

INSPIRING ISAAC AND ISHMAEL:
RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATION
IN JEWISH AND ISLAMIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

MARIA W. VAN RYN: *Inspiring Isaac and Ishmael: Religious, Cultural, and Ethnic Identity Formation in Jewish and Islamic Middle Schools*
(Under the direction of Lisa D. Pearce)

At the heart of sociological analysis of religious schools is the choice to privilege a particular set of values, identities, beliefs, and practices over another. Parents who choose religious schools for their children make a public statement about what kind of people they hope their children will grow up to be. The story of religious education is one of intended and unintended consequences, complicated by the high stakes of ontological and cosmological claims. Complicating the matter further is that more contemporary studies of religious schools indicate that the religious principles that were originally at the forefront of rejecting public schools may not be salient for all students. It is possible for religious schools to all at once teach too much religion or not enough; to be both too exclusive and too inclusive; to be overly accommodating and overly rigid in their interpretation of religious tenets. Such a dynamic is fraught with sociological data offering insight into the complexity of identity formation.

Situated in this framework, this dissertation examines negotiations of religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in the context of Jewish and Islamic middle schools. Qualitative data collected at one Jewish and one Islamic school in the American South stem from multiple methods, including ethnography, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The project coalesces around questions of religious socialization, the intersection between religion and race/ethnicity, negotiations of minority status in the religious arena, and

the overlapping functions of religious schools and congregations. It also makes a methodological contribution by drawing conclusions based on both comparison of disparate research sites and initiation of interaction between them. Ultimately, I argue that the defining experience of members of these school communities is the negotiation of difference across multiple levels, allowing us to understand minority religious status as intertwined with other traditional categories of marginalization.

To my parents, Jack Van Ryn and Debbie Weems-Van Ryn, with all my love

And to Opa

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Providing much fodder for critique and praise, religious day schools offer alternative educational structures to those who find public schools lacking. Historically, the connection between religious ideologies and choice of religious schooling was a clear one (Jones 2008). Jewish schools offered a rigorous dual curriculum, providing proficiency in two complete academic worlds: that of Jewish texts, written in complex and obscure languages, and that of the secular world (Aron and Lee 2005). Catholic schools offered spiritual direction in line with the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church (Perl and Gray 2007). Later, Protestant schools emerged as Protestants began to see an erosion of the presence of religious tenets in public schools due to high profile legal cases establishing new precedents regarding the separation of church and state (Jones 2008; Carper and Hunt 2009).

At the heart of sociological analysis of religious schools is the choice to privilege a particular set of values, identities, beliefs, and practices over another. Parents who choose religious schools for their children make a public statement about what kind of people they hope their children will grow up to be. However, once the choice is made, parents lose much of the control they once had over their children's religious socialization. No longer the primary source of information about the family's religious tradition, parents place their trust in school communities to reinforce what could not be accomplished in public schools. The story of religious education is one of intended and unintended consequences, complicated by the high stakes of ontological and cosmological claims. Merely because families want

children to align with the precepts they choose for them does not mean that the schools will be able to achieve that. Complicating the matter further is that more contemporary studies of religious schools indicate that the religious principles that were originally at the forefront of rejecting public schools may not be salient for all students. Religious schools are also alternatives for those seeking higher academic standards, sheltered environments, and opportunities for family involvement (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009). The result is that religious schools must negotiate an intricate web of demands from their constituents. It is possible for religious schools to all at once teach too much religion or not enough; to be both too exclusive and too inclusive; to be overly accommodating and overly rigid in their interpretation of religious tenets. Such a dynamic is fraught with sociological data offering insight into the complexity of identity formation.

Situated in this framework, my dissertation examines negotiations of religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in the context of Jewish and Islamic middle schools. The project coalesces around questions of religious socialization, the intersection between religion and race/ethnicity, negotiations of minority status in the religious arena, and the overlapping functions of religious schools and congregations. It also makes a methodological contribution by drawing conclusions based on both comparison of disparate research sites and initiation of interaction between them.

Religious identity formation happens in the context of religious socialization. Influencing adolescents' religious identity in particular is first and foremost the family (Cornwall 1988). Parents are not only the first source of information about religion for their children but also filter what other information children are able to access. Parental influence takes several forms: shaping a religious home environment, participating in religious

congregations and organizations, allowing access to religious peer networks, and channeling children into educational structures that support the desired religious identity (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009; Smith and Denton 2005). Especially for early adolescents, there is no escaping the influence of parents, so it can be difficult to parse out separate elements of the socialization process. However, as adolescents develop autonomy, they begin to be able to make their own religious choices. Sherkat goes so far as to distinguish between religious preferences and religious choices in religious socialization, arguing that the latter influence the former (2003). So while parents cannot always make the religious choices they wish for their children, they can help to shape their preferences. One way of doing so is by assuring that children learn about the religious tradition from a legitimate source.

What complicates the ability to do so are the other social contexts surrounding the family. This is especially true for religious minorities, who live with the dual dilemma of marginalization from the mainstream and heterogeneity within that marginalized community. While Christian parents may be able to choose out of several Christian schools the one that best fits their religious preferences, religious minorities are often fortunate to have even one option. Because of the internal diversity of the world's major religious traditions, there is no way to assure that these day schools will be able to provide the precise type of religious education that corresponds to parents' values, beliefs, and practices. If they are to choose a religious day school at all, parents may have to agree to an orientation that does not align with their own. The religious socialization process, thus, takes on a new meaning. The school has to find a way to both teach the religious content that makes the tradition unique while being careful to be as inclusive as possible of different iterations of that tradition. Jewish and Islamic day schools in the American South provide a thought-provoking

comparative case study for investigation of religious socialization because they must be both particularistic and universal.

Religious socialization also overlaps with the formation of racial/ethnic identities. To varying degrees in different traditions and locations, religion and race/ethnicity often become entangled in such a way that it becomes impossible to adjudicate which is which (Cadge and Ecklund 2007). Again, minority religious traditions in the United States have much to tell us here, because the degree to which a member professes a highly salient religious identity may be a factor of the ethnic and cultural practices that appear to outsiders as religious. Related to religious schools, our understanding of the outcomes of schools rests upon data that tend to measure variables that are distinctly religious (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009; Uecker 2009). Therefore, a school that produces graduates with strong connections to ethnic practices could be seen as less effective in its religious socialization while its community members are pleased with its outcomes. Additionally, ethnicity may be a source of conflict within and between religious traditions, leaving religious schools the task of parsing out which ethno-religious practices are in line with the majority of the community and which could lead to contention within the student body. Again, context matters; ethnic behaviors that seem reasonable in some settings could appear to be acts of aggression in others. Islamic and Jewish day schools must constantly be on their guard to incorporate the ethno-religious practices that will make Islam and Judaism relevant and salient to adolescents with multiple demands on their time and allegiance without allowing the core religious values of the tradition fall by the wayside.

In this sense, religious schools take on the role of congregations. Congregations perform the function of uniting diverse communities, some more successfully than others

(Edwards 2008; Emerson 2006; Marti 2005). Those that are able to accomplish diversity do so because they create alternate, unified identities that supersede the perceived significance of one's own distinct racial/ethnic identity. However, this is only possible when congregants are able to agree on a common mission for which they are willing to sacrifice their particularism (Marti 2005). Minority religious schools may have to reach far to find that kind of commonality due to their small relative numbers but high internal diversity.

At stake in the study of Jewish and Islamic schools, then, is an understanding of religious socialization in the context of the relationship between minorities and majorities of several kinds. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how the notion of difference pervades the religious socialization attempts of Islamic and Jewish day schools. Whether it is a different ethnic identity outcome than the one intended, parents' desire that their children be both sheltered from and able to cope with difference, or the difference between students' narratives presented within or external to their own religious communities, the study of Jewish and Islamic middle schools contributes to our understanding of the place of difference in religious identity.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this project come from one Jewish and one Islamic middle school in the southeastern United States. All names and identifying details have been changed to protect the anonymity of my subjects. Sites were chosen to maximize comparability of context, so the schools are very similar in size, community setting, socioeconomic status, and structure. Both schools offer a dual curriculum of secular and religious instruction, requiring the full set of classes that all students in the state must take as well as classes in religion and the sacred language associated with their tradition. Both also have strong ties to local congregations

from their traditions, though they are not directly governed by those congregations. Finally, both have student bodies who by and large have attended the school for most, if not all, their schooling years.

The Beth El Academy (Beth El), a Jewish community day school in “Jacksonville,” offers a pluralistic Jewish education to students pre-K through eighth grade. The middle school, housed in the same building as the lower school but in a separate wing, comprises grades six through eight. In addition to the standard course of study for the state, students take classes in Jewish Studies and Hebrew as well as electives including art, music, entrepreneurship, social justice, and a variety of other rotating options. Students pray daily as a middle school community, following one of several versions of the standard Jewish morning or afternoon prayers. They also pray the Jewish “grace after meals” after lunch. Beth El offers a competitive after school sports program for middle schoolers, allowing students to compete in soccer, basketball, flag football, and cross country contests with other area private schools. Beth El also hosts a wide range of social, cultural, and religious events, many of which correspond to Jewish holiday celebrations. The school enrolls around 120 students in any given year, though enrollment has decreased slightly in the past several years due to the economic impact of the recession. Coming in June is Beth El’s fortieth anniversary gala, announced with the byline “Celebrating 40 Years of Building Jewish Leaders.” Beth El graduates mostly attend area public high schools, but a minority also choose to attend a Jewish boarding school nearby or a local college preparatory school.

Down the interstate approximately 60 miles, in the city of River Bend, is the Islamic School of Conway (ISC). ISC identifies as being guided by *sunnah* but also does not hold affiliation with any one particular official Islamic movement. Slightly larger (and growing),

ISC enrolls about 148 students, also from pre-K through eighth grade. Recent construction moved the middle school, grades six through eight, from a separate school building into the third floor of the mosque across the parking lot. ISC also follows the guidelines of the state standard course of study and requires that students take Islamic Studies and Arabic classes. However, ISC only offers electives to fill the slots in gender segregated P.E. class that meets every other day. The elective is dependent upon the skills of the current P.E. teachers. ISC offers a competitive basketball league for students, again separated into boys and girls (Beth El plays in a co-ed league). The remainder of the school day is co-ed, and students wear uniforms that follow Islamic standards of modesty. The school produces special events for families around the two major holidays of Islam and recently incorporated “family fun days” for families to socialize on several weekend days throughout the year. Though the school is younger, opening its doors in 1992, it is growing at a rate that has prompted the split of younger grades into two classes. Most graduates attend local public schools, though some pursue schooling overseas and a small minority is home schooled.

Three data collection methods form the backbone of my research design. First, I conducted participant observation over the course of two and a half school years, beginning in August 2008. Hence, the sixth graders beginning middle school at the beginning of my study are now preparing to graduate. I visited the schools for full school days, shadowing different students throughout their daily schedule to capture the unofficial and official components of education. I also attended school events, such as the ones listed above, and was invited to meetings of parents, teachers, and administrators. While at ISC, I dressed Islamically, covering my hair and wearing modest, loose-fitting clothing. Over time, I became immersed in both communities, to the extent that I was also able to ask for additional

sources of data, such as student diagrams representing their answers to the prompt, “Being [Jewish or Muslim] to me means . . .”

The second phase of data collection, which ran from April 2010 through January 2011, involved open-ended, in-person interviews conducted separately with children and parents. I conducted interviews with ten families at Beth El, including two families where siblings participated, several families that included Beth El alumni, and two families where two parents were interviewed together. I did the same with four families at ISC. Four additional parents were interviewed by Dr. Serena Hussain of the University of Oxford in conjunction with another project. Dr. Hussain also conducted focus groups with each middle school grade that I draw from here. I recruited interview participants through letters distributed by the principals, so as to protect my minor subjects, and used snowball sampling to reach saturation across level of religious observance, reasons for choosing the school, immigrant status, nation of origin, level of satisfaction for the school, and time enrolled at the school.

Finally, as a result of my findings and with the enthusiastic cooperation of the schools, I taught an eighth grade seminar at both schools, focusing on shared Muslim-Jewish values. Students were introduced to the others’ tradition through the lens of values common to both traditions. The course culminated in a workshop where students met and got to know one another and completed service projects of their own design based on the shared values about which they learned. For the purposes of the dissertation, I draw from these data only lightly as a participant observer. Future research from the overarching project will incorporate close analysis of the outcomes of the workshop. All field notes, memos, and

interview transcripts, prepared by me, were imported into HyperRESEARCH for line-by-line thematic coding and analysis.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The dissertation consists of three distinct papers, each speaking to a particular research question stemming from the themes discussed above.

Chapter 1, entitled ““I Never Thought of This as a Religious School”: Negotiating Ethnicity at Jewish and Islamic Middle Schools,” investigates the ways in which school communities attempt to unite their intra-pluralistic student bodies. Because the literature surrounding religious schools does not incorporate racial/ethnic identities, I turn to models of congregational approaches to integrating members of diverse backgrounds. I draw from participant observation data to assess how school communities at both the institutional and interactional levels negotiate ethnic identities. Acting not unlike congregations, Islamic and Jewish school leaders frame race/ethnicity in such a way as to cut across student difference. For ISC, this means approaching ethnic transcendence, where a wide range of ethnic identities are subsumed under an Islam without ethnic components. For Beth El, this means the opposite, as school leaders introduce a plethora of ethnic identities in an effort to include students whose backgrounds might make them feel less authentically Jewish in some settings. The outcome at both schools, though, is that students appropriate “imagined ethnicities,” corresponding to identification with Palestine or Israel, as they “fill the void” left by a desire to place identity in a status hierarchy. This paper contributes to our understanding of the intersection of religious and racial/ethnic identity by demonstrating how

religious schools operate like congregations in their approach to uniting diverse populations. The crucial difference is that religious schools must take into account not only the interactions that adult congregants have but also the agency of adolescents to take matters of ethnic identity into their own hands.

Chapter 2, entitled “Religious Education, Religious Narratives, and the Power of Social Context,” investigates both outcomes of religious education and sociologists’ framing of those outcomes. I begin with an assessment of traditional measures of religious education outcomes, framed within the context of religious socialization processes. In order to capture a broader context, one more inclusive of religious minorities and their intertwining ethno-religious identities, I turn to the literature on narrative to offer a more useful analytical tool for understanding the outcomes of Jewish and Islamic middle schools. I operationalize narratives at two levels: those provided by school officials and those crafted by students themselves. I further distinguish between various types and settings in which those narratives are enacted so as to capture the power of social context in shaping how students frame their identities. At both schools, official narratives reflect school leaders’ attempts to balance support of the core values of their religious traditions and acceptance of students’ choice to engage those values. Leaders ultimately want most of all for students to express prideful identity in the pluralistic contexts in which they will emerge after graduation. Student narratives demonstrate their ability to frame their religious identities in different ways depending on the audience. In so doing, they accomplish the implicit goal of their schools even if they decide to do less or more religiously than the schools explicitly say is best. This paper contributes to our understanding of religious identity by expanding our notion of what “counts” as religiosity and by demonstrating how context shapes the religious

identities that minorities express. Secondary is a methodological contribution supporting comparative work that introduces sites to one another.

Chapter 3, entitled, “Educating for and Against Difference: Parental Goals, Assessments, and Projections in Southern Jewish and Islamic Schools,” explores the various iterations of difference that shape parents’ decision to enroll their children in minority religious day schools. Situated in the debate about benefits and drawbacks of religious schools in terms of students’ ability to engage with the public, this paper calls upon Chaves’ caution against the “religious congruence fallacy” (2010) to ask what we might be missing by looking at parental choice of religious schooling in terms of theological imperatives or even by additionally incorporating the desire for higher standards of academic achievement. Instead, my data show that parents discuss the salience of minority status at each level of their decision-making: when they initial enroll their children, when they justify the decision to keep their children in religious school even when that might isolate them, and when they choose a high school option most often not affiliated with their religious tradition. In finding this pattern across both contexts, we see that the dialectical relationship of equality and difference frames both Jewish and Muslim families’ choices for their children. Parents want their children to be safeguarded from religious discrimination and to develop particular identities, but they also want their children to be able to operate in a diverse and pluralistic world where they will inevitably remain minorities. Their decision-making accounts reflect how they conceptualize the “bubbles” of the small, insular day schools as difference-within-sameness in order to make the transition from fear of discrimination to confidence in their children’s ability to retain a positive association with their religious identity. The contribution of this paper to both the sociology of religion and the sociology of education is

one that broadens our understanding of school choice, incorporating difference across multiple contexts and situations.

Overall, the dissertation uses Islamic and Jewish day school as a case study of negotiations of difference. The papers investigate experiences of minority religious day schools across institutional and interactional levels, drawing from participant observation and interviews to allow students, parents, teachers, and administrators to provide their own narrations of what Jewish and Islamic socialization should and do achieve. The dissertation increases our understanding of the intersection of multiple forms of minority status to underscore the intertwined nature of religion and racial/ethnic identity. It also helps us to better understand how religious schools act similarly to congregations, informing both how we approach agency within that classic American institution and how we see religious schools as religious organizations as much as they are educational. Ultimately, the dissertation highlights the importance of including Islamic and Jewish perspectives to provide a more complete picture of religious identity in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: "I NEVER THOUGHT OF THIS AS A RELIGIOUS SCHOOL": NEGOTIATING ETHNICITY AT JEWISH AND ISLAMIC MIDDLE SCHOOLS

"I never thought of this as a religious school!"

--Sara, Islamic School of Conway eighth grader

"But if you're studying religious schools, why are you looking at Beth El?"

--Rabbi Katz, Beth El parent and rabbi/instructor

In the 2009-2010 school year, an estimated 8% of all school-aged children students enrolled in religious day schools in the United States (Jones 2008). These schools, exempt from significant regulations and requirements of public schools, offer families a little bit more control over what their children are exposed to from morning through afternoon. Often characterized as 'safe havens' and 'extended families' (Watson and Watson 2002), religious day schools combine the socialization effects of parents and education. More specifically, they offer intensive, purposive curricula with the intention of developing religious identities for future generations (Jones 2007). But given that we know that schools are also common sites for negotiation of racial/ethnic identities (Markus 2008) and that racial/ethnic identity is often intertwined with religious identity, how do we understand how religious schools negotiate ethnicity?

In order to address this question, this paper looks at multiple forms of racial and ethnic socialization at middle schools affiliated with religious traditions that have racial/ethnic components, namely Jewish and Islamic schools. This is important to understand, because whether it is directly after middle school or when entering higher

education or the workforce, students will eventually leave their relatively homogeneous environments and go on to be part of the pluralistic and multicultural United States. They will bring their racial/ethnic identities and, perhaps more importantly, their understanding of how their identities exist in a hierarchical relationship with others, with them. Additionally, we as a society look to schools to promote justice (Minow, Shweder, and Markus 2008a). Overcoming racism is at the forefront of social justice agendas. Schools have to teach students how to take pride in their own identity without thinking others are ‘less than.’

While studies about Jewish education abound and current events have prompted a great deal more recent work on Islamic schools, most of these studies focus on religious outcomes. Longitudinal data analysis tells us that those who attend Jewish day schools are more likely to maintain a connection with the Jewish tradition, practice Jewish rituals, attend religious services, marry other Jews, and profess a more salient Jewish identity than those who do not (Chertok et al. 2007; Cohen 1995; Schiff and Schneider 1994; Wertheimer 1999). Notably, we don’t yet know much about outcomes of Islamic education; Islamic schools have simply not been around long enough, and longitudinal data do not yet exist. While we wait for more information to come out about Islamic schools, we know from smaller scale studies that these schools hope to achieve the following outcomes: “They provide a socially- and spiritually-based alternative to secular public schools. They ‘protect’ students from negative influences . . . They rehabilitate and resocialize ‘wayward’ students . . . They contribute to the social reproduction of Islamic identity and lifestyle” (Zine 2008:95). Consideration of processes of racial/ethnic socialization is notably absent in the study of religious education. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that much scholarship on the larger traditions

of Judaism and Islam, both within and outside of the United States, focuses on these traditions' racial/ethnic components.

In speaking more broadly about the connection between religion and race/ethnicity, it is helpful to think of the main categories of that relationship. Hammond and Warner argue that three variations exist: ethnic fusion, where ethnicity undergirds the premise of the religious tradition; ethnic religion, where ethnicity and religion are intertwined but one may claim the former without the latter; and religious ethnicity, which reverses ethnic religion by allowing members to claim religious identification without one of several accompanying ethnicities (1993). In the United States, Jews and Muslims can be seen as fitting the religious ethnicity profile. American Muslims and Jews have a nearly infinite range of potential ethnic connections. Indeed, conflating Arab and Muslim identity is a common fallacy experienced by those who are members of one group but not the other (Read 2008). Ethnicity and religion, then, can be intertwined and symbiotic but also have the potential to be rife with tension and conflict.

The abundant and exciting work on the relationship between race/ethnicity and religion focuses on congregations, whether multi-racial or mono-ethnic (Edwards 2008; Emerson and Kim 2003; Marti 2005). This makes sense, since congregations are the primary organizing feature of American religion (Ammerman 2005; Chaves 2004; Warner 1994). We know that congregations provide venues for recent immigrants to retain some of their ethnic traditions and that some even operate to counter the segregation that so infamously characterizes our Sunday mornings (Marti 2005; Warner 1998; Wuthnow 2007). But for youth who attend religious day schools, spending 10,000 hours at school by the time they complete eighth grade, surely their schools must be taken into account as well.

In sum, we know a lot about how religious and racial/ethnic identities intersect. We are also starting to know more and more about how religious day schools act as agents of socialization for their students. What we are missing are the mechanisms that can bridge these areas. In order to do that, I take inspiration from the epigraphs at the top of the page. If people affiliated with religious schools do not necessarily see religion as first and foremost at school, then what is going on at these schools? In order to answer this question, I turn to ethnographic data collected at one Jewish and one Islamic middle school in the American South over the course of two and a half years. My findings suggest that though the process works in reverse directions at each school, students at these schools ultimately negotiate the creation of their own ethnicity, resting on “imagined nations” that epitomize Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991). Ultimately, the paper contributes to our understanding of the complexity of religious socialization in minority religious and ethnic traditions by highlighting the lived experiences of those who are the targets of socialization efforts in religious schools.

BACKGROUND

Religion plays a significant role in the identities of many adolescents. Especially in traditions with a rite of passage for early adolescents, religion can offer adolescents the space and impetus to examine which values, morals, and practices are important to them. In his book detailing the childhood religious experiences of adult Christians and Jews, Wuthnow argues that “effective religious socialization comes about through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning the spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community”

(Wuthnow 1999:xxxix-xxxii). Religious schools purport to offer these kinds of “embedded practices.”

We currently lack a consensus on the outcomes and effects of religious day schools. Generally, as Uecker summarizes, we know that religious schools play a part in the religious socialization of their students in several ways: by encouraging development of friendship networks between students of the same faith, providing adult religious role models, teaching explicitly religious material, and funneling student into religious post-secondary institutions (Uecker 2009:354). Across a variety of Christian traditions, religious education has been shown to be related to subsequent religious service attendance, adherence to particular doctrines, engagement in various religious practices, and salience of religious identity (Perl and Gray 2007; Uecker 2009).

However, Jewish and Islamic day schools have significantly different theoretical implications than their Christian counterparts due to both their minority status and the ethnic components of these diasporic religious traditions. While it is true that they have many of the same goals as Christian schools, they must also address issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, teach the second language that dominates their religious services, and decide which of many ethnically and culturally related religious things to teach (i.e. practices that are more cultural than religious but are associated with that religion). We also should remember that in most communities, there are many fewer options for Muslim and Jewish families wishing to send their children to religious schools in their traditions, so schools often have to deal with a population diverse on many fronts. In short, Jewish and Islamic schools must make choices differently than Christian schools. Each choice then has socialization

repercussions for the students and their families in regard to religious and racial/ethnic identity.

What do we know about what happens in Jewish and Islamic schools? Essentially, there is no one good answer to this question. Following from the difficulties in measuring Islamic demographics in the United States, there is no one complete data source for Islamic day schools. A multi-step process begun by the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA) in 1998, the first time a list was ever compiled, has been maintained to include 235 schools. This number includes schools with Sunni and Shia orientations as well as those sponsored by the Nation of Islam the former, largely fueled by growth in Muslim immigrant communities, are on the rise while the latter are declining in number (Keyworth 2009). All of these schools fall under the heading “*madrassa*,” which means simply “place for studying” (Haddad and Smith 2009:7; Hefner 2007). Though Western media images of *madrassas* may conjure images of foreign terrorist cells, these schools vary across all categories as much as any other grouping of schools, religious or otherwise (Bergen and Pandey 2005; Hefner 2007). Given this variation, one profile of the “typical” Islamic day school contains the following facets: “Average size for a parochial school – 100 students or fewer. Young – six years or younger. Growing. Professionally oriented. Independently governed” (Keyworth 2009:33). This profile might very well be quite different in ten years, depending on growth patterns and the success of organizations such as ISLA and MASCIS (Muslim American Society Council of Islamic Schools).

Though there is no one consensus of the primary goal(s) of Islamic education, the most consistent commonality is to include Islamic principles excluded from public and other private schools. This inclusion ranges from schools whose primary focus is such Islamic

educational staples as Qu’ran memorization and performance of the five pillars to those who want strongly Western-style schools that apportion the school day into secular and sacred times. Most American Islamic schools fall into this second group, which does overlap with the first as in a Venn diagram, and promote the development of an “Islamic ethos” rather than a more narrowly defined religious identity (Mandaville 2007). These schools recognize the wide range of students available to them in the United States and want to unite those individuals, who often hail from politically opposing ethnic groups (Merry 2007).

Not surprisingly, we know very little about religious or other outcomes for students from either or both kinds of Islamic schools. Due to lack of funding, longitudinal data, and centralized organizations offering accreditation and other services, researchers have only been able to rely on information from individual schools and small-scale studies. However, what these studies have been able to give us is an idea of the major themes of Islamic education outcomes: protection from the dangers lurking in public schools, creation of Islamic communities, socialization of students into an Islamic lifestyle and identity, and understanding of how to confront Islamophobia and other challenges to Islamic and Islamic values after leaving school (Merry 2007; Zine 2008). Overwhelmingly, what these studies reveal is the immense number and scale of difficulties facing Islamic schools and educators. We can not yet draw conclusions about the effect of having attended Islamic school in the United States on religious identity later in life, at least not in any representative way. What we do know, though, is that American Islamic schools are just that: American. They share many more features with American religious schools than they do with *madrasas* abroad.

In stark contrast to the literature about Islamic schools, scholars of American Judaism have been able to collect a wide range of material about the history, goals, and outcomes of

American Jewish educational sources. For several of the challenges presented to the American Islamic community, American Judaism has a response in place. This is most likely due to factors including stronger historical presence in the United States, a more centralized organizational structure, and endowed funding sources, often at Jewish research institutions. Thanks to explosion in both Orthodox *yeshivas* and non-Orthodox day schools, the number of Jewish day schools currently operating in the United States is around 760 with approximately 205,000 students enrolled (Pomson and Schnoor 2008; Schick 2005).

Likely due to the diversity of perspectives offered by over 750 different institutions, the goals of Jewish education are not only numerous but also often contradictory. What some schools put forward as ideal others decry as heresy; indeed, the main source of division within Jewish schools exists between the more “isolationist” Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox schools, which comprise about 95% of all Jewish day schools, and the 5% that remain, which promote “integrationism” and assimilation (Pomson 2009). The latter group puts forth goals that include education of the entire community, proficiency in Hebrew (both modern and biblical), intimate knowledge and love for Israel, ability to perform rituals both in the synagogue and in the home, and achievement of academic excellence (Aron, Zeldin, and Lee 2005; Chertok, Phillips, and Saxe 2008; Levisohn 2009; Pomson 2009; Reimer 1997; Sales and Saxe 2004; Schiff 1999). If there is a consensus about the goal of Jewish education, it is that Jewish schools exist to continue an established tradition of learning and scholarship while attempting to replenish the Jewish population for generations to come. Overall, attending a Jewish day school generally leads to a greater connection with the Jewish tradition as well as increased scores on measurements such as ritual performance, synagogue

attendance, Jewish marriage, and salience of Jewish identity Chertok et al. 2007; Cohen 1995; Schiff and Schneider 1994; Wertheimer 1999).

What we know about religious schools, then, is mixed. Some schools do a better job than others at producing the kinds of outcomes they want. What is clear, though, is that the desired outcomes of Jewish and Islamic day schools do not map directly on to those of Christian schools because they face different challenges. Most notably missing in all of these assessments of religious school goals is discussion of race/ethnicity. While we know that some minority parents in urban areas send their children to Catholic school even if the family is not Catholic in order to access a more academically rigorous and behaviorally strict environment (Bauch 1991), we do not know how religious schools, even those of traditions that imply ethnic identity/ies, incorporate race/ethnicity into their goals. Race/ethnicity is then the “elephant in the room” of religious school scholarship.

Congregations and Race/Ethnicity

It is important at the outset to operationalize ethnicity. Both Islam and Judaism have strong ethnic components, the former both an amalgamation of different cultures and a false identification with Arab ethnicity and the latter a close relationship where often what is religious to one is ethnic to another. In the United States, ethnic identity is usually strongly tied to some nation of origin. Because this study investigates the manifest and latent functions (Merton 1957) of religious schools’ efforts with regards to ethnicity, I rely upon Milton Gordon’s three functions that ethnic groups fulfill for their members: group self-identification (“the locus of the sense of intimate peoplehood”), primary social networks, and a “[refraction of] the national cultural patterns of behavior and values through the prism of [their] own cultural heritage” (1964:38).

Much of the current scholarship on religion and ethnicity focuses on the congregational level. Therefore, in order to assess what religious schools are doing in terms of shaping racial/ethnic identity, it is important to borrow from the theoretical constructs dominant in these congregational studies. Current work argues that religious institutions relate to their congregants' race and ethnicity in one of three ways:

1. Seeking out and achieving racial/ethnic diversity (Emerson and Kim 2003; Marti 2005; Marti 2008; Stanczak 2006);
2. Maintaining a mono-ethnic environment in hopes of maintaining customs threatened by assimilation (Bankston and Zhou 1996; Min 2010; Warner and Wittner 1998; Yang 1999; Yang and Ebaugh 2001);
3. Sidestepping the issue of race/ethnicity or framing it ineffectively with the effect of reifying mono-ethnic communities (Edwards 2008; Emerson 2006; Emerson and Kim 2003; Emerson and Smith 2000).

In the first relationship, epitomized by Marti's (2005) "ethnic transcendence," congregants are united by the premise that no one ethnic identity trumps the value inherent in the common mission of the church. The congregations that do the best job of uniting disparate ethnic groups draw from personal interactions and a complete re-structuring of the institution to emphasize shared characteristics. In these cases, ethnic identity is subsumed by what is seen as a greater opportunity to fulfill a crucial task in the community, based upon salient theological principles. In order to achieve consistent racial/ethnic diversity, this process must operate at several levels: group identity, institutional structure, and interpersonal interaction (Stanczak 2006). This hints at the complexity of the approach that religious schools would need to take were they to achieve similar results.

The second relationship does not assume that race/ethnicity need be eliminate or reduced – quite the opposite. Here, like in Hammond and Warner's ethnic fusion, ethnicity can be considered constitutive of a particular religious identity. Korean Protestants, for example, can assert that there is something distinctive about the roots of Korean theology that, in

tandem with ethnic cultural practices, necessitates a mono-ethnic congregation (Kim 2010). Mono-racial/ethnic congregations feel that they serve a discrete function that can not be fulfilled elsewhere, as in the case of Black Churches that operate as the “cultural womb of the black community” by providing theological and institutional frameworks that speak particularly to black experiences (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:8). This congregational approach to race/ethnicity, in contrast to ethnic transcendence, operates under the principle that race/ethnicity can be an asset rather than a hindrance to religious organizations. It is safe to assume that religious schools closely aligned with a particular racial or ethnic identity, such as Islamic schools identifying with the Nation of Islam or Jewish schools of a Hasidic sect based on a particular Eastern European shtetl, could operate similarly.

In the first two cases, congregations set out with a perspective on race/ethnicity that they are then able to achieve, whether that is transcendence or fusion. However, some congregations are unable to fulfill the former and thus are left without the diversity that they purport to want. When this happens, it is largely a function of approaches that fail to take into account the institutional level of racism and discrimination that characterize racial/ethnic relations (Emerson and Smith 2000). Religious schools could fall into the same trap.

Unlike the congregations in this typology, religious schools do not generally address race/ethnicity at the outset. However, not unlike the white evangelicals in Emerson and Smith’s study (2000), minority religious schools in the United States will encounter the problems of racial/ethnic relations regardless of how much might rather relegate them as irrelevant. This congregational framework is a crucial starting off point from which to better understand how students at Jewish and Islamic day schools negotiate and assume racial/ethnic identities.

To summarize, we know that religious schools have the ability to produce a variety of outcomes, none of which is framed in a way through which we can understand the place of racial/ethnic identity. We also know that congregations succeed and fail at achieving racial/ethnic diversity and reconciliation dependent on their ability to acknowledge the structural processes of racialization. What we do not yet know is how to bridge these two areas of literature. The objective of this paper is to address this gap by asking how minority religious days schools *qua* religious institutions frame ethnic identity and how students respond at the interactional level.

METHODS AND DATA

The data for this paper come from a larger project involving multiple qualitative methods employed at one Islamic and one Jewish school in a mid-size southeastern metropolitan area (“River Bend”); names and other identifying details have been changed in order to protect the identity of my subjects. The largest part of data collection took place as participant observation conducted over two full school years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010). I immersed myself in school life, shadowing students for full school days and attending parent, teacher, and administrator meetings, athletic events, holiday celebrations, musical performances, and field trips. During this time period, I also gathered official school written material, including curriculum guides, brochures, student handbooks, and newsletters. Being immersed in the school day let me conduct informal interviews with teachers frequently, asking questions as they arose. During Fall 2010, I taught an eighth grade seminar at each school on shared Muslim-Jewish values, culminating in a workshop where the students from both schools met one another and completed service projects related to the shared values they

had learned. Most of the evidence in this paper comes from the participant observation component; field notes and memos were coded using HyperRESEARCH software.

Beginning in the spring of 2010, I also conducted interviews with parent-child pairs, interviewing adults and children separately. Thanks to collaboration on another project, several interviews at the Islamic school were conducted by Dr. Serena Hussain of the University of Oxford; Dr. Hussain also conducted focus groups with nearly all students there. In total, eight Islamic and ten Jewish families were interviewed. Families were recruited through letters sent by the principals at each school; snowball sampling after initial responses allowed me to reach saturation across multiple categories: length of time at the school, primary reason for sending kids to the school, immigrant status and region of origin, ethnicity, religiosity, and overall happiness with the school. Interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two and a half hours and were recorded digitally. I prepared verbatim transcripts and supplemented with field notes. In most cases, interviews were conducted in private rooms at the schools, though some families preferred to host me in their homes. I used the same interview guide at each school. While it was very loosely crafted, designed to draw out respondents' own narratives about what was important to them, the interviews asked families to describe the process of choosing the schools, what was most and least important to them that their children learned there, what they were more and less satisfied with, what religious and cultural things they did outside of school, and how they were planning on negotiating the high school decision and transition away from middle school. In this paper, interview data are supplementary to the participant observation data.

School Community Descriptions

In order to select my research sites, I looked for schools comparable on as many axes as possible beyond their doctrinal differences. Each school is in a draw area with above average public schools, has a small student body, and, most importantly in this case, is in a similar geographic area. Data were collected based on the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowing my research questions to emerge from categories of data collected early on.

River Bend is a metropolitan area of approximately 1.5 million people residing in several counties. While there is a great deal of diversity in River Bend, the towns and cities within the larger area have distinct reputations in terms of race/ethnic and class compositions. Currently, the area with the most growth is the city of Conway, whose public schools have coped with very quick spikes in enrollment by implementing multi-track year-round schools. Conway hosts a research university and several smaller colleges and has a substantial industrial base. The city's estimated racial composition is around two-thirds white and one-third black with a small number of other races in a population of about 275,000. Median household income is about \$46,000.

Bordering the university campus is the Islamic School of Conway (ISC). ISC, founded in 1987, serves the Islamic community of the greater River Bend area, offering full-time Islamic and secular education from preschool through eighth grade. The school shares facilities with the local *masjid* (mosque) but has built additions over the years to provide classrooms and learning spaces dedicated to its 200 students. Grades six through eight comprise the middle school, which operates as a separate unit from the lower school and offers classes at different levels and specialized teachers. ISC is co-ed, though there are parts of the day where girls and boys are in separate classes or physical spaces. Students wear a

uniform, including required *hijab* (head scarf) for middle school girls. Both ISC's faculty and student populations are predominantly Arab, and most teachers and parents are immigrants to the United States. There is also a substantial minority of Southeast Asians among the student body, and there are several black and multi-racial families. Students address teachers as Brother or Sister [first name], and teachers often use that term for students as well.

The dual curriculum at ISC includes both religious and secular subjects. Students must meet the academic standards by the state in Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Physical Education, and they have required additional classes in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The school day is also organized around the Islamic prayer schedule. Daily, after lunch, students make *wudu* (washing before prayer) and congregate in the prayer hall, along with *masjid* congregants, for *dhuhr* (mid-day prayer). The Friday schedule is revised to include the longer *jum'ah* service that supplements *dhuhr* with a *khutbah* (sermon) and is required of adult men. Students at ISC all speak at least enough Arabic to be proficient at *salat* (prayer), and many are fluent. ISC maintains a small and close-knit Islamic community where many students spend their entire primary and middle school years and where several sets of cousins in attendance is not unusual. After graduation, most ISC alumni attend area public high schools, with an occasional student choose home schooling or study abroad.

Approximately one hour down the interstate from Conway and ISC is the town of Jacksonville. Located on the outskirts of the River Bend area, Jacksonville serves a similar sized population and also is the home of a research university and several smaller colleges. Jacksonville's racial composition includes a more substantial minority population, with

around 55% of residents being white, 37% black, almost 5% Latin@, almost 3% Asian, and the remainder other minorities. Median income is about \$40,000.

In an upper-middle class neighborhood of Jacksonville, surrounded by wooded neighborhoods and relatively upscale shopping centers, is the Beth El Academy (Beth El), a Jewish day school with approximately 120 students from preschool through eighth grade. Beth El was founded in 1972 and prides itself on being not only a staple of the Jacksonville community but also a producer of high achieving young men and women. Middle school students, enrolled in grades six through eight, have their own classroom wing, where teachers largely remain in their rooms dedicated to each subject area. The only Jewish teachers in the middle school are those who teach Jewish Studies and Hebrew; two are Israeli-American. Adding to the familial feeling, students call teachers by their first names. Beth El's student body is almost entirely white, and a small minority of families are first and second generation immigrants from countries including Israel, South Africa, and the nations of the former Soviet Union.

Like ISC, Beth El teaches a dual curriculum. Students take classes in all of the standard secular subjects, including Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and P.E., and also in Hebrew, Torah/Bible, and general Jewish Studies. Additionally, students attend more occasional (i.e. once or twice a week) classes in Art and Music, and all seventh and eighth graders take Spanish; recently, two students have begun independent online studies in Mandarin and Latin. Beth El is completely co-ed and does not separate students by gender at any time; students do not wear uniforms. Middle school students start each day at *T'fillah* (prayer) in their multipurpose room, which follows an abbreviated version of *Shacharit* (the morning service) and is largely student-led. Each day after lunch, several students lead the

middle school in *Birkat HaMazon*, the grace after meals. Friday classes are abbreviated so that Friday afternoons conclude with *Kabbalat Shabbat* services (celebrating the onset of the Sabbath), co-led by teachers/administrators and students, and the whole school gathers on Thursdays for a service where students read from the Torah. Again, like ISC, Beth El students have often attended Beth El for their entire school lives, and small class size means that the student body is close and familiar. While most graduates go on to a local public high school, a minority enroll in a Jewish college preparatory school in the Jacksonville area or secular, private, college preparatory schools. In fact, the public high school that draws so many Beth El alumni created a Hebrew program especially to attract the generally high performing Beth El students. Students who do not live in the draw area can commit to taking four years of Hebrew in order to attend this highly-ranked public school.

In operationalizing ethnicity for the purposes of this paper, I take an approach that acknowledges upfront the impossibility of completely extracting religion and ethnicity from one another. Therefore, in detangling the two, I define religious practices first and foremost as those characterized in that way by my participants. When students talked with me about themselves and their peers, they almost always set up an orthopractic hierarchy, noting that those high on that scale were “religious” and those who performed fewer practices were not as religious. There are common baselines at both schools; nearly all students at ISC observe the five pillars of Islam, and nearly all of Beth El population celebrates the High Holy Days, Passover, and occasionally Shabbat. Practices that would then mark one as “religious,” then, became things like wearing *hijab* outside of school, refraining from listening to music, eating only *halal* (Islamically permissible) meat, refraining from social activities on Shabbat, keeping kosher, and observing more minor holidays. Ethnic identity, then, is constructed by

beliefs and practices that mark one as having a distinct (from American) culture that is related to but not the same as the one proclaimed as important by religious officials.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data naturally fall into a number of thematic mechanisms. These mechanisms converge into the central model I propose, which suggests the following: At Beth El, where students largely identify with Jewishness as symbolic ethnicity, adults introduce many ethnicities to students. Their effort illuminates the central facet of symbolic ethnicity, that Judaism for many of the students is an affiliation that does not affect their daily lives but instead is a matter of choosing fun and positive traditions (Gans 1979; Gans 1994; Winter 1996). Due in large part to the multiplicity of identities introduced and the lack of any ‘real’ affiliation with them, students instead defer to the central one presented, which is based on the idea of all Jews being *de facto* Israelis. So, at Beth El, whose student body has no single ethnicity, adults introduce many ethnic options and achieve one, a Jewish “imagined ethnicity” based on identification with Israel

At the Islamic Student of Conway, the same effect is achieved, but the process works in reverse. The student body is racially and ethnically diverse, presenting a heavy opportunity for conflict. Adults consistently introduce the idea of Islam superseding race and ethnicity, encouraging students to use religion to transcend ethnicity. However, due in large part to this stage of adolescence (Sumter et al. 2009), the predominance of students of Palestinian heritage, and the fact that the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian is a hot button item to which students have a personal connection, the ultimate effect is that students “imagine” a Palestinian ethnicity for themselves. Thus, results indicate a negotiation between intended and achieved outcomes in terms of race and ethnicity that are ultimately not closely related to

what we commonly operationalize as religion. Why does this happen? Because the kids, while attending religious schools, do not necessarily believe and practice the same things. At Beth El, students are minimally observant outside of school, and at ISC, students practice but do very little introspection or critical thinking about their religion. They take it for granted and do everything they are supposed to but rarely indicate a high level of salience. So ethnicity takes the unifying place of religion. How does this model work? The results suggest that adults use the mechanisms at their disposal, namely structuring the school day and special events and projects, while students “fill the void” with undercurrents of the ethnicities they create on the basis of imagined communities.

Jewish and Islamic School Days.

Upon comparing the school calendars at Beth El and ISC, one cannot help but notice striking similarities as well as wonder how any twelve-year-old can navigate their complexities! Essentially, these are American school days, broken up into periods by subject. Students move from classroom to classroom, banging locker doors on their way from math to P.E., from lunch to prayer, and so on. Teachers remain in their own classrooms, which are decorated carefully and thematically. In fact, at each school, teachers have a great deal of autonomy. They are clearly instructed to set high standards for students and to dedicate themselves to student learning, but they design lesson plans and units independently. This explicit curriculum, defined as “an official statement of what students are expected to know and be able to do” (Levin 2008:8), epistemologically allows teachers to highlight what they want within the parameters of accreditation, standardized testing performance, and parental and administrative expectations. Doing so allows them to pull from a quintessential American structure, the common school (Minow, Shweder, and Markus

2008b), rather than from the structure of the more conservative, orthodox and orthopractic *yeshivas* and *madrasas*. The schools are saying, you are Americans, we are Americans, but we will supplement with a religious perspective – rather than saying, we are here in America temporarily and we have to get along with everyone, so we are cramming in whatever they make us on the side. Their emphasis on Americanness undercuts any other ethnicity that they would purposely try to invoke or deny.

The first piece of evidence that these are essentially American schools is that there is very little substantive overlap between religious and secular subjects. As noted earlier, each school requires a religious studies course and a religiously motivated language course. The curricula in the former is explicitly religious; often undergirded by the history of the traditions, students learn how to read and interpret holy texts, perform rituals, celebrate holidays, and come to an understanding of their belief systems. Language classes can overlap in content at times, but essentially kids are learning conversational Arabic and Hebrew. In fact, parents and students at Beth El raise the issue of the Israel trip as the primary reason they want Hebrew in the curriculum. There is the added benefit of it making Bar/Bat Mitzvah training easier, but the primary motivation in the classroom is often something like, don't you want to be able to bargain at the *shuk* [Israeli marketplace]? Parents at ISC say they want kids to learn Arabic so that they can understand Qur'an. However, there is a mismatch here between that desire and what actually goes on in the classroom. Students are not learning Qur'anic Arabic but instead Modern Standard Arabic, focusing on conversational standards such as colors, weather, greetings, and so on. So, we can largely isolate religious education to the Islamic Studies and Jewish Studies classroom.

However, we can see that through tactics reflecting a “hidden curriculum” (Eggleston 1977; Jackson 1968; Snyder 1971), schools are “doing religion” in a way that West and Zimmerman characterize “doing gender” (1987). In this symbolic interactionist argument, we perform gender, using our interactions with others to interpret and reinforce symbols. The school day is full of opportunities to “do religion,” but comparatively few of these opportunities are actually taken by staff members. The main one they do take advantage of is use of language. Teachers pepper Arabic and Hebrew phrases throughout the school day whenever possible, most notably when asking students to quiet down, to be seated, etc. Beyond these secular uses of language, adults use language to infuse a little religion. The very structure of Arabic words such as *inshallah* (God willing), *mashallah* (thanks to God; God willed it), and the like infuses God into secular subjects. At Beth El, religious use of Hebrew implores students to don a *kippah* (head covering) or wish one another a “*Shabbat Shalom*” (lit., a peaceful Sabbath). However, what is interesting here is that these words are spoken primarily by adults. Kids use them when prompted or as a response, but largely they speak colloquial American English, even peppered with Southern phrases and idioms. This is one example of intended curriculum not necessarily being received and internalized as much as school personnel would wish. Interestingly, this second language use is also limited to the two sacred languages. Spanish is not used in the same way at Beth El, even though students spend equal time on Spanish as Hebrew in seventh and eighth grade, and none of the non-Arabic languages spoken by teachers or students is audible with any frequency. The emphasis here is that the sacred languages unite the communities, whether employed in sacred or secular ways.

Similarly, while the schools both look very much like typical American schools, visual symbols maintain a quiet presence of the religious traditions. Again, though, the takeaway point is that the symbols are placed at the initiative of adults and are not referred to by students. At ISC, the *bismillah* (prayer invoking the name of God) is mounted in a prominent place in each classroom, and teachers told me that it is recited at the beginning of every class, but over the course of my two years of observation at the school I found it is really recited only rarely – frequently by some teachers and almost never by others. Rotating hallway displays sometimes display class projects about Islamic topics, but just as often these displays are about American literature or world history.

At Beth El, annual eighth grade projects give students the opportunity to create artwork for the school on various Jewish themes. So, in the middle school wing, the space above each classroom doorway has student paintings of materials used in that subject with the subject's name in Hebrew and English. Benches in the hallway are similarly festooned with student depictions of Jewish ritual objects and scenes from Israel. In years past, the projects took on a theme – peace, Israel, etc., wherein each student crafted a section in his/her own way. More recently, the projects infuse Jewish symbols where you might not expect them. The class of 2009 produced three panel paintings representing the regions of the state to adorn the lunch room. One has to look closely to see the Hebrew writing on the wine bottle and its accompanying glass, the only representation of Judaism in any of the panels.

The take home point is not that religion is not at the schools but instead that it is generally initiated by adults and in such a way that it complements rather than challenges the American norms that form the basis of most of what goes on every day. Outside of religious

classes, religion generally serves a symbolic function that reiterates that these kids are just a little bit different – one of the main functions of ethnicity.

The basic idea here should be that thanks to the American school day, students are prepared to enter secular high schools and not feel that different. In fact, the main differences they talk about expecting are size and freedom from restrictive rules, not religion. Muhammad, an ISC eighth grader, says what excites him about entering a public high school the following year is that “it's a lot bigger. And it has a lot more equipment for stuff, and things to do, and a football field.” Echoing this sentiment, Naomi, a Beth El eighth grader, says that either of the public high schools she is considering “will be bigger than what I’m used to, which is nice.” The takeaway point is that 99% of these students will enter secular schools, if not at the high school level than certainly by the time they go to college. The American school day structure allows the schools to both prepare students for the future and to maintain difference for as long as possible. The schools have to continually balance being a ‘safe haven’ (Watson and Watson 2002), letting students be who they are, and prepare them to be outsiders.

Projects and Special Events

On occasion, the school day continues beyond 3:30. School communities re-convene on certain evenings for project presentations, holiday celebrations, parent meetings and the like. My argument here is that these events transform the school into a ‘third place,’ characterized by Ray Oldenburg as a non-home or work space that is “inclusively sociable, offering the basis of community and the celebration of it” (1989:14). This is a role often fulfilled by congregations. However, for these minority religious communities,

congregations are often not the primary place of religious observance. At Beth El, most families are relatively unobservant, so the local synagogues more often than not serve mostly as venues for Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation and celebration and High Holy Day observance. Beyond that, the few religious observances that most families enact take place in the home – lighting Shabbat candles, celebrating Passover with the tradition seder meal, and exchanging Hanukkah presents are all activities that happen outside the synagogue.

At ISC, families mention that many religious duties are performed at home; the *masjid* is simply not necessary for one to be observant, and those who are looking for the cultural transmission that so often goes on at congregations can find opportunities for that at cultural centers themselves, such as the nearby Turkish Community Center. Families that pray the requisite five times per day do so mostly at home or even in places like remote corners of the mall or tucked away spaces in public parks. The school becomes a central place for this ethno-religious community to unite, even the adults who do not spend the whole day at school.

Additionally, projects and special events offer good data as the schools put on a public face. Sometimes this ‘public’ is merely what is public to the kids – their parents, who are not around during the daily weekday lives of their kids. Sometimes, though, this ‘public’ includes other invited guests or even local media looking cover a local interest story about religious minorities. Either way, projects and special events allow schools to highlight what is most important to them. Essentially, it gives them a chance to check in and offer a statement of what it means to be Muslim or Jewish at this school.

Each school has developed a project that becomes central to the school year. At ISC, this project is the Integrated Subject Fair (ISF). Based on a theme common to the middle

school, the ISF requires students over the span of several weeks to develop a multi-disciplinary research project that draws from each of their school subjects. One year the theme was green living, the next globalization, and so on. Students were able to choose their own topics and then were required to explain explicitly how science, social studies, and Islam would enrich our understanding of the topic and the student's argument about it. Teachers emphasized again and again in the weeks leading up to the final presentations that the projects needed to incorporate an "Islamic perspective;" so much so that in the presentations, that phrase would comically appear in less than seamless ways, as in, "and for my Islamic perspective, I found a *hadith* (statement about the prophet) that said Muhammad, *sallallahu alayhi wa-salaam* (peace and blessings be upon him), planted a lot of trees." In doing so, students were to practice applying *suras* (verses from the Qur'an) and *hadith* to new contexts, especially challenging when students noted that they could not find anything about recycling in the Qur'an. So yes, of course the ISF projects included religion. But what of race and ethnicity?

What was not apparent to those only viewing the final presentations was the teachers' consistent quelling of political topics for the ISF. Students talked about these topics constantly during the projects' development, and some projects, like one discussing Iran's potential use of nuclear weapons, had overtly political implications. But nowhere to be found was Palestine. Despite the broad definition of globalization as "anything that reaches globally," conspicuously missing from the approved topics was the very topic that students raised themselves day after day. In contrast, topics were themes like the rise of the internet, poverty in Africa, and, interestingly, how racism is not Islamic. Teachers' hearty public approval of this last topic highlights the idea that they are actively trying to subsume this

diverse yet heavily Arab population into a race-less Islamic population. Reiterating the model I introduced above, adults at ISC begin with many ethnicities and introduce and emphasize the importance of having none. The ultimate effect on the surface might seem to be that they are successful, but as I will outline below, that is not necessarily the case.

While the Integrated Subject Fair is in full swing at ISC, down the road at Beth El, eighth graders are busy putting the final touches on their family history projects. An annual project that students know will be the focus of their Humanities course in their final year at Beth El, the family history project specifically asks students to unearth, rather than subsume, their geographically diverse heritages. Students interview family members and document artifacts, ultimately producing almost professional looking bound booklets that track their family's progress to the United States and specifically to Jacksonville. During one class period, the students chatted with their Humanities teacher as they worked. The teacher circulated among the half-finished projects, listing aloud the number of countries that students designated. This led to a discussion about the areas that are not usually thought of as having substantial Jewish populations or history – Ireland, South Africa, Italy, etc. – as well as the more stereotypical list including Israel, Eastern Europe, and the nations of the former USSR. The teacher made a point of treating the subject casually, encouraging acceptance of non-Jewish family members and inclusion of their heritage by making comments like, “I wish I had some Irish blood in me” and “your mom’s parents must be such great cooks.” While intermarriage has long been a sticky wicket in Jewish communities, at BEA the administration has taken up the tactic of full inclusion. This allows for even more ethnic identities to be considered Jewish. The message is that learning about our differences

does not undermine our sameness. In fact, having different backgrounds is part of being Jewish in this community.

These themes are reiterated in special events at each school. At ISC, each *Eid al-Adha* (holiday commemorating Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael), taking place after the annual *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca) brings the *Hajj* Fair. The event is more of a fair in the sense of a country fair than a science fair. It is the culmination and high point of the season leading up to one of the most important days on the Islamic calendar. In preparation, students learn or review the importance of the fifth pillar of Islam, making a pilgrimage to Mecca. The school gymnasium is transformed into the Arabian peninsula, featuring a six foot high *Ka'aba* (cube-shaped building in Mecca circumambulated by pilgrims and which all Muslims face in prayer), tables crowded with smaller models made by lower school students, and students dressed all in white buzzing with activity. The students re-enact the stages of the *hajj* for their parents and others from the *masjid* community.

This is one of those times when the school acts as a representative of Islam; local newspapers have been known to highlight the event at least in part to explain all the 'fuss' to neighbors. The rituals of the *hajj*, clearly religious in nature, also serve the function of minimizing racial and ethnic differences. Students dress all in white, as opposed to other holidays where some jump on the opportunity of no-uniform dress up days to wear cultural clothing. Teachers circulate, saying things like, "you all look so nice, dressed alike in your *ehram*, you can hardly tell who's who!" The point is that even within overtly religious contexts, adults make a concerted effort to underscore the sameness of everyone. Here we

are again, taking an ethnically diverse population and introducing the idea that it should be, at its pinnacle, a community free from the divisiveness of ethnicity.

Sometimes special events are just that, so special that they do not occur regularly but are unique occasions for administrators to use fleeting resources. This is especially interesting precisely *because* it is not planned for at length beforehand. The spontaneity involved allows values to surface easily, since the only people involved are the ones with the most control. One such situation occurred at Beth El one spring when a group of teenagers from a Jewish high school in Mexico touring the area visited the middle school. With all thirty or so middle schoolers in attendance, plus representatives from local synagogues and Jewish organizations, the Mexican students gave individual presentations about their Jewish heritage. Though the accompanying Power Point slides were not functioning as planned, the students' evocative prose about their Lebanese families and integration into Mexican life painted a picture with which Beth El students clearly strongly identified. Among mentions of favorite foods and holiday rituals, the Mexican students again and again repeated ideas like, "we might sound Mexican but we are Jewish" and "we feel like our whole Jewish community is our family." Interestingly, when asked by a Beth El teacher what language they spoke at home, most said that their parents would speak Arabic to them while they responded in Spanish. Seeing raised eyebrows from the Beth El students, the Mexican students explained that though they learned Hebrew at school, to a chorus of "so do we!," their parents came from countries where Arabic was the language most commonly spoken. An undercurrent of tension was resolved when teachers from both schools spoke over one another things like, 'Jews are all over the world, they speak all languages, but look at how similar we are,' steering the conversation back to similarities in family life. Adding another

dimension, the visit, purely by circumstance, took place on March 17th – St. Patrick’s Day. Even more than the American students, the Mexican students were decked out in green clothing and accessories, wishing everyone a Happy St. Patrick’s Day. The tone of the visit was very much that it is OK to have multiple ethnic heritages – as long as we all remember that we are Jewish. And the things they said to underscore what makes them Jewish were not obviously religious – family ties, Yiddish jokes, body type stereotypes, and so on. This highlights my model in an interesting way because here the Mexican students were literally trying on the symbols of ethnicities not their own with their green clothing, introducing the American students to ethnicities they had no idea could even be Jewish, and, especially after noting that they too were looking forward to their upcoming trip to Israel accomplishing the final imagined ethnicity.

Undercurrents: “Filling the Void”

So far, I have focused largely on the work of adults in these school communities. Remember that these are middle school students; they have almost no choice in how to spend their time. Adults still control every aspect of their lives. So, we have to start with what adults are planning for students. But on another level, we need to look at what students are doing with the information that adults present to them on their own level of interaction. We have already seen that adults at the schools approach the issue of race/ethnicity from opposite directions; at Beth el, where students display very little obvious ethnic attachment, teachers introduce many ethnicities to underscore that difference-within-sameness is acceptable. At ISC, where students display strong ethnic attachments, teachers attempt to negate all of these external ethnicities and highlight that Islam should be their only source of identity. What is the result of these efforts? My results show that students, while on the surface engaging with

the ideas that adults want them to have, use Israel and Palestine as a proxy, ultimately accomplishing a singular imagined ethnicity.

How does this work? At the outset, it is important to note that each school avoids nearly any mention of the ‘other’ tradition. At least in part due to the sheer volume of information that the dual curricula must cover, meaning that there is a lack of time to cover other religious ideologies, the schools do not do any ‘othering.’ However, because of the rampant attention to the Middle East by nearly all media outlets as well as the students’ families themselves, lack of mention does not mean that students do not think about Israel and Palestine. Quite the contrary; students “fill the void” of lack of information about the ‘other’ tradition and its purported ‘homeland’ by assuming the ethnicity associated with their own place. Remembering again that they are in early adolescence, characterized by social achievement (Ryan and Shim 2008), we see them latching on to what is sensational, what their parents teach them, what is fun, in order to gain ‘street cred.’ Adults can only tamper down what they can hear, and some may furtively agree with the kids. Families with multiple racial/ethnic/religious backgrounds are using the school as their ethnicity, as I noted above by comparing the schools to congregations. These schools are where their kids *are not* mixed, because they are treated equally as Jews or Muslims. In fact, some of the most religiously active kids are the ones with a non-Jewish/Muslim or convert parent. Because they are already engaging in processes of identity attainment at school, they are well-versed in some of the techniques. They choose to co-opt them for their own purposes, replacing “Muslim” and “Jewish” with “Palestine” and “Israel.”

Let’s look at some examples of these undercurrents I have been describing. Sometimes, they become evident when a teacher does not do enough to disallow them.

When I asked one parent if there was anything at school that she disagreed with, she relayed the following anecdote:

I think one teacher one time just said do any project, any project you want, and they were going to do skits. And he came home, he was so happy, and, I felt [she sighs], I felt so hurt that he wanted to go in and shoot so-called Jews. Shoot them all. And his friends were going to be the Jews, and he was going to go in and shoot, and that was their skit. And he was laughing with his friends, and the teacher OK'd this, and I told him you'd better not do anything like that ever. . . . But I told him if you don't go tell your teacher that that's wrong, I am. And he said, but you're gonna get them fired, you're gonna get them fired, and I said, they'd better be fired if they think that's OK! And I said, even though there's politics going on, even though the world can be mean and rude, we're not going to do that kind of thing. In our hearts, we're going to be Muslims, we're going to be peaceful, we're going to be right. What they're doing is wrong, and we're not going to do that kind of thing. We're not in the real world, we're in school, we're learning. What you see, what you've heard, on the news, from family, from friends, you cannot act on it. You're not ready to act on something like that, you have to grow up and think straight. And when a teacher encourages something like that, usually they're, I think they're eccentrics. I know for sure that [the principal] doesn't like shirts that say, uh, Israel, Palestine is the best, Jordan is the best, things that portray a feeling of politics, a feeling of love for a country. . . . We're trying to educate him to love, and to be peaceful, and to be a good Muslim, but you come to this place and there's so much bigotry and there's so much hatred.

As the mother notes, this was not an ordinary teacher or an ordinary occurrence. This particular teacher was indeed let go as the principal took a stand against this kind of hatred.

But the mother goes on to say later in the interview, about the political ideologies enmeshed with Palestinian Muslim identity, "And so we've brought it back here, to the school, to ISC, 'cause most of us are Palestinian, if you think about it. So I think that hatred and the anger is instilled in us and we need to get rid of it. And I don't know how to do it. . . . They need to tell them, to remind them that Islam means peacefulness. 'Don't hate, you can't hate,' and the teachers don't do that, they don't have it in them." What makes this event stand out is that in this case, the undercurrents are made accessible to adults, one of whom enables it and one of whom aggressively acts to quell it. Clearly, though, this is an ongoing issue. If we look closely at this incident, we see that students originate this idea of shooting Jews. Where else

can this idea come from but the highly politically charged Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially given, as the mother reiterates, the majority Palestinian population? The student's enthusiasm demonstrates that his peers took no issue with their planned activity. "Shooting Jews," with the implicit assumption of Palestinian identity of the 'shooters,' becomes a cool, fun thing to do. Being Palestinian is a cool, fun thing to be. And it takes an immense amount of effort from adults to nip this in the bud when it arises, to the point where staff changes must be made.

While dramatic events like the one I have just described serve as explosive examples of public and purposive action, we can also see students "filling the void" in more furtive, small ways. Because the students at ISC wear uniforms, issues of dress and appearance come to the surface whenever they are allowed to wear alternate clothing. Frequently, the days before or after *Eids* are "dress-up days," where students may forego their uniforms in favor of 'dressy' clothing. This also happens when they give presentations, as in the Integrated Subject Fair. Part of many students' dress-up wardrobe is ethnic or cultural clothing, such as the Pakistani *shalwar qameez* or a Kuwaiti *abaya*. This is allowed and encouraged to the degree that there is no direct connection to a political entity. However, one afternoon, as I assisted students with a writing assignment in the computer lab, I noticed a student furtively showing a few classmates the black and white *keffiyah* (black and white checkered scarf often worn to represent Palestinian nationalism) he had tucked away in his backpack, the other boys patting him on the back and generally indicating that they thought it was cool. When the teacher had left the room for a moment, I asked them why all the secrecy? They told me that the teacher "gets really mad, we're not allowed to have them at school." When I asked them why not, they shrugged and made a comment about her general

strictness. The teacher returned, saw the scarf, which had spilled out of the backpack, and immediately told the student she was writing him up, since she had told him earlier that that was not acceptable to bring to school, that they had “no idea what that means and how it can hurt people.” Though other students in the room wore clothing that I could identify as Pakistani, the lack of direct concrete link to political actions of nation meant that they were fine. Defying the teacher by taking the scarf out gave this particular student status.

Later in the year, at the workshop when the ISC and Beth El eighth graders met one another, we spent several minutes after lunch sharing artifacts. One of these artifacts was a different student’s *keffiyah*. He took it out and showed it to the group without explanation. When I asked him to tell us what it meant, he said simply, “Palestine.” Probing for more, I asked if it was related to Islam. He shook his head, smiling, and said, “Nope, just Palestine.” In a break later that afternoon, one of the Jewish parents approached me and whispered, “Do our kids know what Palestine is?” Unsure of what she meant, I said something innocuous about many of these students having family in Gaza and the West Bank, pointing out one ISC student’s plastic bracelet with the Palestinian flag and the word “Palestine” emblazoned on it. The mother, still looking confused, said “I don’t think they have ever heard of Palestine. I don’t think they know that they are all talking about the same place.” What the ISC students take for granted, the Beth El students have almost no exposure. The void flip-flops.

In contrast to ISC, where mentions of Palestine come from students and are quashed, at Beth El, Israel is everywhere. Students learn to love Israel from day one. Display boards around the school have Israeli flag trim, children learn the Israeli national anthem in pre-school, and, as was reiterated to me again and again not only in my observations but in interviews, the eighth grade Israel trip is the focus of not only the eighth grade year but in

many ways the entire Beth El experience. In fact, when I asked students and parents why they thought Beth El made Hebrew mandatory, the immediate response from nearly everyone was that then the kids would be able to communicate in Israel in eighth grade. So, while the idea of many ethnicities is introduced, the one at the forefront is Israel. Largely because the Israel trip is such a legendary part of the Beth El experience, the students latch onto it above all other possible ethnic choices, even if those choices are introduced, as discussed above, in other projects. Also, the trip makes it easy for kids to latch onto Israel, since merely by going on the trip, they are doing everything they are supposed to do. Deciding to go on a trip abroad with one's closest friends, even if that trip is 'educational,' is an easy choice. Beyond the minor annoyances of fundraising (given that the school covertly makes sure that every kid who wants to go will ultimately be able to), the kids don't have to do anything extra. They just have to learn about Israel as part of their curriculum and then go and enjoy it. Assuming a quasi-Israel ethnicity becomes quite easy.

But how much salience does Israel hold for these students before they go on the trip? Even at a time when Israel attracts a great deal of negative attention for its policies regarding the displacement of Palestinians, students still tout a love for Israel as central to their identity. They say that Israel is their "homeland," that they belong there even if they have never been before, that it is where all Jews can go and feel like they are at home. One of the ways this is achieved is by leaving very little void to fill with anything negative. Questions about Israel are posed in such a way that even while critical thinking is usually a central focus of the school, kids do not have the obvious opportunity to disagree with Israeli policy. In Jewish Studies class, the most deviant position on Israel is along the lines of, "I think Jews should have thought more about the Uganda option" or "It upsets me that peaceful Palestinians have

to go through all the checkpoints and give up their homes.” The precedent, and the ideology that gets kids a lot of positive attention, is that to love Israel is a marker of high status. This precedent is set annually at graduation, when each graduate’s short speech about his/her experiences at Beth El includes at least a modicum of ‘what I learned in Israel.’ There is very little dissension on this topic. However, one parent of a rising eighth grader expressed to me the following concern:

This came up in our conversation last night after the graduation. So you know the kids got up and they talked about their Israel trip. So, you know, of course, everything was pro-Israel, pro-Israel, well, that, that really irked my husband, 'cause he doesn't think, you know, I mean, he doesn't, he knows that they don't really know everything about Israel, they only see the good things. So maybe the school promotes too much rose-colored glasses about Israel. So [my husband] expressed to Hannah, you can't listen to everything you hear, you have to judge for your own self.

Here, it is not the students who must ‘fill the void’ but individual parents who question the propriety of assuming a quasi-Israeli ethnic identity. The default is a deep and abiding love for Israel that sparks a burning desire to return later in life – in fact, this is repeated again and again as the purpose for the trip. So, without a venue for thinking critically about Israel, kids ‘fill the void’ by assuming a highly salient quasi-Israeli identity that emphasizes that it’s good to love Israel without really getting into the particulars of what that entails.

CONCLUSION

Students at the Jewish and Islamic middle schools in my study both achieve central ethnicities but through opposite means. For the Jewish school, where students’ Jewishness often takes the form of symbolic ethnicity, adults attempt to introduce many Jewish ethnicities in hopes that kids will latch on and make connections. As Herbert Gans comments in a footnote, “. . . [non-Orthodox] schools often devote considerable attention to ‘cultural,’ i.e. ethnic, course – in part as an introduction to religious schooling, especially for

children, and in part to make a religious education more inviting and attractive. ‘Lifestyle’ attracts students more easily than religion” (1994:590). The biggest emphasis is on a connection to Israel, and given the positive associations with the annual eighth grade trip to Israel, that one eventually supplants all others. Kids do not necessarily achieve the outcomes we look at as measures of successful religious education, but they do have a connection to one another and to Judaism via a sense of peoplehood gained through seeing ethnic connections across various sub-groups and through a connection to Israel. At the Islamic school, where there are higher levels of religious observance and a great deal more ethnic diversity due to the number of second generation immigrants, adults work actively to try to transcend ethnicity using religious principles. But these are adolescents, and their religious observances are not as homogeneous as perhaps the administrators and teachers would like, so they latch on to a Palestinian identity. Because most of the kids are Arab, and because most of the Arabs are Palestinian, even non-Palestinian kids know they can fit in by assuming a quasi-Palestinian identity.

What are the implications of this imagined ethnic identity? I argue that as a result of these data, we can now better explain the complexities of religious education. Despite official proclamations to the contrary, religious schools in U.S. minority traditions are also ethnic schools. Though Sara and Rabbi Katz, quoted at the beginning of this paper, would also likely not identify their schools that way, the fact that they fail to perceive the schools are religious means that there must be elements with higher salience present. Additionally, approaching religious schools according to a congregational model helps us to better understand congregational approaches to diversification and the difficulties of pluralism more broadly.

Students take a powerful agentic role in developing their race/ethnicity, in large part as a response to adults' efforts to achieve religious identities via any means at their disposal. The American setting means that schools have to be purposeful in light of the threat of assimilation but carefully, since each group is a minority in the Christian-dominated American South. Whether ethnicity is safe (Jewish) or dangerous (Islamic), kids learn that their position as Jews and Muslims in the U.S. means they will be different. They might as well be different in a way of their choosing. Nancy Ammerman notes that agency "is located, then, not in freedom from patterned constraint but in our ability to invoke those patterns in nonprescribed ways, enabled in large measure by the very multiplicity of solidarities in which we participate" (Ammerman 2003). The agency that students engage helps to explain how schools fit into the schema of congregational approaches to race/ethnicity. While ISC makes a strong attempt to achieve ethnic transcendence, its policies ultimately underestimate students' agency. Not unlike Emerson and Smith's (2000) findings, neglecting to pay close attention to the status wrapped up in racialization leads to the school's inability to reach the 'reorientation' it desires (Marti 2005). Similarly, the unintended consequence of Beth El's introduction of nearly infinite nationally related Jewish ethnicities, alongside its emphasis on Israel, makes it easy for students to take a pass on the religious beliefs and practices the school spends eleven years trying to get students to absorb. In terms of the congregational models, this process operates in the opposite direction of ethnic transcendence, wherein religion is subsumed under an ethnic banner.

The findings presented here also provide a window into how to better understand minority congregations. Most of the theoretically significant work on religion and ethnicity focuses on Christian congregations. How are these schools acting as congregations, and how

might we now understand the production of race and ethnicity in Jewish and Islamic settings? One conceptualization of congregations frames them as “a unique crucible or focal point for exploring the dynamic interplay of numerous forces and processes in spiritual development: family, peer, personal agency, self-reflection, moral guidance, and intergenerational relationships – not to mention the rituals, traditions, and practices that build bridges to the sacred and transcendent” (Roehlkepartain and Patel 2006:324). In order to incorporate race/ethnicity into these “numerous forces and processes,” we need to pay attention to the same “crucibles” I highlight in minority religious schools. Multicultural congregations outside the Christian tradition may also incorporate a routine that syncretizes mainstream American and specifically racial/ethnic symbols and languages. They certainly offer special events in order to draw the community together. And their members interact in ways that might not be anticipated by authority figures. But they may also operate differently than Christian congregations for a whole host of reasons involving but not limited to theological and cultural distinctions. Drawing conclusions about how congregations relate to race and ethnicity without incorporating non-Christian congregations runs the risk of imposing Christian meanings onto non-Christian structures.

Finally, future research should also move to build a better understanding of religious schools through comparative means. Qualitative research allows us to dig deep into social processes that may not appear in quantitative data, including the interactions that I highlight here. Case studies of multicultural Christian schools can only help to introduce nuance into our understanding of how religious schools negotiate race and ethnicity. Ultimately, in order for us to understand how religion and race/ethnicity interact at the interactional level, we need as broad a picture as possible.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES, AND THE POWER OF SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the United States, identified as “the world’s most religiously diverse nation” (Eck 2002), religious identity has the power to shape vastly different kinds of lifestyles and ways of navigating the social world. Though historically, sociology of religion has focused mainly on understanding adult religiosity, recent work argues that adolescents experience religious identity formation in ways that can both help us to understand how adults achieve identities and how adolescents experience religion in their own right (Pearce and Denton 2011). Such work locates religious identity as an outcome of multiple socialization processes, resulting in tangible behaviors and practices (Smith and Denton 2005).

Complicating the study of the development of religious identities are the varying religious traditions in which this process occurs, most notably the difference in the process of the nation’s religious minorities whose outcomes cannot always be measured using the same tools as their Christian counterparts. Further, for these religious minority groups, the development of a religious identity can be virtually inseparable from one’s racial/ethnic identity. In this paper, I draw from an ethnographic framework to examine identity development in Jewish and Islamic middle schools. Drawing from a comparison of official school narratives and multiple student-created narratives, I argue that the construction of an autobiographical narrative that incorporates religion, ethnicity, and overlap between the two *itself* is the primary intended outcome of religious education in this setting, altering how we conceptualize “successful” religious education for these groups.

BACKGROUND

For many adolescents, religion constitutes a significant part of their identity. Especially in traditions with a rite of passage for early adolescents, religion can offer adolescents the space and impetus to examine which values, morals, and practices are important to them. Recent work tells us that adolescents as a group engage in religious behaviors and profess religious ideologies, and a majority do so according to the conventions by which they were raised (Smith and Denton 2005). High religious devotion often correlates with any number of the following factors: parent religiosity, relationship with parents, parental marital status, parent education, organized activities, religious tradition, higher desired attendance, close friends, peer influences, teen gender, and race (Smith and Denton 2005). However, devotion and identity are not one and the same (Pearce and Denton 2011). Religious socialization, which may encompass Smith and Denton's factors as well as others, may operate differently across traditions, cultural contexts, and individuals. Religious day schools offer families the chance to immerse young people in proactive socialization attempts. Though they comprise only a small percentage of America's religious schools, Jewish and Islamic schools and the processes of identity development that occur therein have much to tell us about the intricacies of religious socialization.

American Muslim and Jewish Adolescent Identity

Research on the identities of adolescent Jews and Muslims in particular shows us the struggles of adolescents with many demands on their lives, both as religious minorities and American teenagers. According to the Jewish Adolescent Survey (JAS), which surveyed 1,300 Jewish teenagers in Eastern Massachusetts who had completed their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*,

Jewish adolescents, while valuing their Jewish identity and heritage, experienced a significant decline in Jewish practice after their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* (Kadushin et al. 2000). Indeed, the main finding of the JAS, while hampered by selection effects, is that Jewish teenagers are overscheduled and overcommitted, failing to commit to Judaism not out of apathy but sheer lack of time (Kadushin et al. 2000). The Jewish oversample in the National Study of Youth and Religion reflects “notable levels of traditional Jewish observances not only among the “religiously Jewish” teenagers, as we would expect, but also among the “culturally Jewish,” who comprise 42 percent of the sample (Smith and Denton 2005:49-50). A main finding from the National Jewish Population Survey regarding adolescents suggests that “for young children in particular it is the parents who make the difference, not the community” (Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner 2000:106), though it is important to note that the greatest effect that parents have, according to the study’s analysts, is to incite socialization by immersing their children in a wide range of Jewish communal activities. These activities go beyond synagogue attendance and traditional extra-curricular religious school; emphasis is now placed on evaluating the socialization effects of Jewish summer camp and subsidized trips to Israel (Sales and Saxe 2004; Saxe and Chazan 2008).

In stark contrast, there are no major surveys of Muslim adolescents and their identities. Their numbers are too small for analysis in studies such as the National Study of Youth and Religion, and without the funding possibilities available through major Jewish philanthropic and research organizations, there has yet to be a large-scale survey of Muslim teens. Much of what we purport to know about Muslim youth comes from studies of particular ethnic groups with large Muslim populations (Ajrouch 1999; Ajrouch 2004; Haddad 2004). Very recent studies show that a major component of American Muslim

adolescent identity is tied up with the stigma of being identifiably Muslim post-9/11 (Bullough 2007; Haddad and Smith 2009; Hermansen and Mir 2006; Sirin and Fine 2008), a challenge that “may ironically be turning a generation of enraged teens into young adults at risk of becoming more alienated, more religious, and more marginal exiles in their homeland, the United States” (Sirin and Fine 2008:194). While American Jewish adolescents often identify as white or are perceived thusly (Brodkin 1998), American Muslim youth must live “on the hyphen” (Sirin and Fine 2008). Religiously, American Muslim adolescents, like many of their non-Muslim counterparts, describe themselves as questioning, valuing, and ultimately maintaining a close connection to their religious heritage, traditions, and beliefs (Chaudhury and Miller 2008).

Overlapping Smith and Denton’s (2005) assessment of mostly Christian teens and Keysar et al.’s analysis of Jewish adolescents, Chaudhury and Miller include close family and peer networks, religious clubs and organizations, maintenance of a prayer schedule, and an idea of a more solidly religious future as mechanisms contributing to the religious identity formation of American Muslim adolescents (Chaudhury and Miller 2008). A sad commonality between these works on Muslim youth is the authors’ commenting on the paucity of research done so far and their pleading for more scholarship on this underrepresented population (Khan 2006).

Overall, what we know about adolescent religious identity is that adolescents are religious beings, and adults’ influence over adolescents matters tremendously. But what in what directions do adults wish this influence to go? Parents who choose religious education for their children, and religious professionals who administer that education, filter an endless

amount of material to offer what they see is the best path to religious identity for their young people.

Religious Education: Goals, Outcomes, and Dilemmas

The pinnacle of overlap between the scholarly genres of sociology of religion and adolescent identity development is the religious school: that institution founded and supported to nurture the religious growth and identities of its students. Especially in areas of the United States where public schools offer above average, if not excellent, K-12 educations, religious schools stand out as public, conscious, and often expensive choices parents make for/with their children. Whether or not families' goals for their children's education involve development and maintenance of strong religious identity, their decision to enroll children in religious day school greatly affects students' daily experiences. As Malcolm Gladwell aptly noted, it takes 10,000 hours to achieve mastery of a field – roughly the length of time spent in first through eighth grades. Those hours, spent without parents in an environment structured to provide them with the best possible religious and academic education, exists in order to give children and adolescents the tools they need to not only remain a part of that religious tradition but to be future contributors to it.

Due to factors including the normative nature of much research on religious education, the potential conflict of interest inherent in studies from one religious tradition evaluating that tradition and others, and lack of a statistically significant number of religious day school attendees in nationally representative surveys, we do not yet know much about outcomes stemming from attendance of religious day schools. Additionally, studies of religious education, much like work on American religion as a singular phenomenon, may

conflate the differences between schools from different religious traditions in an effort to draw conclusions (Uecker 2009). Of all the religious education literature, that regarding Catholic schools is arguably the most plentiful, but even with decades of data, there is not yet a consensus on long-term effects of Catholic education (Perl and Gray 2007), and there is even less regarding outcomes of religious education in general. Generally, as Uecker summarizes, we know that religious schools play a part in the religious socialization of their students in several ways: by encouraging development of friendship networks between students of the same faith, providing adult religious role models, teaching explicitly religious material, and funneling student into religious post-secondary institutions (2009:354). In many analyses, including the Jewish and Muslim centered ones below, such factors connect to outcomes such as service attendance, adherence to particular doctrines, engagement in various religious practices, and salience of religious identity (Perl and Gray 2007; Uecker 2009).

Following from the difficulties in measuring Islamic demographics in the United States, there is no one complete data source for Islamic day schools. A multi-step process begun by the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA) in 1998, the first time a list was ever compiled, has been maintained to include 235 schools (Keyworth 2009). The history of Islamic schools in the United States branches into schools sponsored by the Nation of Islam (NOI) and those associated with the Muslim immigrants arriving in relatively large numbers after 1965 (Haddad and Smith 2009). Though by 1978 there were 41 NOI schools across the United States, most closed after the schisms brought about by issues related to Warith Deen's succession of his father (Haddad and Smith 2009; Rashid and Muhammad 1992). In contrast, the schools begun in Muslim immigrant communities have experienced tremendous

growth in the late 20th and early 21st century, most likely best attributed to the growth in immigration from Muslim countries itself (Haddad and Smith 2009). All of these schools fall under the heading “*madrassa*,” which means simply “place for studying” (Haddad and Smith 2009:7; Hefner 2007). Though Western media images of *madrassas* may conjure images of foreign terrorist cells, these schools vary across all categories as much as any other grouping of schools, religious or otherwise (Bergen and Pandey 2005; Hefner 2007). Given this variation, one profile of the “typical” Islamic day school contains the following facets: “Average size for a parochial school – 100 students or fewer. Young – six years or younger. Growing. Professionally oriented. Independently governed” (Keyworth 2009:33). This profile might very well be quite different in ten years, depending on growth patterns and the success of organizations such as ISLA and MASCIS (Muslim American Society Council of Islamic Schools).

Though there is no one consensus of the primary goal(s) of Islamic education, the most consistent commonality is to include Islamic principles excluded from public and other private schools. This inclusion ranges from schools whose primary focus is such Islamic educational staples as Qu’ran memorization and performance of the five pillars to those who want strongly Western-style schools that apportion the school day into secular and sacred times. Most American Islamic schools fall into this second group, which does overlap with the first as in a Venn diagram, and promote the development of an “Islamic ethos” rather than a more narrowly defined religious identity (Mandaville 2007). Following this perspective, schools attempt to “impart religious knowledge in the light of modern pedagogical principles in a way that is accessible to children who have grown up in an environment where novelty and entertainment value are prevalent and where rote

memorization is not valued as an instructional method” (Hermansen and Mir 2006:425). Thus, these schools recognize the differences between their students and those attending *madrasas* in Islamic nations, and they draw from Western techniques to emphasize Islamic ideologies. They recognize the wide range of students available to them in the United States and want to unite those individuals, who often hail from politically opposing ethnic groups (Merry 2007).

Not surprisingly, we know very little about religious or other outcomes for students from either or both kinds of Islamic schools. Due to lack of funding, longitudinal data, and centralized organizations offering accreditation and other services, researchers have only been able to rely on information from individual schools and small-scale studies. In her study of Canadian Islamic schools, Jasmin Zine finds four themes of Islamic education outcomes: “They provide a socially and spiritually based alternative to secular public schools. They ‘protect’ students from negative influences . . . They rehabilitate and resocialize ‘wayward’ students . . . They contribute to the social reproduction of Islamic identity and lifestyle” (2008:95). Note here that Zine’s themes only vaguely touch on religious ideologies; her outcomes do not name, for example, strong professions of faith or strict adherence to the *salat* schedule. In his smaller and more philosophically-oriented study of Islamic schools in the United States, Belgium, and the Netherlands, Michael S. Merry mentions the plethora of graduates of Islamic schools who report stronger Muslim identities as a result of their time spent there; “for these students, this translates into a stronger sense of self and a surer set of beliefs when it becomes necessary to confront non-Islamic customs and values” (Merry 2007:61). However, Merry also mentions ways in which Islamic schools fail to measure up to the high standards they set for themselves. Many of his respondents did not

find the Islamic curricula to be helpful or effective, and schools mention a less than desirable level of parental involvement (2007:61). Overwhelmingly, what these studies reveal is the immense number and scale of difficulties facing Islamic schools and educators. Because of the wide range of challenges, schools' failures often overshadow their successes, and it can be next to impossible to parse out which challenge is operating in which setting. We cannot yet draw conclusions about the effect of having attended Islamic school in the United States on religious identity later in life, at least not in any representative way. However, an investigation of intended outcomes is the first step in assessing whether or not those outcomes are achieved.

In stark contrast to the literature about Islamic schools, scholars of American Judaism have been able to collect a wide range of material about the history, goals, and outcomes of American Jewish educational sources. For several of the challenges presented to the American Islamic community, American Judaism has a response in place. This is most likely due to factors including stronger historical presence in the United States, a more centralized organizational structure, and endowed funding sources, often at Jewish research institutions. Jewish day schools, like *madrasas*, have their origins in the intensive settings of religious communities. Beginning in the middle ages, Jewish boys and young men attended religious schools as part of a long-standing tradition of religious scholarship. These schools, called *yeshivas*, taught students proficiency in biblical Hebrew and religious texts including the Torah and Talmud (Heilman 2006; Helmreich 2000). Orthodox Jews continued this tradition upon immigration to the United States, integrating secular studies into an already full religious curriculum as early as the early 20th century; 50 years later, non-Orthodox Jewish day schools followed (Pomson and Schnoor 2008). Thanks to explosion in both Orthodox

yeshivas and non-Orthodox day schools, the number of Jewish day schools currently operating in the United States is around 760 with approximately 205,000 students enrolled (Pomson and Schnoor 2008; Schick 2005).

Likely due to the diversity of perspectives offered by over 750 different institutions, the goals of Jewish education are not only numerous but also often contradictory. What some schools put forward as ideal others decry as heresy; indeed, the main source of division within Jewish schools exists between the more “isolationist” Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox schools, which comprise about 95% of all Jewish day schools, and the 5% that remain, which promote “integrationism” (Pomson 2009). For the former group, “the yeshiva seemed the symbol of their resistance to assimilation and guarantee of continuity, while the day school was the gateway through which the young would be led astray” (Heilman 2006:96). The latter group clearly does not agree with this assessment, putting forth goals that include education of the entire community, proficiency in Hebrew (both modern and biblical), intimate knowledge and love for Israel, ability to perform rituals both in the synagogue and in the home, and achievement of academic excellence (Aron, Zeldin, and Lee 2005; Chertok, Phillips, and Saxe 2008; Levisohn 2009; Pomson 2009; Reimer 1997; Sales and Saxe 2004; Schiff 1999). If there is a consensus about the goal of Jewish education, it is that Jewish schools exist to continue an established tradition of learning and scholarship while attempting to replenish the Jewish population for generations to come.

The high emphasis placed on Jewish education by institutions conducting studies on American Judaism means that we know more about various outcomes for these students than for students of Islamic schools. Overall, attending a Jewish day school generally leads to a greater connection with the Jewish tradition as well as increased scores on measurements

such as ritual performance, synagogue attendance, Jewish marriage, and salience of Jewish identity (Chertok et al. 2007; Cohen 1995; Schiff and Schneider 1994; Wertheimer 1999). However, these conclusions come from surveys that are only supplemented with qualitative methods, leaving out the voices of students themselves. Without this perspective, it is difficult to assess what is actually important to those whose very education is being discussed. In order to address mechanisms of identity development, we must turn to the experiences of students. This project uses early adolescents' experiences of religious schooling, one of their primary settings of identity formation, in order to access meanings that might otherwise be clouded by intervening adults' interpretations.

A New Outcome: Narrative Identity

As mentioned above, sociologists generally measure outcomes of religious education as they do those of other forms of religious socialization, as a causal relationship between socialization efforts of institutions (including the family) and explicitly religious behaviors and practices. However, new work in sociology of religion suggests that a broader conceptualization of religious identity may provide a better picture of the product(s) of religious socialization. In his study of the relationship between official doctrine and lay person belief, David Yamane explains, "Sociologists have been far more interested in the role of religious affiliation in the moral, ethical, and political beliefs of Americans than they have in understanding their religious beliefs, per se" (Yamane 2007:41). Drawing from the work of Andrew Greeley, Yamane argues that we focus more on the "poetry" of religious traditions, which "can be found in the sensibility or "imagination" it cultivates" (Greeley 2000; Yamane 2007:44). According to this perspective, adherence to public, formalized

doctrine does not automatically translate to a higher degree of religiosity. Instead, religious institutions provoke journeys wherein the structure is a starting point and the individual pursues infinite possible identifications without refuting the relevance of the greater tradition.

Similarly, Nancy Ammerman sees the interplay between structure (religious institutions) and agency (individual religious identity) as one wherein individuals construct “autobiographical narratives” from the core concepts provided by their faith traditions (2003). According to Ammerman, “Religious narratives – the building blocks of individual and collective religious identities – are activated, then, by settings in which they are implied and by actions into which they have been distilled, as well as by overt experiences and direct references” (2003:216). Though narratives can also be conceptualized on a larger and more structural scale, involving concrete subjects/objects and traditionally defined “plots” (Smith 2003; Yamane 2000), here I draw more from the broader idea that narratives are essentially expressions of meaning making (Chase 1995). Especially when approaching the religious experiences of early adolescents, it may be neither practical nor feasible to expect that all subjects will have the wherewithal to structure autobiographical narratives in the way that adults might. Being open to the power of narratives as an outcome as well as an object of study means also approaching alternate forms.

In this paper, I argue that religious day schools offer students the opportunity to imagine religious narratives. Though day-to-day activities certainly involve learning, engaging with, professing, and practicing religious beliefs, rituals, and the like, when school officials have the opportunity to leave students with a final message, they focus instead on the importance of the narrative that students have constructed at the school and will take with them to their secondary institutions. In short, schools want students above all to *identify as*

Jewish or Muslim and to have the wherewithal to do so often and proudly. In order to assess how schools' goals have been received and interpreted by the intended objects of religious socialization, I compare official school narratives, understood as schools' mission statements, administrators' interpretations of those statements, and graduation speeches given by school appointed adults, with narratives created by students themselves and directed both within and external to the school communities. My findings demonstrate that religious narratives, as products of religious socialization, are largely dependent upon context. Even if religious schools do not produce students with high profession of religious practices and beliefs, their ability to navigate different social contexts with their religious narratives gives them a leg up in religiously pluralistic communities.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this paper come from a larger project involving multiple qualitative methods employed at one Islamic and one Jewish school in a mid-size southeastern metropolitan area ("River Bend"); names and other identifying details have been changed in order to protect the identity of my subjects. The largest part of data collection took place as participant observation conducted over two full school years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), in which I immersed myself in school life, shadowing students for full school days and attending parent, teacher, and administrator meetings, athletic events, holiday celebrations, musical performances, field trips, and, importantly for this paper, graduation ceremonies. During this time period, I also gathered official school written material, including curriculum guides, brochures, student handbooks, and newsletters. Being immersed in the school day let me conduct informal interviews with teachers frequently, asking questions as they arose, and

I also conducted more formal open-ended interviews with administrators. During Fall 2010, I taught an eighth grade seminar at each school on shared Muslim-Jewish values, culminating in a workshop where the students from both schools met one another and completed service projects related to the shared values they had learned.

In order to assess both the formal goals of the schools and the student narratives that emerge, I first operationalize each. The formal, stated goals of the schools can be found in several arenas. First, the public face of the schools' objectives is their mission statements, which are not only posted in each classroom and office of both schools but are also front and center on the schools' websites. The mission statement is also a consistently re-worked and re-tooled examination by school officials and community members of the school's core values. There is simply no better place to look for a succinct, public, well thought out description of what the schools hope to achieve. Second, I asked administrators several open-ended questions about the goals and objectives of their schools. Interviews gave me the opportunity to allow the person at the school who arguably has the most power as well as being the first and foremost representative of the school to flesh out what exactly was meant by the mission statement and how it came to be. These interviews also shed light on objectives that might not be so public, as well as how the schools themselves see themselves accomplishing their goals – or not. Finally, I turn to another public, formal source of data on what the schools ultimately hope to achieve: the final charges given to 2009 and 2010 ISC and Beth El graduates. Taking place within two weeks of one another in both years, each ceremony offered families the chance to honor both eighth grade graduates and the schools that played such a large role in their religious development. One of the central features of the graduations was the delivery of speeches by teachers, administrators, community members,

and students. In these speeches, members of the school communities offered commentary prepared in advance to not only laud graduates but also to share with the community what the students had achieved in their years at Beth El or ISC. Due to the public, purposeful, and introspective nature of these speeches, they offer a window into the communities' adults' most salient hopes for their young adolescents. Operationalization thus includes narratives presented to outsiders (the mission statement, available to website guests and accreditation teams), insiders (graduation speeches to school communities), and those in between (interviews with me, a newcomer at the time but someone present throughout the school year).

To operationalize the students' narratives themselves, I turn to two variations of semi-public declarations of identity. First, I coordinated with the Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies teachers at each school to incorporate an in-class assignment wherein students responded to the prompt, "Being [Muslim or Jewish] means to me . . ." Students were given blank sheet of paper with those words written in English and Arabic or Hebrew and were instructed by their teachers to use whatever pictures and words they liked to fill in the ellipses. Student diagrams were then hung in the hallways of the middle schools. Thus, students were able to express individually what it meant to be Jewish or Muslim but were also cognizant of the fact that their diagrams would be visible within their communities. In this way, these visual narratives allowed students to work through their identities within relatively loose boundaries, as there was still the chance that they could be corrected by a teacher or administrator. Second, I captured another set of narratives when eighth grade students in the values seminar wrote letters to one another. I gave students free reign to introduce themselves to students at the other school in whatever way they wanted. However,

when I presented the assignment to students at ISC, they wanted more direction. As a class, they decided to write about their hobbies, families, backgrounds, reasons for going to that school, and what being Muslim meant to them. I then presented the assignment to Beth El students before allowing them to read the ISC letters. This was a way for students to practice the narratives that the school is preparing them to be able to give when they leave the school – narratives about who we are to individuals who might not know anything about us. Thus, like in the formal school narratives, these two narratives express students’ religious identities both within and external to their school communities.

After data collection was complete, I transcribed all interviews and speeches. I then employed systematic coding techniques using HyperRESEARCH software. I coded student diagrams (ISC N=27, Beth El N=30) and letters (N=22), by hand, creating categories of information students included and noting particularly salient excerpts and images. To maintain the spirit and integrity of the narratives, all spelling and grammar of letter excerpts included here are their own, though I used standard spelling in the coding schemas I created for the diagrams.

School Community Descriptions

The Islamic School of Conway (ISC), founded in 1987 and located in the city of Conway, serves the Islamic community of the greater River Bend area, offering full-time Islamic and secular education from preschool through eighth grade. The co-educational school shares facilities with the local *masjid* but has built additions over the years to provide classrooms and learning spaces dedicated to its 200 students. Grades six through eight comprise the middle school, which operates as a separate unit from the lower school and offers classes at different levels and specialized teachers. Both ISC’s faculty and student

populations are predominantly Arab, and most teachers and parents are immigrants to the United States. There is also a substantial minority of Southeast Asians among the student body, and there are several black and multi-racial families. The curriculum at ISC includes both religious and secular subjects but also an integrated approach to Islamic education. ISC maintains a small and close-knit Islamic community where many students spend their entire primary and middle school years and where several sets of cousins in attendance is not unusual. After graduation, most ISC alumni attend area public high schools, with a minority going on to secular, private, college preparatory schools.

Approximately one hour down the interstate from Conway and ISC is the town of Jacksonville. In an upper-middle class neighborhood of Jacksonville, surrounded by wooded neighborhoods and relatively upscale shopping centers, is the Beth El Academy (Beth El), a Jewish day school with approximately 120 students from preschool through eighth grade. Beth El was founded in 1972 and prides itself on being not only a staple of the Jacksonville community but also a producer of high achieving young men and women. Middle school students, enrolled in grades six through eight, have their own classroom wing, where teachers largely remain in their rooms dedicated to each subject area. Beth El's student body is almost entirely white, and a small minority of families are immigrants from countries including Israel, South Africa, and the nations of the former Soviet Union. Beth El requires students to take both secular and religious subjects and achieves integration of those areas in multiple ways. Again, like ISC, Beth El students have often attended Beth El for their entire school lives, and small class size means that the student body is close and familiar. A small number of graduates go on to a Jewish high school in the Jacksonville area, whereas the

remainder are split between public high schools and secular, private, college preparatory schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Official School Narratives: Mission Statements

“The Islamic School of Conway shall be guided by Qur’an and Sunnah according to the methodology of the people of the Sunnah and jumu’ah. Through the teaching of Islamic and scholastic courses, ISC shall prepare students to achieve excellence in education and a strong Muslim identity, meet or exceed the goals of the state curriculum and the national education goals, and exhibit high morals and exemplary citizenship.” – Islamic School of Conway

“Our mission is to provide a caring, supportive school community in which students achieve academic excellence in a dual curriculum that inspires each student to develop his/her fullest potential as an inquisitive learner, critical thinker and future Jewish leader.”
– Beth El Academy

Each school is guided by a mission statement, carefully crafted by the community. This mission statement tells not only school families, employees, and affiliates what the school is about but also is part of a larger process to link the school with other educational institutions. Having a strong, clear, accessible mission statement suggests that the school is part of a larger network of educational institutions following guidelines set forth by state and national governing bodies. When asked about how the mission statement was created, both administrators noted that while changes happen frequently, they are often only because of the required prompting to reconsider the mission by accreditation requirements. Minor changes and “tweaking” happen frequently, but the core values stay the same.

Who is involved in crafting these official narratives? In both schools, principals underscore that the mission statement is the product of the community as a whole. Sister Amina (as she is called by all school community members) of ISC describes the process of

drafting the original mission statement, saying, “So, based on what the needs of the parents are, what their expectations are from the school, keeping that in the mind, the board, the teachers, the parents, they all got together, and everybody gave their input, and that's how the mission statement was created.” Similarly, Joanne Levy (Beth El principal, addressed by her first name) says, “all constituencies of the school are involved in this process. In our case, that means that there are parents involved, teachers involved, administration, it can be alumni, students involved, and we generally put together a committee to re-examine the mission statement every five years when we're undergoing our review for re-accreditation.” So, the mission statement is very much a product of the entire community. It is the community's statement about what is important and why the school exists. In that way, it is the school's official narrative of its identity.

If the mission statement is revised at the prompting of official educational bodies, how are we to know if students and families are actually familiar with that particular narrative? Both principals strongly assert that the statement is not only an outward sign but also an ideology reinforced at the school. Indeed, when I walk the halls and sit in classrooms, it would be impossible to miss the mission statement, which is something that differentiates these schools from public schools. When asked whether the mission statement is something that ISC ever refers to directly, Sr. Amina responds enthusiastically in the positive, explaining,

Oh yes, they do. Umm, actually in our classrooms, the teachers discuss it with the students on a daily basis. What is the mission of our school, why do we come to this school and not another school, and with elementary, the teachers try to re-word it, rephrase it, based on their mental abilities, so that they understand why I'm in ISC and not in some other school. And, recently, um, actually, this coming Saturday, on the first, I'm going to meet with the parents to discuss our mission and vision statement.

Note that Sr. Amina directly states that the mission is something that sets ISC apart from other schools. The narrative for her emphasizes difference as much as it does compliance with state standards. For Joanne, who concurs about the high frequency of reference to the mission, the purpose is not as much on difference as it is about staying on task:

And it is posted in the classrooms because we do continually refer to it at meetings a lot of times, at board meetings, or at a faculty meeting, everyone will have the mission statement, you know, we have nametags, your name will be on the outside and the mission statement will be on the inside. Because it's really important to always remember what the goal is. And, you know, it's very easy in a school, like any organization, to get sidetracked by the little things, and you know, if you're always looking at the mission statement, that's always in front of you, then there's no possibility of making an incorrect decision, as long as you stay true to the mission of the school.

Joanne's comments also underscore the centrality of the mission to the operation of the school. The purpose of the mission is to act as a narrative that constantly guides the school. Thus, for both schools, the mission is highly salient.

Because the mission statement must be both concise and inclusive, it leaves much room for interpretation. Administrators are the ones who first and foremost implement the mission. Though both stressed their accessibility and the schools' openness to hearing from families with concerns, as Joanne put it, "the only way that a school can run in a healthy way is to have the administration of the school, you know, I wouldn't try to be the doctor, or something." So, one portion of the in-depth interview asked the principals to flesh out the mission statement and explain what it meant to them and translated to curricular priorities. That is, given the wide and diverse range of theologies within the two religious traditions, even if the Islamic tradition is narrowed somewhat to the Sunni branch, missions highlighting such concepts as "Muslim identity" and "future Jewish leaders" could bring forth countless

interpretations. What narratives, then, do school leaders present about the religious identities they want students to develop?

When asked about the meaning and content of the Muslim identity mentioned in the ISC mission statement, Sr. Amina walks a fine line between particularism and universality. Wanting to both develop students' Islamic beliefs and practices while underscoring their positioning as average Americans about to attend public secondary institutions, Sr. Amina's narrative highlights the intricate balancing act of minority religious educators. Speaking about the main goals of ISC, Sr. Amina says,

We, our major expectations for our students when they finish middle school here and they go to high schools, we want them to um, actually practice their religion, not necessarily just memorize some verses from the Qur'an or they should know the tradition of the prophet, we want them to be role models for other students around them. And that's what, that's why we said, you know, in our mission statement, that they exhibit high morals, exemplary citizenship and character, which is part of the Muslim identity, you know, because if you are practicing Islam as it is, based on the teachings of the Qur'an, and the traditions of the prophet Muhammed *salla allah alayhi wa sallam* (peace and blessings be upon him), umm, it's basically what any religion would teach. You know, the morals are the same, the values are the same.

Sr. Amina's narrative begins as one might expect. She highlights the importance continued practice, which is understandable given the difficulties students could encounter when switching from an Islamic to a secular school day and calendar. However, she quickly segues into a statement that hedges a bit. The implication here is that Sr. Amina wants the school's narrative to reflect the desire of the local Islamic community to fit in with its predominantly Christian neighbors rather than supporting a barrier between Muslim graduates and the non-Muslims with whom they will spend their high school years. The purpose of Islamic education at ISC, then, is not in line with the fundamentalist *madrasas* that come to many Americans' minds when thinking of Islamic schools. ISC's narrative

provides an explanation to the community that its students will practice a version of Islam that shares instead the fundamentals of all religions.

Similarly, Joanne's interpretation of the Beth El mission statement focuses on Jewish engagement in the wider community. Their mission statement is purposely broad by necessity. Because the school is a Jewish community day school rather than affiliating with a particular Jewish movement, the school consciously develops a mission that holds Jewish values close but leaves room for a multitude of interpretations. When asked why the mission takes this particular approach, Joanne explains, "Umm, well, you know, our statement is mostly about learning, and you know, it's very deliberate that it's about how to learn, you know, inquisitive learning and critical thinking, and in the way that we look at that leads to future leadership. And because our students are Jewish, we assume that that leadership will not only be in the general community but in the Jewish community as well." It is almost like the Jewish part of the school's mission is an afterthought – a given rather than a goal. Again, though, we must consider the context. This narrative allows families with low levels of Jewish observance but high salience of that identity, for whatever combination of reasons, to feel comfortable sending their children to Beth El. These children are still Jewish, and they still experience the difficulties of living as Jews in the American South. Every family with whom I spoke could relate at least one incident of blatant anti-Semitism that members had experienced. However, Jews are also leaders in Jacksonville – they are prominent business owners, doctors, lawyers, politicians, etc. – so they have made some headway.

Indeed, Joanne later notes that the school's implicit mission is to account for the building of Jewish identity that is not going on at home due to assimilation. So while the

official narrative may be so inclusive that it seems almost secondary, Joanne fills in the details, stating,

There's very, very little going on, 95% of these homes, and everything they get about being Jewish occurs between 8 and 4 on Monday through Friday. We have to make it as rich as possible. So, it means that even though the majority of our teachers are not Jewish, they are all brought into the mission of the school, which means, for example, that [our middle school science teacher], she's learning Hebrew, and this is her 11th year in the school, but she decided, look, you know, if I really want to be on board, I've gotta learn Hebrew. She's not the only one. So, it's a really, a true commitment to the mission of this little school.

Joanne's narrative here fills in some of the gaps left by the ambiguity of a phrase like "future Jewish leaders." While officially, the school's narrative reflects little more about Jewish identity than an advanced approach to learning and a forecast of alumni leadership, Joanne notes that the mission really means more than that. Beth El, like ISC, works to develop students' religious identities while also emphasizing the positive relationship between that particular tradition and the broader community. Rather than requiring teachers to be Jewish as part of the mission, Joanne gives an example of how the mission is lived out by non-Jews and Jews connecting. Bringing teachers into the mission of the school means for Joanne that non-Jews can be role models for Jewish students by respecting and embracing the Hebrew language. This is something that does not require non-Jewish teachers to give up their own religious tenets but instead highlights a model of interfaith relations that relies upon learning for the common good.

The mission statements, both as stated and as interpreted by administrators, of these Jewish and Islamic middle schools have much to say about the kind of religious identities cultivated and encouraged in the schools. Above all, what we see is that these narratives must accomplish three things: highlight some kind of core religious precept, be inclusive of a broad range of adherence to that tenet, and yet allow for connections to be drawn to the

mainstream population. Particular to the traditions, we would expect that Muslim student narratives would include reference to the practices that are required during the school day, such as dressing modestly and praying according to Islamic standards, and there may be some reference to fighting the association with 9/11 and terrorism that is often thrust upon American Muslims (Haddad 2004). We might expect Beth El students to highlight their own required, daily Jewish activities such as prayer, wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl) or *kippah* (head covering), adhering to Jewish dietary laws, and connecting to Israel. Given the complexity inherent in this kind of narrative, it is no wonder that schools also attempt to train students to develop their own narratives. Clearly, that is something they will need to do once leaving the school.

Commencement Narratives

Now that we know how administrators frame their narratives about the goals of schools at the outset, let's turn to the other end of the spectrum: the charges given at the culmination of students' Jewish and Islamic day school experiences. As the guest speaker at the ISC 2010 graduation, an alumna who had recently graduated from medical school, noted,

I often wondered why they called this both a graduation and a commencement. Because to me a graduation was an ending, it was the end of a lot of class work, lots of tests, earning lots of grades, and finally you're done and that is what this is all about. But the word 'commence' means to start. And indeed, this is a good beginning for all of you. You're going to make a wonderful transition coming up that I know all too well, it is going to be the beginning of the rest of your lives.

ISC and Beth El are sending their graduates out away from their protected environments and have a final opportunity to let them know what their identities should look like going forward. The narratives provided by adults at Jewish and Islamic day school graduation ceremonies demonstrate a vested interest in three central 'marching orders' of sorts. First, students should *continue the greater tradition*. Second, they should *recognize and maintain*

their day school cohort as one of their primary communities, even after dispersing for high school. Third, they should *represent the tradition with pride*. Each of these components allows for some degree of individual variation; there are different paths that students can take in each directive, leading to the ultimate goal of asserting the autobiographical narrative built at Beth El or ISC.

Continue the Tradition

The first category of messages to graduates involves adults' desire to continue the larger Islamic and Jewish traditions. This in itself is not surprising; adults send their children to religious schools because they see some value in that tradition. What is interesting here is that the tradition is conceived broadly, even in small faith communities who could potentially offer more unilateral advice. Near the beginning of the 2009 Beth El graduation, Rabbi Katz suggests that what is most important for students to continue is to "be Jewishly alive." He follows up with a plethora of suggestions for how to do so but underscores that the core of a Jewish life is to "continue the discussion." He offers an example of several interpretations of a Talmudic text, emphasizing that the several meanings really do not matter. What matters is "that we're having the discussion at all." Similarly, Sister Aisha, who had taught the eighth graders during their fifth grade year, tells students to become involved in the *masjid* (mosque) because of the opportunity for conversation that occurs there. Addressing both parents and students, Sister Aisha cautions that it is too easy to let the lines of communication between Muslim generations falter; as students with an Islamic education, the class of 2009 is responsible for keeping those lines open in an Islamic way. Both speeches place the graduates firmly into the context of the future tradition. The most important way to continue the tradition is through conversation. In this way, without

specifically validating student choices that do not directly correspond with school or tradition teachings, adults tell adolescents that the most important thing they can do is stay involved.

The tradition has things to offer the adolescent – but the relationship goes both ways.

At the 2010 graduations, the narratives take on a sense of urgency that borders on anxiety of losing the tradition. Sr. Amina opens the ISC ceremony by telling the eighth graders that she knows they are more than ready to leave now but will soon realize what they are missing. She goes on to say a little more about what in particular will be absent from their high school experience: “So when you leave ISC, we don't want to do, we don't just want you to excel academically, we know *inshallah* (God willing) you will, we have prepared you to face all the challenges out there. What we are worried about is, are you going to maintain your Islamic identity? That's the challenge for us.” In other words, the narrative presented here expresses more confidence in the staying power of the secular education provided at ISC than its Islamic counterpart. Even at a school with a dual curriculum and entirely Muslim student body and staff, Sr. Amina is concerned that they will not have done enough to create long-lasting, salient Muslim identities. What she wants them to focus on as they depart is how they will then be responsible for being in charge of creating their own Islamic environments, perhaps individual-sized versions of the one provided at ISC.

Concluding the 2010 Beth El graduation ceremony with a benediction, Rabbi Katz again greets the assembled families. He, too, expresses concern that the environment outside of the religious school puts the impetus to continue the greater tradition squarely on the shoulders of teenagers. After describing the manifold ways in which Beth El students are “continually surrounded by the influence of Torah,” Rabbi Katz cautions students that they

are “entering a world which will not be so easy.” A beloved pillar of the Jacksonville Jewish community, the rabbi ends the celebratory evening foreboding what could happen if students do not actively pursue a Jewish life: “You are leaving Beth El, and we can't rely on passive osmosis anymore. If we do nothing, our Jewish learning will stagnate and dissipate. But if we are proactive, if we take action, if we make our Torah learning and Jewish behavior a fixed practice, then our Jewish souls and our Jewish minds will continue to grow and flourish.” Whether or not it was his intention, Rabbi Katz’s narrative implies in the first phrase that what Beth El is doing is, in fact, “passive osmosis.” Continuing the tradition, in contrast, takes a more concerted effort.

In the case of both schools, graduates will enter environments that challenge students’ ability to maintain their religious identities. The schools believe they have given students the tools necessary but ultimately do not have full confidence that those tools will be employed.

Maintain the Cohort

Repeatedly, adults mentioned the importance of the friendships forged at Beth El and ISC. Even though several of the 2009 Jewish graduates would be going on to a Jewish high school, each of the speakers at Beth El spoke in some way about how the graduates onstage should turn to one another first. In his speech that year, Rabbi Friedman, affiliated with the local Reform congregation, noted how long he had known each individual graduate, emphasizing that their shared history made them the greatest class he had yet seen come through Beth El. Joanne agrees, noting, “And in fact, this group of students is incredibly blessed. As we watched a DVD last night chronicling your history together, I thought, how many groups of young adults are fortunate enough to have grown up together, experienced so

many important events together, argued, made up, sang . . .” The next year, given a graduating class with a rather more precarious reputation (it was, until sixth grade, made up of eleven boys and only one girl), Joanne extends the cohort: “Graduates, may the shared experience of your Beth El education stay with you always. When you reach high school and college, I hope you will stay strongly connected to your fellow Beth El alumni and other day school graduates you come across.” Here, rather than talking up a close-knit class that did not really exist or focusing instead on general Jewish connections, Joanne finds a happy medium. She enjoins students to recognize and maintain the special narrative they will be able to share only with those who have similar experiences to them. In this statement, she makes a distinction between those who have received a full-time religious education and those who have not. They have different kinds of Jewish identities.

Likewise, in 2009 Sister Amina highlights the fact that though many graduates are happy to finish school, they come back to ISC in groups to help out so often that she has to “shove them out the door!” Sister Nura, a teacher at the school who had taught many of the students in earlier years, follows up by cautioning graduates to “choose who your friends are wisely. Uh, it's, it's good to be friendly with everyone, but, you know, you have to be sure that you can trust the-your friend . . . you know, your friends from here, even if they're not in your school, you can always rely on them.” In 2010, Sister Ayah, the long time but departing administrative assistant, makes a more subtle reference to the importance of networks from ISC. Keeping her remarks quite brief, she says, “My advice to you, I gave to the eighth grade class last year, is that high school will make you or break you as a Muslim, so please make you sure that we can be proud of you.” Not unlike Joanne, Sister Ayah makes the reference point the school itself. While certainly other speakers referred to making choices

Allah would approve of, Sister Ayah suggests that students live Muslim lives according to the standards they learned at school. Their cohort, whether narrowly or broadly defined, determines Islamic standards.

Each speaker emphasizes the importance not only of the tradition as a whole, or even the school itself as a smaller community, but of the peer group formed in kindergarten and maintained, with additions and subtractions, through eighth grade. In this way, religious education again is not necessarily about doctrine but about giving students a place in a long-lasting network. Students are to include in their narrative the fact that they are part of a nested identity: class of 2009/2010, Beth El or ISC, Jewish or Islamic school graduate.

Prideful Representation

Finally, students are encouraged not only to maintain the tradition, within a select group of few, but to do so with pride. In a moving account of a 2009 ISC class trip to an amusement park, eighth grade homeroom teacher Sister Maryam expresses the satisfaction she felt when noticing that despite rude looks from a set of non-Muslim teens, her *hijab* and modest clothing wearing students neither reciprocated nor felt badly about the incident: “And I was, eh, I was standing in the front, so I didn't see my girls, you know, the girls’, um, face expression. So I was worried that they would be feeling uncomfortable. And I turned back, and they didn't care! So I said, *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God), we've done our job. They are proud, they don't care, they kept on walking, those looks didn't hurt them. And that's where we want them to be.”

Joanne echoes a similar sentiment when she outlines her suggestions for the 2009 Beth El graduates, including “Lesson number 1: Make sure to do what you love and love

what you do. *You* love being Jewish, so act on it” (emphasis hers). In 2010, again, speaking to a different kind of graduating class, she emphasizes the Israel experience that served to unite and enthuse a class that had undergone a difficult year. She bids them to “continue to love and support the state of Israel.” Even for students who may have made it clear over the years that they do *not* particularly love being Jewish, Joanne’s narrative offers them a prideful connection that they *can* conscientiously maintain. In these cases, adults demonstrate that while action (or lack thereof) is important, that action must be rooted in a love for what the tradition represents. It is not enough to wear *hijab*; one must wear it in spite of criticism from others. It is not enough to go on to Jewish high school; one must ground Jewish action not in obligation but in love.

In 2010, the guest speaker at ISC shed some light on what this pride actually connotes. She refers to the successes that Sister Amina had listed upon introducing her and attributes them to faith, confidence and pride. Immediately, she clarifies, saying, “Not the type of pride that you're warned against, not boastfulness or arrogance, but the type of pride that makes you proud to be a Muslim and proud to be who you are. And those are things that can help you make this transition, and it will be a wonderful experience for you, as it was for me.” This hearkens back to Sister Amina’s narrative about the school’s mission statement. There is a balance in pride just as there is a balance in particularity vs. universalism. In light of the intense scrutiny of Islam and Muslims, pride could be hard to come by, but the fact that an honored invited guest places it front and center of the narratives graduates should develop reinforces that the ‘correct’ amount of pride is well within their rights.

In conclusion, schools offer graduates countless exposure to belief and practice throughout their students’ academic careers. However, when push comes to shove, the

schools' final message is that students should independently, but with regard to what they have learned, develop religious narratives that express a desire to continue their faith tradition into the future, supported by their religious school peers, and based upon a sense of pride in being part of a religious tradition that has good things to offer the world. Schools, then, are less *creating* religious identities and more *activating* them, hearkening back to Ammerman's suggestion (2003). Recall that Ammerman says that narratives are activated by settings, actions, experiences, and references. The setting of religious schools, which teaches and models actions for students, provides them with meaning-laden experiences, and leaves them with references to how they should continue, hopes to activate religious narratives that will allow students to leave that particular setting and continue with their own activation. After graduation, schools know that they will no longer have influence on the more concrete building blocks of identity. They can no longer require prayer, correct religiously inappropriate dress, forbid food that does not meet religious standards, or create insular experiences that present an ideal-typical religious identity. In order to remain effective, then, religious middle schools must set another process in motion. The narrative process allows students to draw from their "imagination," as Yamane and Greeley suggest, to take over agency in developing their own religious identities. Official school narratives, then, can clue us in to how religious socialization works in transition and liminality. When examining the students' narratives in comparison, we can see what sparks that religious imagination, helping us to better understand what is most pertinent and meaningful to adolescents as they negotiate their own identities. However, the risk of leaving things open-ended is that students will presume that the ideas and behaviors that distinguish their religious tradition are not as important as merely professing the identity itself. In students'

own narratives, do they emphasize the particularities of their lived experience at school, obligations that make manifest the schools' mission statements, or do they focus more on identification and interaction processes? The results have implications for how we understand any purposeful attempt to pass on values and representations to the next generation.

Student Narratives: Diagrams

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 schoolyear, all middle school students at both schools received an assignment from their Jewish Studies or Islamic Studies teacher. Completed during class, this assignment asked students to create a diagram surrounding a phrase, written in English and Hebrew or Arabic: "Being Jewish/Muslim to me means" When hung on bulletin boards in the middle school hallways, these diagrams serve as narratives that both allow students to prioritize the salient elements of their religious identities and yet also potentially restrict the narratives to subjects students knew school officials would approve. The topics broached in these diagrams demonstrate what students believe is important to include in a narrative about being Muslim or Jewish in terms of their own opinions and the assumptions they make about what the school communities want for them. While Tables 1 and 2 show the raw frequencies of the words and pictures students included in their visual narratives, here I will discuss the most salient themes.

To Beth El students, "being Jewish" largely means being part of a community. Nearly every student provided some depiction of holidays, either as a category or as specific favorite holidays. Not surprisingly, the most common holiday mentioned was Hanukkah, indicative of the American positioning of the holiday as a Christmas alternative. Regardless

Table 1: Frequency of Items in Beth El Academy Student Narrative Diagrams

CATEGORY	ITEM	FREQUENCY
Holidays	General	19
	Hanukkah/latkes	11
	Passover/matzoh	2
	Purim, Tu B'Shevat, Yom Kippur	1x3 = 3
		Total = 35
Food	General	16
	Matzoh ball soup	4
	Falafel	3
	Brisket, kugel	2x2 = 4
	Grandma's food, gefilte fish, KY-style Jewish food, lamb chops, challah	1x5 = 5
		Total = 32
Community	Going to a Jewish school	10
	Having Jewish friends	8
	Family	4
	Togetherness/Jewish community	3
	Being a nation	1
	Teachers	1
Israel	Israel	12
	Israeli dancing	1
Hebrew	Hebrew	7
	Hebrew songs/music	3
	Hebrew rap	2
		Total = 12
Prayer	Going to synagogue/temple/services	10
	Praying	2
		Total = 12
Difference/uniqueness	Differences/being different/being a minority	9
	Being your own person	1
	Uniqueness	1
		Total = 11
Shared history/culture	Culture	3
	Remembrance	3
	Our past/history	3
	Tradition	2
		Total = 11
Misc. ritual (including clothing)	Wearing cool hats/Hasids/beards	4
	Following laws	2
	Making/wearing a tallit	2
	Kippah	2
		Total = 10
Bar/Bat Mitzvah	Bar/Bat Mitzvah	Total = 9
Values	Peace	2
	Not being mean, being helpful, not being racist, diversity, welcoming guests, tzedakah	1x6 = 6

		Total = 8
Shabbat	Shabbat	5
	Kiddush cup/wine	2
		Total = 7
Kashrut	Keeping kosher	3
	Not eating meat with blood in it	1
		Total = 4
Love being Jewish	I love being Jewish	Total = 4
Belief in God	God/belief in one God	Total = 4
Symbols	Life/Chai/L'chaim	2
	Jewish star	1
	Jewish silly bandz	1
		Total = 4
No category	Religious, stories, pictures, Jewish summer camp, having a slightly larger nose, sharing new things, expressing Judaism through art, facing many hardships	1x8 = 8

Table 2: Frequency of Items in Islamic School of Conway Narrative Diagrams

CATEGORY	ITEM	FREQUENCY
Five pillars of Islam	Shahada (belief in Allah)	16
	Prayer (including at masjid)	16
	Hajj/ka'aba/Mecca	15
	Zakat/charity	9
	Fasting	6
		Total = 62
Qur'an	Qur'an	Total = 19
Practices	Modesty/hijab	5
	Be like/follow the Prophet	3
	Follow the sunnah	2
	Celebrate Eid/Ramadan	2
	Follow the straight path	1
		Total = 13
Values/Ethics	United/unity	4
	Kindness	4
	Peace/no violence	3
	Diversity, respect, equality	2x3 = 6
	Loyalty, good people, education, determination, fairness, tranquil, make good choices, good friends, explaining what Islam is, helping the community, thinking of others' feelings, correcting the wrong	1x12 = 12
		Total = 29
Beliefs	Iman/faith	6
	Afterlife/heaven/hell	2
	Mercy	1
		Total = 9
Symbols	Star/crescent	Total = 2

of the specific commemoration or celebration mentioned, religious holidays, and Jewish holidays in particular, are communal affairs. This is especially true for Beth El students, as the school curriculum draws heavily from holidays from pre-school through eighth grade to teach everything from the alphabet to the Hebrew calendar to the founding of the state of Israel. It is also especially true for a student population that by and large has a low level of observance. Joanne says in an interview, "I would say that 85% are secular, if not more. Percentage of kids who light candles with their families on Friday nights, that's a very basic thing, I don't even think it's 10%, I would say maybe 5%." Again, this leads us back to the school's function as providing what the home does not. Holidays are salient for the middle schoolers possibly because they are celebrated at home, but more likely because they are celebrated at school. This is especially true of the holidays that are not as widely celebrated and do not have traditions of gift-giving – holidays that are still introduced, discussed, and commemorated at school.

Similarly, the next most frequent category of items mentioned or depicted is Jewish food. Again, some students mentioned the category more generally while others listed specific items. The latter is a mix between the traditional food of Ashkenazi Jews, originating in Eastern Europe and forming the majority of American Jews, and the Israeli and Middle Eastern fare that students eat at school on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day. Particularly interesting is one student's mention of "KY-style Jewish food," echoing claims of bricolage made in Marcie Cohen Ferris' *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (2005). Again, mention of food allows students to express a kind of Jewishness that is considered legitimate by religious and school authorities but which is also

accessible to families who do not adhere to stricter standards of Jewish eating. Note, then, that *kashrut*, Jewish dietary laws, comes in at a strikingly lower frequency than the foods associated with Jewish symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979). Food here is most likely an indicator of the particular Jewish communities that students identify with, whether those are ethnic, familial, both, or other. If not gastronationalism, wherein the processes surrounding food “demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment” (DeSoucey 2010), this could certainly be gastroregionalism.

After holidays and food, there is one remaining highly salient category before a natural break. This is the category of community itself. Coded to include any mention of Jewish social networks, the community category demonstrates a narrative resting on the foundation of ties in the formats most salient to young teenagers: school, friends, family, and a broadly defined religious community. For a full third of Beth El students, being Jewish means going to a Jewish school. The school becomes a fundamental characteristic of how students talk about being Jewish. However, a tangential category shows that an equal number of students do also recognize the place of the synagogue/temple, implying communal prayer. One student even goes so far as to include a caveat in her mention of this institution, writing “going to services . . . some of the time.”

After holidays, food, and community, the category frequencies drop quite a bit. As a single item, though, Israel has one of the higher frequencies at 12, not surprising given the school’s annual eighth grade Israel experience. Hebrew also ranks relatively high, especially when including the Hebrew music that is taught in music class and played during the procession of students to their seats at the graduation ceremony.

In more abstract categories, a surprising number of students included in their narratives some kind of concept of being unique or different. One went so far as to say being Jewish for him meant “being in a minority,” while others simply used the word “differences” or “being different.” The implication here is that the students see themselves as different from non-Jews; but, as one eighth grader listed “being your own person,” it is also possible that this narrative highlights the possibility of both inter and intra group difference. This awareness of the distinctive nature of Jewishness is also reflected in a category wherein students mention its longevity. Using the words “remembrance,” “history,” “our past,” “tradition,” and “culture,” students accentuate how much Beth El focuses on learning Jewish history, the context of Jewish schools of thought, and the prominence of the Holocaust in the contemporary Jewish experience.

In the ritual category, we see students include rituals that are both practiced daily at school and that are entirely out of the realm of Beth El student experiences. One student mentions making a *tallit*, the Jewish prayer shawl that one wears after his/her *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*; most Jews do not make the *tallit* themselves, instead purchasing or being given ornate versions on special occasions, but the Beth El sixth grade makes their own as an elective. Students are also required to wear the *tallit* at daily services, which makes it interesting that only two students total mentioned it in their narratives. Here is a preliminary indication that the practices the school considers important and relevant are not being interpreted that way by students. This is especially interesting in that Beth El makes a concerted effort to do just that in the *tallit*-making project. Students are allowed to choose their own fabric and are involved in the entire process of learning about and creating the various elements of the *tallit*. However, even after all this, students largely still do not

connect the ritual garment with their own identity. The *tallit* becomes just another Jewish thing you have to do at Jewish school, not something you would choose to do on your own.

In contrast, four mentioned the Hasidic, ultra-Orthodox beards and hats that simply do not exist either at Beth El or even in the Jacksonville community. So, for those students, being Jewish for them *can* be things with which they do not engage personally. Likewise, two students mention a *kippah*, commonly known in the United States by its Yiddish name, *yarmulke*, though all boys at the school are required to wear a *kippah* while praying, eating, or studying Jewish subjects. This works in the reverse of students' mention of Hasidism – here is a practice that half the students must engage in daily and yet not many students highlight in their own Jewish narratives.

While the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is certainly a Jewish ritual, its existence as one of the pre-eminent experiences of these students places it in its own category. Indeed, Joanne could not remember the last time a Beth El middle schooler had not had a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, and the dates of each of the students' rite of passage are noted on the central middle school calendar in the main hallway.

Shabbat is also a category in its own right, simply because it is not one particular ritual and for most students does not involve more than the short Friday afternoon service that gathers the entire school. Recall that Joanne estimates that only 5% of the student body lights candles on Friday evenings; this would be perhaps two middle schoolers. So, there is something beyond the ritual that leads students to include *Shabbat* in their narratives. When asked about how the school handles the lack of observance outside the school walls, Joanne explains that the school's policy is to as minimally normative as possible: "Instead of what you *should* do, it's here's what *Jews* do [emphasis hers]. And these are Jewish observances. .

. . You know, we don't say that everyone is, because everyone isn't, but you know, this is a worldwide Jewish observance.” Students narratives ultimately reflect this approach of a highlighted but not mandatory Jewish core. Four also express their love of being Jewish, suggesting that, at least for some, the curriculum is working on a ‘meta’ level if not at the level of specific ritual performance. We start to see, then, that requiring practices may be in effect working against the schools’ aims. Engaging with Jewish objects and rituals only to avoid negative repercussions of *not* doing so does not spark the religious imagination.

Finally, there is a smattering of other items with lower frequencies. Believing in God or simple mention of God occurs four times, as does mention of specific Jewish symbols. Students mentioned a variety of values and ethical orientations, including “being helpful,” “not being mean,” “not being racist,” diversity, “welcoming guests,” and *tzedakah* (the religious obligation to help those in need). Peace, though, is the only value mentioned twice.

Turning to more traditional narratives, with some sort of story arc, the letters that Beth El eighth graders wrote to their ISC counterparts tell us several things about their Jewish identities. As noted earlier, the students were given free reign to write about whatever they wanted, but in order to correspond to the framework that ISC had adopted in their previously written letters, it was suggested that Beth El students write a bit about themselves, why they attended Beth El, and what being Jewish meant to them. The themes of the letters show significant overlap with the themes presented in the visual narratives, namely being part of a distinct community with a rich history and enjoyable traditions. However, by directly including Beth El in the prompt, students also explained their perceptions of the purpose of a Jewish day school. They did so by highlighting academic excellence in a Jewish context, clearly reflecting a key component of the mission statement.

Unlike the diagrams, where students did not generally present the components of their Jewish identities in a progression or even by showing relationships between different components, the narratives in the letters highlight the intertwining nature of the religious, cultural, and secular education offered by Beth El. However, they also indicate that for most students, a Jewish day school is in its essence just school. Especially for students who have attended Beth El from pre-school through eighth grade, the meaning of their Beth El experience is inseparable from the meaning of their entire schooling experience.

Students who spoke of overlap between secular and Jewish education did so with the ubiquitous phrase, “good Jewish education.” Interestingly, students also brought up this phrase quite frequently when I spoke with them at the beginning of my field work in a way that mimics ISC students’ mention of the “Islamic environment.” These phrases become buzz words. So, Lauren says, “I go to Beth El because all of my siblings have gone here and my parents wanted me to get a good Jewish education.” Similarly, Miriam explains, “I chose to go to Beth El because I wanted a Jewish education. I went here for my whole life! I’m a little sick of it, but shhh” [implying ‘don’t tell anyone]. In both of these cases, students also note that they may not have much input in where they go to school. Lauren draws attention to the family that preceded her and her choice, while Miriam ironically uses the past tense indicating agency in the school choice that took place when she was a toddler.

In contrast, most other students separated the quality of the education from the Jewish experience. Naomi, who has also been a student at Beth El since pre-school, says, “I came to Beth El ten years ago (long time, right?) because of the good education and fun folks – my friends, I mean” [she then draws a smiley face]. Again, we notice an interesting ordering and verb tense use; while J focuses on the quality of the general education, for her, the meaning

of the choice is also wrapped up in her social network. Obviously, she did not have these lifelong friends upon entering the pre-school classroom twelve years prior. But she also cannot imagine her Beth El experience without them.

Leah, who began at Beth El only at the beginning of eighth grade, states more simply, “I came to Beth El because my parents thought it was a good school.” Leah’s comment is even more illuminating in context. Her family moved to Jacksonville specifically so that her mother could begin a job working in Jewish Life at the nearby Jewish high school, a career decision the mother later explained to me was in large part in an effort to help Leah attend that school the next year specifically for its Jewish content. Leah, then, consciously chooses not to mention the Jewish part of the “good school.” Emily echoes this sentiment, saying, “I go to Beth El because my parents wanted me to get a good education.” Matt also speaks more generally, explaining, “I go to Beth El because I enjoy what we learn and our learning environment.” While their narratives do not explore the meaning of “good education” in more depth, they do highlight the perception of students that academic excellence is at the core of the Beth El identity. The Jewish facet may be taken for granted or it may not be considered much at all. While it is also possible that they were considering their Muslim audience, their following profession of love for Judaism makes that less likely.

When speaking of what being Jewish means to them, students echo the sentiments of the visual narratives. Community, including several elements, is at the forefront of the meaning of the Jewish experience. To Jackson, “being Jewish means to be a community and help each other.” This community can be closer to home, like in Naomi’s statement, “Judaism is important to me because it means family, and I love my family.” Lauren bridges the two by saying, “Judaism is important to me because I love the traditions, and I want to

follow in my family's footsteps." Again, we also see that this community is one set apart from others. Leah puts it simply as "I like being Jewish because it is different." Matt concurs and expands a bit, explaining, "To me, being Jewish allows me to have an aspect of my life which is different from that of other people." Finally, there is also an assignation of this difference in culture being a positive one. Miriam says, "I like being Jewish because the culture interests me." Naomi, in the narrative that perhaps best encompasses all of these meanings, states enthusiastically, "Being Jewish is very important to me because all of my family is Jewish, and I love spending holidays with them! It is a very interesting culture!" Note that the students, while given the opportunity to write an endless amount, limit themselves to general statements. Their narratives are succinct and fairly nebulous, echoing the inclusivity of the official school narratives.

Overall, the narratives presented by Beth El middle schoolers demonstrate significant but not entire overlap with those offered by official school narratives. Certainly, there is little indication that students are considering or prioritizing being "future Jewish leaders" at this point. This is likely due to the lack of scope involved in daily middle school life. However, they do show that they are at least currently continuing the tradition with pride and connecting closely with their Jewish day school peers. Though there is nothing present that contradicts official school narratives, students also spend proportionately more time in their narratives talking about non-Jewish things. They are as descriptive, if not more so, of their hobbies, favorite colors, and excitement about meeting new friends as they are about their Jewishness. Although they know they are involved in this project as Jews, Jewishness is only one of many characteristics salient in their identities.

Turning to ISC student narratives, the first observation has to be the sizable decrease in the variety of items. ISC students have much more direct but constrained narratives. In their diagrams, their responses are more specific, concrete, and easily categorized. This is also true of the letters, though those narratives also overlap appreciably with the themes of Beth El letters as well as those of official school narratives from both environments. Based on my observations, this is most likely due to the variation in pedagogy between the schools. While Beth El, as noted in the mission, focuses more on critical thinking skills, ISC adheres to a more traditional educational model where students are to attain a more content-based, standardized set of knowledge. This is true for both religious and secular studies.

Though the single most frequent item represented in ISC students' visual narratives is the Qur'an – including that word on its own, pictures of the Qur'an, and phrases like “reading the Qur'an” – the category with the most responses is the five pillars of Islam. Those pillars are *shahada*, or profession of belief in one God and Muhammad as God's messenger; *salaat*, or the five daily prayers; *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca; *zakat*, or giving 2.5% of one's wealth to charity; and *sawm*, or fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. The first three are the most frequently mentioned, and indeed, each occurs at least as frequently, if not substantially more frequently, than any other response given other than Qur'an. The next category, practices, reflects those that are outside the five pillars. Both boys and girls mentioned modesty or wearing the *hijab* or drew pictures of stick figures wearing modest clothing or the *hijab* independently of a human figure. Though the prophet Muhammad is a direct part of the *shahada*, following him or being like him becomes a practice of its own, as does following the *sunnah*, translated generally as practice but also referring to the practices of Muhammad himself. *Eid*, which could refer to either of the major holidays of Islam, and

Ramadan, which concludes in one of those *Eids*, has relatively few specific mentions at two, and one student mentioned the more indefinite “follow the straight path.”

Students mentioned a wide variety of values and ethics, which I operationalize as the traits students believe Muslim communities should exhibit or more abstract ethical ways of living that are less directly related to statements of faith. Four students each mentioned kindness and unity as part of their understanding of what being Muslim means, three referred either to peace or “not using violence,” and two each wrote diversity, respect and equality. However, there is a much wider range of values only mentioned by one student, including loyalty, good people, education, determination, fairness, tranquil, make good choices, good friends, explaining what Islam is, helping the community, thinking of others’ feelings, and correcting the wrong. Here is where we see overlap in the tactic taken by Beth El students. When religious tenets are less specific, as they are in the pluralistic community at Beth El and as they are when speaking of values rather than doctrine, students’ narratives deviated more from one another. Finally, ISC students nine times mentioned these specific beliefs, including *iman* (faith), some attention to the afterlife, and *rahman* (mercy). Also, two students mentioned or drew the Islamic star and crescent – the latter being the ISC sports team mascot.

In their letters to Jewish students, ISC eighth graders echo Beth El students’ ambivalence in their expression of the intersection between Islamic and secular education. Most place the Islamic entity front and center, in reference not only to specific things they do at school but also the more general “Islamic environment” mentioned in the school’s mission statement. Asma, who, like Miriam at Beth El has only been at the school for less than a year, says, “I like going to ISC because we get to pray, read Qur’an, and keep God close to

heart at all times. Also to Muslims it is incredibly vital for us to be conscious of Allah at all times & in a Muslim environment it is a pretty easy task (ma'a sha Allah)" [praise be to God]. Taqiya agrees, noting that what she likes about her school "is that we can keep our religion close to us, since we are reminded of it everyday."

Other than these two, though, students generally combine the Islamic aspect with others. We see again the focus on community that Beth El students highlight. In fact, that communal aspect and the relationships with teachers and friends are often what override the negative sentiments many ISC students express. As Kayla explains, "I go to ISC because my mom made me. At first I didn't want to go here at first but I like my school. I've been in ISC for three years (since sixth grade). The stuff I like about this school is we're surrounded by Muslims and our teachers care about us." Sayid mimics this narrative. He says, "I go to ISC because my parents make me. I like it because friend and Islamic communatti." In a third example, Talal spells out the ambiguous meaning of ISC for him: "I go to ISC because my parents made me. It's not like I don't want to be here, but I've been in a private school for 8 years, so I'm happy next year I'm going to public school. What I like about ISC is that you get to see your friends and your around a Muslim community." In all three of these cases, the narratives reflect both the lack of power students have in making their own educational choices, being only middle schoolers, but also how the communal experience at ISC ends up making the experience a positive one. Most blatantly call attention to the Islamic quality and meaning attached to that community, but ultimately, the friendship networks are also 'just' about having peers who understand and share a common experience. Having attended ISC for "practically all [her] life," Farrah describes her experience as one whose meaning has shifted as she nears its completion: "I go to ISC because of my parents

mainly, but part of me I think belongs to this school. In my elementary years I always disliked ISC, begging my parents to take me out because of the homework, the rules, and many more things. But now all I can think of is how I am getting out of ISC this year and leaving my teachers and friends!” [frowning face]

In addition to speaking directly about their ISC experience, ISC eighth graders also reflect on the meaning of being Muslim. Again, many students refer to specific creeds and practices. The most precise list comes from Serene, who chooses to explain what being Muslim means to her in a normative and concrete way: “Islam is my religion, and I respect it I obey what we have to do in Islam. I pray 5 times a day every day Fajr (before sunrise), Zthur (noon), Asr (afternoon), Maghrib (sunset), and Isha (night). We also memorize Quran but we shouldnt forget them because its considered a sin. We believe in 6 pillars of faith. Allah, Books of Allah, Prophets, Angels, day of judgment, Iman (faith).” Taking a similar tack but being more brief, Janna says, “Being a Muslim to me means worshipping only one God (Allah) and the Muhammed is his messanger. We have one holy book and it is called the Holy Qura’an.” For these students, the question about what being Muslim means, in the context of introducing oneself to non-Muslims, means that one is also being asked to provide an introduction Islam itself.

For others, though, it is the opportunity to explain the *meaning* of Islam, including its benefits. Dana, who describes ISC as having a “friendly and homey environment,” draws a direct comparison between Islam and another religion. Notably, though, it is not the Judaism of her letter’s audience, but the majority tradition of her larger environment: “Being a Muslim is important to me because it has all the solutions to your life, unlike Christianity which hides the truth from you. To me, Islam makes the most sense from all the religions out

there. The Qur'an and the seerah provides a straight path for you to follow.” Kayla also hones in on the correctness of Islam, but instead of highlighting difference instead highlights sameness: “I like being Muslim because it’s the right religion for people. . . . Islam is the right religion as we say it is the right path. But I respect your guy’s religion too!” In these narratives, the meaning of Islam is more abstract than the daily habits students maintain. Their experience is one of having made a logical choice, choosing something that everyone should. However, their training under Sister Amina can be seen as they do not directly denigrate the tradition of those whom they are addressing.

Finally, the greatest overlap between the Beth El and ISC narratives emerges as ISC students express their pride in and love for Islam. Farrah, whom we previously saw talking about her change in perspective nearing graduation, describes the salience of Islam in her life: “Being Muslim is very important to me too, I love praying (as long as I’m not watching T.V. or playing on the computer). I love fasting too. I always feel guilty when I take to long to pray. I love Allah.” Here we see the intersection between Islam and secular life. Farrah offers an opportunity for Jewish students to connect by highlighting the normal secular American life that can compete with religious practice. But ultimately, her narrative expresses exactly the love and pride that the school encourages. Janna echoes this sentiment by doodling “I’m a Muslim and I’m proud” with a smiley face and heart by her signature. Though some treat their connection to Islam as a given, saying things like “I’m Muslim because thats the religion I grow up with and all my family is muslim” (Ahmed) or “Being a Muslim is important to me because you need a religion to follow” (Talal), most speak of Islam in more explicitly favorable terms.

In sum, what we see in ISC narratives towards insiders is a direct, focused, particular assessment of the doctrines and practices that students are taught at school and, likely, at home. When those narratives are directed toward outsiders, they lose some but not all of their specificity. What is interesting here is that student narratives are visibly *more* specific in terms of substance and content than those provided by school officials. Though the practices and beliefs they mention are moderate and mainstream in the scope of Islam, students present them in greater detail than is presented by the mission statement, the principal's interpretation of the mission statement, or graduation speeches. ISC students do not present as much "poetry" in their narratives as they do concrete facets of Muslim identity with which most Muslims would be hard-pressed to disagree. However, like Beth El students, students at ISC also reflect components of their identities that are not related to Islam, grumble a bit about parts of the school they do not like, and reflect an excitement to broaden their horizons. Overall, ISC students create autobiographical narratives that give every implication that they will continue the Islamic tradition with pride and with the support of the peer networks they created during their time at Islamic school.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the narratives that students at Islamic and Jewish middle schools create as they begin to prepare to leave those schools. Whether in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, students who have been at these schools for their entire academic careers know that high school is fast approaching. As opposed to studies that quantitatively measure outcomes of religious education by analyzing the beliefs and practices that alumni profess later in their lives, this paper instead turns to the narratives students prepare to present to their future non-Jewish/non-Muslim classmates and teachers. Smith suggests that narratives "seek to convey

the significance and meaning of events by situating their interaction with or influence on other events and actions in a single, interrelated account” (2003:65). These accounts serve to indicate how Jewish and Muslim day school graduates will integrate what they have learned at school with their own personal leanings in order to explain to others what their religious identity means to them. Recall that Ammerman describes religious narratives as useful in illuminating individuals’ responses to settings, actions, experiences, and references (2003:216). What better way, then, is there to understand the power of religious schools (at least into the relatively immediate future of high school than first examining how students see those four elements playing out in their own descriptions of what it means to be Muslim or Jewish?

We have seen how one pluralistic Jewish school desires to produce “future Jewish leaders” by providing as rich a Jewish experience as possible at school for students who may not have the equivalent at home. The school does so by framing students lived experiences at school as “what Jews do” rather than what Jews *should* do. When given the opportunity to tell graduates what they most hope for them, adults in the school community say that their highest priorities are for students to continue the Jewish tradition in a prideful, positive way and to maintain the social networks established at school. Students reflect on the meaning of their own Jewishness in the context of school by focusing primarily on holidays, food, and community as what being Jewish means to them. In a mainstream survey of American religious life, questions then about belief in God, service attendance, reading religious texts, and the like would only capture a partial picture of a highly salient Jewish identity. In letters to Muslim day school students, Jewish day school students’ narratives imply that what is more important to them than their Jewishness plays out in terms of difference, culture,

community, and a tradition of academic excellence. While this is not directly and neatly aligned with being a “future Jewish leader,” it does suggest that the narratives given at graduation are indeed reflected in those of students.

We have also seen how an Islamic school that orients itself as following the precepts of the Qur’an and *sunnah* in order to develop Muslim identities and moral codes broadens its narrative to also indicate that these values are essentially universal. This school wants students to develop relatively particularistic religious identities but within the context of universal values and assumptions. At the culminating experience of middle school students, the graduation ceremony, adults in the community hammer home the same themes as at the Jewish school in an Islamic way: continue to be proud Muslims, surrounded by the community you have built here. When students go to create their own visual narratives, they do so in a basic but specific Islamic framework, representing the five pillars of Islam, familiarity with Qur’an, and adherence to an assortment of other Islamic beliefs and practices. However, students also include in their narratives more general and universal values, like the ones the principal mentioned as be present in “all religions” – things like treating one another with respect. This is echoed in students’ letters to Jewish day school students, wherein Muslim eighth graders craft narratives that reflect the balancing act that they engage in when agreeing with some but not all school policies. Not unlike the way in which they negotiate their frustration with seemingly opposing circumstances like overly strict rules but caring teachers, they also express love for and pride in the Islamic tradition while going out of their way to also state that they respect others.

Jewish and Islamic day schools have as their mission the nurturing of future Jewish and Islamic adults. This is not surprising. What this paper contributes instead is an idea of

how the framing of educators' goals for students play out in the meanings of Muslim and Jewish identities to the young adolescents who are faced with leaving their insular religious communities. The outcomes of "strong Muslim identity" and "future Jewish leader" are ambiguous and leave much room for interpretation. By considering how they will present their religious identity to both insiders and outsiders, students develop narratives that reflect the meaning of their experience as day school students. As I show elsewhere in this project, the narratives exhibit the intertwined nature of religion and ethnicity. The strongest narratives will be the ones in which students feel they take the most ownership. That is, we see reflected in the narratives that there are some components of official narratives that do not show up in student versions, and vice versa. This is likely due to how relevant teachers and administrators are able to make certain practices and beliefs, which is then largely connected to what students' families do at home. No matter how "rich" the tradition is made to seem at school, middle schoolers are not likely to cook their own Shabbat dinners or put their families on a prayer schedule. Because schools know they have little control over what goes on at home, the best contribution they can make to students' religious lives is a manner of speaking about the tradition and one's place in it. If students are able to do that in the face of the non-Jewish, non-Islamic environments that they encounter after leaving middle school, they may be less likely to abandon or compromise their religious identities.

One of the implications of comparing official and student narratives for the sociology of religion is methodological. Traditional religious education outcome measures gauge how often students perform certain practices, to what degree they adhere to certain doctrines, and even salience of identity. What can not be assessed in survey data is the degree to which individual schools might be just as pleased with other outcomes. In other words, survey data

tend to assess the efficacy of religious schools by sociological categories that might be as relevant to the schools themselves. Especially in minority religious traditions, where schools are actively preparing students to be comfortable explaining their religious identity to someone at best unfamiliar with and at worst prejudiced toward that tradition, the goals of schools may be implicitly tiered such that someone who practices to a lesser degree but professes a more salient identity could be considered a successful product of religious education. In other words, religious narratives, collected using qualitative methodologies, allow us to conceive of religious identity as more intersectional than linear. Students at religious schools may not appear from survey data to be any “more religious” than students who do not attend religious schools; focus groups and interviews confirm that students do not conceive of their Muslim and Jewish friends who attend other schools to be “less religious.” But religious day school students may be better able to conceptualize, talk about, and frame their religious identity than those who are not asked to do so as part of their daily, lived experience at school. This is reflected here in the differences between narratives to be presented at the schools versus those to be presented to others. Even though the questions posed to them were similar, students demonstrated a clear understanding of context, knowing that the way one describes oneself to insiders is different from how one tells someone else about one’s identity. This problematizes survey instruments that by their nature can only be administered by one anonymous person.

Moving forward, then, the analysis of religious narratives contributes a sense of not only how identities are imagined but how they are imagined in different contexts. One school’s “strong Muslim identity” may look to another school to be relatively weak. One school’s “future Jewish leader” could be another’s current secular Jew. In the context of the

American South, where apprehension about assimilation must be balanced with that about religious discrimination, the ability to speak about being Jewish or Muslim in a variety of contexts could be as valuable an outcome as any other. So, more broadly, narratives can help us to understand the intricacies of how individuals present themselves in given social contexts. Future work should build on this premise in other settings to examine what about a certain setting leads someone to shift the focus of his/her narrative. The Beth El student who identified “KY-style Jewish food may actually have to shift her identity further in a Jewish community in New York city than she might were she to encounter a Muslim eating hummus on cornbread in Jacksonville. Thus, the core contribution of this paper is an illumination of how socialization processes are particular to context.

CHAPTER FOUR: EDUCATING FOR AND AGAINST DIFFERENCE: PARENTAL GOALS, ASSESSMENTS, AND PROJECTIONS IN SOUTHERN JEWISH AND ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

No longer a vestige of traditionally diverse areas such as New York City, American Jewish and American Muslim communities are growing across the nation, in places as surprising as the overwhelmingly Christian American South (Evans 2005). As a result, religious groups find themselves in new and varied settings, with the challenges and benefits those places bring. One infamous challenge facing Islamic and Jewish populations is how to negotiate identity in the contexts of both ethnically connected minority religious traditions and the majority white, Christian population (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Warner and Wittner 1998). Many approach the maintenance of their religious traditions by assuring that their children, their faith's future, have every possible tool at their disposal to meet the challenges of being Jewish or Muslim in America. Religious day schools offer a community of such adherents. Regardless of how central religion is in each family's decision to reject public or other private schools, the schools' guiding principles are based on religious ideologies different from those of Christian America. Required religion classes and an overarching Jewish or Islamic framework provide an intensive setting for identity formation.

However, these schools also operate differently from their counterparts in areas where, though still minorities, Muslims and Jews have more significant populations. Life as a Muslim in Dearborn, Michigan or as a Jew in Brooklyn, New York allows for development of multiple sub-communities (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007; Karim 2008; Pomson and Schnoor

2008; Sarna 2004). While these communities are by no means completely uniform, there is some element of choice in how parents can direct their children's religious, ethnic, and cultural identity development. It is possible, for example, for one to attend a religious school where the population is uniform in terms of level or variety of observance, ethnic or national background, and so forth – and if the school down the road does not provide the environment parents identify with, they can always go down another road (Joseph and Riedel 2008; Pomson and Schnoor 2008). However, Jewish and Islamic communities in the American South, with perhaps the exception of those in Atlanta (Evans 2005; Karim 2008), have to provide for more diverse communities even within a smaller population. People in these communities deal with both difference from the mainstream and difference within the community.

While recent work on multiracial and multiethnic congregations has much to say about how religious organizations can and should negotiate internal difference to reflect the interests of their members (Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Edwards 2008; Emerson 2006), these studies examine Christian congregations in an effort to make the analytical complexities involved more manageable and effective for application to American religion at large (Christerson, Emerson, and Edwards 2005). However, as Marti notes, “*we should focus more attention on non-Christian congregations*” (emphasis his), in order to “uncover additional structures that alternately enable and constrain processes of diversification” (2010:228). Said another way, basing our understanding of how religious organizations deal with difference on a sample that enjoys majority status in the realm of religion provides only one side of the story. Following Marti's directive by investigating non-Christian religious schools, we must incorporate religious discrimination with racial/ethnic discrimination to

truly understand why families opt out of the seminal American socialization instrument that is the public school. Such a process has implications beyond religious schools to the choices American Jews and Muslims will make later in their lives with respect to engagement with other secular American institutions.

Adding another layer to this concatenation of pluralism is what parents think their children will realistically encounter after attending a religious day school. When day school graduates attend high schools that are public or private but non-sectarian, they leave the cocoon of their Islamic or Jewish environment and are thrust full-time into life as a minority. Even when these students are able to attend a religious high school of their tradition, there are only at best several Jewish options and no Islamic choices for post-secondary institutions. Regardless, then, of the shelter that religious middle schools provide; the values, beliefs, and behaviors they teach; and the intra-group diversity they manage, their graduates will ultimately not live in an environment like the one created at school. The schools must teach students how to be minorities while those same students live most of their daily lives in an environment where they are not so. This is highlighted by the precarious balance school communities face in teaching prideful identity while also teaching respect for the other traditions students will soon encounter. That balance corresponds with the crux of the argument about whether or not children should attend religious schools. The fear is that those who do will abandon the majority identity that is supposed to unite all Americans. Parents' decisions, then, must be understood in the context of this debate, one "about American national character and the place of strong sub-national identities within it" (Jones 2007:164).

This paper discusses religious education in minority traditions through the lens of parents' negotiation of difference. Drawing from face-to-face, open-ended interviews, I demonstrate how parents conceive of their decision to send their children to Jewish and Islamic middle schools in terms of both experienced and anticipated difference. Parents do speak of the expected reasons for sending children to these particular schools: to learn the practices, beliefs, and values of their religious traditions, not to mention to avoid perceived dangers and inferior academics of local public schools. Ultimately, though, their discussion of initial decisions, continued enrollment, and final evaluation of the schools also rests on an understanding of minority status.

Focusing on parental accounts helps us to avoid the "religious congruence fallacy," in which researchers assume that "religious ideas hang together, that religious beliefs and actions hang together, or that religious beliefs and values indicate stable and chronically accessible dispositions in people" (Chaves 2010:2). At the surface, it may seem perfectly congruent that parents' religious beliefs lead to their action of sending children to religious school. This is not what I am contesting. The issue at hand is what other factors are also at play that might influence the socialization processes of students at religious schools. In other words, in order to understand religious schools as cases of social processes larger than just religious education, we must also follow Chaves' call to look at "decision-making situations," which he suggests "activate religious schema in people" (2010:12). This paper contributes to the sociology of religion by demonstrating how evolving notions of difference in parents' decisions to enroll their children in Jewish and Islamic day schools activates a schema in which adolescents can maintain both particularistic and universal religious identities.

BACKGROUND

American Judaism, American Islam

Muslims and Jews have been a continuous part of the American religious landscape since before the founding of the United States. Official tallies of the two populations are hard to come by due to the lack of religious identity on the United States census, but rough estimates put the American Muslim population at 1.4 million (0.6%) and the American Jewish population at 6.4 million (2.2%) ("Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream" 2007; Sheskin and Dashefsky 2006). Both American Judaism and American Islam serve as examples of religion in diaspora, and even when disregarding the immigrant status of many of the traditions' members, the traditions highlight the challenges and benefits of existence in the religiously plural United States (Warner 1998).

Scholars of Islam invariably note that there is no one "Islam" (Ernst 2003). Instead, there are many iterations of Islam, especially in the United States as global traditions combine in new and unique ways (Esposito 2007; Haddad 2004). Scholars generally assess Muslims in America across two categories: nation/region of origin and Muslim tradition ("Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream" 2007; Smith 1999). Again, measurement difficulties abound. The recent Pew Research Center report purports to be the "first ever nationwide survey to attempt to measure rigorously the demographics, attitudes, and experiences of Muslim Americans" ("Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream" 2007), calling attention to the pressing need for attention to this growing group. The report highlights the proportions of Muslims by several factors; important to note here is that 65% are first-generation immigrants, breaking down into 24% of total American Muslims from the Arab region, 8% from Pakistan, 10% from other South Asia, 8% from

Iran, 5% from Europe, 4% from other Africa, and 7% other. The remaining 35% are native-born, including 20% African American and 15% other. When measuring Islamic affiliation, the report indicates that 50% of American Muslims identify with the Sunni tradition, 22% as “just Muslim,” 16% as Shia, and 5% with another Muslim tradition (7% did not respond). Though accounts vary, the United States cities with the most significant Muslim populations are cited as Chicago; Dearborn, MI; Los Angeles; and New York (Barrett 2007; Karim 2008).

While the percentage of Muslims in the United States is growing, the Jewish equivalent has been steadily declining since World War II (Sarna 2004). The meanings behind this decline are highly contested; is Judaism ‘dying out’ (Bershtel and Graubard 1992; Goldscheider 1986)? Is it experiencing a ‘cultural turn’ or a ‘revitalization’ (Cohen 1988; Goldscheider 1986; Silberman 1985)? Regardless, the conversations surrounding the American Jewish experience differ from their Muslim counterparts in that their main focus is not measurement of population growth but explanation of demographic decline. Nonetheless, the American Jewish population remains sizeable and diverse. Indeed, though the major waves of Jewish emigration to the United States took place in the 1890s and 1920s, current estimates note that 8% of the adult Jewish population has immigrated since 1980 (Ament 2004). Two-thirds of the total immigrants emigrated from the republics formerly part of the Soviet Union, with 10% from Israel/Palestine, 4% from Canada, 4% from Iran, 2% from Great Britain, 2% from South Africa, and 11% from other countries (Ament 2004). Of adult Jews, 35% identify as Reform, 27% as Conservative, 26% as “just Jewish,” 10% as Orthodox, and 2% as Reconstructionist (Ament 2005). The two largest concentrations of American Jews are in the New York metropolitan area and South Florida (Sheskin 2004).

What these demographics show is a great deal of internal diversity even while American Jews and Muslims exist as significant minorities in the general United States population. Even before examining religious schools themselves, we see that American Islamic and Jewish communities are composed of minorities but also minorities-within-minorities. So, religious schools outside of areas with available enclaves like Dearborn, Los Angeles, New York, and South Florida will necessarily have to provide both an exclusive and an inclusive environment.

America's Islamic and Jewish Day Schools

Due to factors including the normative nature of much research on religious education, the potential conflict of interest inherent in studies from one religious tradition evaluating that tradition and others, and lack of a statistically significant number of religious day school attendees in nationally representative surveys, we do not yet know much about outcomes stemming from attendance of religious day schools. Additionally, studies of religious education, much like work on American religion as a singular phenomenon, may conflate the differences between schools from different religious traditions in an effort to draw conclusions (Uecker 2009). However, work from sociologists of American Judaism and American Islam on religious schools in those traditions can give us a general sense of what goes on in Jewish and Islamic day schools.

Following from the difficulties cited above in measuring Islamic demographics in the United States, there is no one complete data source for Islamic day schools. A multi-step process begun by the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA) in 1998, the first time a list was ever compiled, has been maintained to include 235 schools (Keyworth 2009). However, of these, only 32 belong to the ISLA proper; others operate either within other small

organizations or independently. The Muslim American Society also maintains an organization for overseeing and supporting Islamic schools, the Muslim American Society Council of Islamic Schools (MASCIS). Both organizations are young and just beginning to see results of much of their work. Given that 20 years ago there were only 49 documented Islamic schools, their history has really only just begun (Keyworth 2009).

In contrast to the miniscule number of Islamic schools affiliated with the Nation of Islam (Haddad and Smith 2009; Rashid and Muhammad 1992), the schools begun in Muslim immigrant communities have experienced tremendous growth in the late 20th and early 21st century, likely due to the growth in immigration from Muslim countries itself (Haddad and Smith 2009). All of these schools fall under the heading “*madrasa*,” which means simply “place for studying” (Haddad and Smith 2009:7; Hefner 2007). Though Western media images of *madrasas* may conjure images of foreign terrorist cells, these schools vary across all categories as much as any other grouping of schools, religious or otherwise (Bergen and Pandey 2005; Hefner 2007). Given this variation, one profile of the “typical” Islamic day school contains the following facets: “Average size for a parochial school – 100 students or fewer. Young – six years or younger. Growing. Professionally oriented. Independently governed” (Keyworth 2009:33). This profile might very well be quite different in ten years, depending on growth patterns and the success of organizations such as ISLA and MASCIS.

Though there is no one consensus of the primary goal(s) of Islamic education, the most consistent commonality is to include Islamic principles excluded from public and other private schools. This inclusion ranges from schools whose primary focus is such Islamic educational staples as Qu’ran memorization and performance of the five pillars to those who want strongly Western-style schools that apportion the school day into secular and sacred

times (Alavi 2008; Hefner and Zaman 2007; Hermansen and Mir 2006; Zine 2008). Islamic education also follows a tradition of following the prophet Muhammad by seeking knowledge, consisting of the prophet's life and teachings but also secular fields such as mathematics and the sciences (Talbani 1996), and promotes the development of an "Islamic ethos" rather than a more narrowly defined religious identity. Thus, these schools recognize the differences between their students and those attending *madradas* in Islamic nations, and they draw from Western techniques to emphasize Islamic ideologies. They recognize the wide range of students available to them in the United States and want to unite those individuals, often hailing from politically opposing ethnic groups (Merry 2007). An important goal in this setting is "character development"; schools aim to "protect children from stereotyping and taunting; offer Islamic alternatives to such social ills as premarital sex, drugs, and violence; and allow children to avoid public school curricula that may in some way be prejudiced against Islam" (Haddad and Smith 2009:5). Islamic identity is still at the forefront, but it is defined not as much by a set of rituals and beliefs as a specific idea of what it is to be a good and moral person. Schools that take this approach hope to "deculturalize" Islam, providing a "common Islam" to students from a multitude of backgrounds (Joseph and Riedel 2008).

Not surprisingly, we know very little about religious or other outcomes for students from either or both kinds of Islamic schools. Due to lack of funding, longitudinal data, and centralized organizations offering accreditation and other services, researchers have only been able to rely on information from individual schools and small-scale studies. One concern, though from the British context and articulated by the British chief inspector of schools, is that Islamic education, in achieving its goals, produces young adults who are less

than capable at living productive lives in Western society/ies (Mandaville 2007). However, this is a concern that, while perhaps held by outsiders, does not seem to be echoed by Muslims themselves. While families who enroll their children in Islamic schools are rejecting the public school system, most often it seems that they do so out of a desire to protect children rather than isolate them. In her study of Canadian Islamic schools, Jasmin Zine finds four themes of Islamic education outcomes: “They provide a socially and spiritually based alternative to secular public schools. They ‘protect’ students from negative influences . . . They rehabilitate and resocialize ‘wayward’ students . . . They contribute to the social reproduction of Islamic identity and lifestyle” (2008:95). Note here that Zine’s themes only vaguely touch on religious ideologies; her outcomes do not name, for example, strong professions of faith or strict adherence to the *salat* schedule. Similarly, data from graduates of Islamic schools report stronger Muslim identities as a result of their time spent there; “for these students, this translates into a stronger sense of self and a surer set of beliefs when it becomes necessary to confront non-Islamic customs and values” (Merry 2007:61). Here we see a glimmer of this identity based on difference. Muslim identity becomes at least partially defined by interactions with non-Muslims, whether for better (opportunities to educate others and potentially even lead them to Islam) or for worse (when dealing with Islamophobia).

Jewish day schools, like *madrasas*, have their origins in the intensive settings of religious communities. Beginning in the middle ages, Jewish boys and young men attended religious schools as part of a long-standing tradition of religious scholarship. These schools, called *yeshivas*, taught students proficiency in biblical Hebrew and religious texts including the Torah and Talmud (Heilman 2006; Helmreich 2000). Orthodox Jews continued this

tradition upon immigration to the United States, integrating secular studies into an already full religious curriculum as early as the early 20th century; 50 years later, non-Orthodox Jewish day schools followed (Pomson and Schnoor 2008). Thanks to explosion in both Orthodox *yeshivas* and non-Orthodox day schools, the number of Jewish day schools currently operating in the United States is around 760 with approximately 205,000 students enrolled (Pomson and Schnoor 2008; Schick 2005).

Jewish day schools in the United States represent a limitless range of theologies, observation levels, communities, and so on. Schools can choose to affiliate with one of several denominational or transdenominational organizations, including the Solomon Schechter schools of the Conservative movement; Torah Umesorah, which brings together Orthodox schools; and RAVSAK, the Jewish Community Day School Network, which supports unaffiliated pluralistic Jewish day schools. Likely due to the diversity of perspectives offered by over 750 different institutions, the goals of Jewish education are not only numerous but also often contradictory. What some schools put forward as ideal others decry as heresy. Indeed, the main source of division within Jewish schools exists between the more “isolationist” Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox schools, which comprise about 95% of all Jewish day schools, and the 5% that remain, which promote “integrationism” (Pomson 2009). The latter group, which exist more commonly outside of Orthodox communities, puts forth goals that include education of the entire community, proficiency in Hebrew (both modern and biblical), intimate knowledge and love for Israel, ability to perform rituals both in the synagogue and in the home, and achievement of academic excellence (Aron, Zeldin, and Lee 2005; Chertok, Phillips, and Saxe 2008; Levisohn 2009; Pomson 2009; Reimer 1997; Sales and Saxe 2004; Schiff 1999). If there is a consensus about the goal of Jewish

education, it is that Jewish schools exist to continue an established tradition of learning and scholarship while attempting to replenish the Jewish population for generations to come. The high emphasis placed on Jewish education by institutions conducting studies on American Judaism means that we know more about various outcomes for these students than for students of Islamic schools. Overall, attending a Jewish day school generally leads to a greater connection with the Jewish tradition as well as increased scores on measurements such as ritual performance, synagogue attendance, Jewish marriage, and salience of Jewish identity (Chertok et al. 2007; Cohen 1995; Schiff and Schneider 1994; Wertheimer 1999).

At its most basic level, what this literature suggests is that Islamic and Jewish day schools establish goals based on religious and cultural tenets in combination with some kind of rejection of the ‘outside world.’ These schools exist to combat assimilationism, even after many of their student bodies cease to be comprised of immigrants. They also exist as alternatives to the “racial and religious frustration” with the status quo in public schools that require drastic measures to relieve within the public school system itself (Binder 2002) and as agents of religious socialization, or “an interactive process through which social agents influence individuals’ religious beliefs and understandings” (Sherkat 2003). Part of the socialization process is influencing the formation of religious preferences (“favored explanations of the supernatural”) that then go on to lead to religious choices (such as devotion, participation, and affiliation) (Sherkat 2003). However, the socialization process at religious schools need not always highlight the supernatural. In fact, educating towards identity itself may also have a strong impact on religious choices; we know that educating towards other identities certainly does affect other choices. The literature currently frames the development of particular identities in education as a negative relationship in which

minority identity (usually racial) corresponds with lower achievement (Coleman et al 1966; Foley 2001). In order to explain how racial minorities *are* able to succeed academically, Prudence Carter suggests that the most successful minority students are those who do *not* play up membership in one group or another, instead acting as “cultural straddlers” who pull from several cultural repertoires (2006). The behaviors that work for these students of color are ones that emphasize their ability to function within multiple sets of boundaries, even if those boundaries do not intersect.

So, the central question in identity and education asks how schools encourage and create identities in ways that have implications for educational outcomes. When speaking about the problem of particular cultural, racial, and religious identities more broadly in public schools, Minow, Shweder, and Markus call this the “equality-difference paradox,” manifesting itself in “competing tugs variously named *uniformity versus difference*, *individual opportunity versus group rights*, *inclusion versus multiculturalism*, *assimilation versus factions*, *commonality versus distinctiveness*, and *equality versus difference* (2008:6). This paradox captures the central debate surrounding outcomes of religious schools: do they produce citizens who will be unable to cope in mainstream American life, or do they epitomize the values of a free, democratic society (Jones 2008)? Studies of Christian schools indicate that this debate is also present within school communities themselves, as various Christian orientations lead to different understandings of the ideal relationship between the public and private spheres (Sikkink 1999; Wagner 1990). However, what neither studies of public schools nor those of Christian schools can capture is the nuance of difference that is established from the external creation of boundaries. That is, what if the difference is not only maintained by community members themselves but is also imposed upon them by the

mainstream? While historically, Catholic schools existed to mitigate this problem, their ascendance into the mainstream means that even non-Catholics attend them in large numbers when they feel they offer a higher standard of academic achievement and discipline (Bauch and Goldring 1995). Generally, this is understood to occur in ethnic and racial identities, which can be conceived alternately as “culturally derived differences” as opposed to “imposed status differences” (Markus 2008:65). The distinction lies in what is derived from and claimed by a group versus what is derived from “evaluations and actions of those outside the group” and not claimed by the group itself (Markus 2008:65). What minority religious schools aim to do is to legitimize the former while minimizing the effects of the latter. So, their approach to equality and difference, more specifically to maintaining equality while upholding difference, has a different tenor than those of multicultural public schools and Christian schools.

Addressing this gap in the literature, I turn to Cornel West’s “cultural politics of difference,” wherein he suggests that people of color who support that paradigm act as a “Critical Organic Catalyst,” or “a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints, and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling subcultures of criticism” (1990:108). When applied to identity more broadly than race, “the cultural politics of difference recognises both the interdependent and relational nature of identities, their elements of incommensurability and their political right of autonomy” (Rutherford 1999:10). Applied to Islamic and Jewish schools, producers of cultural identity insofar as that category includes religious identity, the cultural politics of difference allows parents to both acknowledge the marginalization they see their children experiencing in what they often call “the real world” while still hoping that

their children will be able to engage the mainstream. This paper seeks to address how parents engage a philosophy similar to West's "cultural politics of difference" and Carter's "cultural straddlers" in order to assess the place of difference in decisions about minority religious schools. Ultimately, I will show that it is this complex negotiation of difference and sameness that characterizes parents' "decision-making situations" regarding sending their children to Jewish and Islamic day schools, keeping them there, and conceptualizing what will happen when they leave.

METHODS AND DATA

The data for this paper come from a larger project involving multiple qualitative methods employed at one Islamic and one Jewish school in a mid-size southeastern metropolitan area ("River Bend"); names and other identifying details have been changed in order to protect the identity of my subjects. The comparison of Jewish and Islamic schools serves the purpose of investigating a broader experience of religious minorities. Though the traditions diverge in terms of theology and practice, their proportionately small numbers mean that they potentially share a minority status. Thus, we can draw broader conclusions than if the data were only from one tradition. Also, the comparison opens the door for the possibility that there is a distinct type of difference experienced by Jews and Muslims, which could lead to the activation of alternate religious schemas (Chaves 2010). By comparing directly, similarities that do emerge again reinforce the notion that religious minorities experience the socialization processes of religious education in a unique way.

The first part of data collection took place as participant observation conducted in every facet of school life over two full school years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010). Being immersed in the school day let me conduct informal interviews with teachers frequently,

asking questions as they arose. During Fall 2010, I taught an eighth grade seminar at each school on shared Muslim-Jewish values, culminating in a workshop where the students from both schools met one another and completed service projects related to the shared values they had learned.

Beginning in May 2010 and concluding in January 2011, I also conducted interviews with parents of current middle students and alumni. Thanks to collaboration on another project, four of the interviews at the Islamic school in my study were conducted by Dr. Serena Hussain of the University of Oxford. Table 1 summarizes family characteristics of the eight Islamic and ten Jewish families interviewed. Most parent interviews were with one parent, though at two, both parents were present. I recruited interview participants with a letter distributed by the principals of each school describing the study and offering a \$25 incentive. I used snowball sampling after being contacted by families directly in order to reach saturation across multiple categories: length of time at the school, primary reason for sending kids to the school, immigrant status and region of origin, ethnicity, religiosity, and overall level of satisfaction with the school.

Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to two and a half hours and were recorded digitally. I prepared verbatim transcripts and supplemented with field notes. In most cases, interviews were conducted in private rooms at the schools, though some families preferred to host me in their homes. I used the same interview guide at each school. While it was very loosely crafted, designed to draw out respondents' own representations about what was important to them, the interviews asked families to describe the process of choosing the schools, what was most and least important to them that their children learned there, what they were more and less satisfied with, what religious and cultural things they did outside of

school, and how they were planning on negotiating the high school decision and transition away from middle school. These data form the backbone of this paper.

School Community Descriptions

In order to select my research sites, I looked for schools comparable on as many axes as possible beyond their doctrinal differences. Each school is in a draw area with above average public schools, has a small student body, and, most importantly in this case, is in a similar geographic area. Data were collected based on the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowing my research questions to emerge from categories of data collected early on.

River Bend is a metropolitan area of approximately 1.5 million people residing in several counties. While there is a great deal of diversity in River Bend, the towns and cities within the larger area have distinct reputations in terms of race/ethnic and class compositions. Currently, the area with the most growth is the city of Conway, whose public schools have coped with very quick spikes in enrollment by implementing multi-track year-round schools. Conway hosts a research university and several smaller colleges and has a substantial industrial base. The city's estimated racial composition is around two-thirds white and one-third black with a small number of other races in a population of about 275,000. Median household income is about \$46,000.

Bordering the university campus is the Islamic School of Conway (ISC). ISC, founded in 1987, serves the Islamic community of the greater River Bend area, offering full-time Islamic and secular education from preschool through eighth grade. The school shares facilities with the local *masjid* but has built additions over the years to provide classrooms and learning spaces dedicated to its 200 students. Grades six through eight comprise the

middle school, which operates as a separate unit from the lower school and offers classes at different levels and specialized teachers. ISC is co-ed, though there are parts of the day where girls and boys are in separate classes or physical spaces. Students wear a uniform, including required *hijab* for middle school girls. Both ISC's faculty and student populations are predominantly Arab, with about 85% of the population with nations of origin including Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, and Kuwait. There are also substantial minorities of South Asian families from Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as African American and multiracial families and several families each from Iran and Turkey. Though while most teachers and parents are immigrants, nearly all children were born in the United States

The dual curriculum at ISC includes both religious and secular subjects. Students must meet the academic standards by the state in Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Physical Education, and they have required additional classes in Arabic and Islamic Studies. The school day is also organized around the Islamic prayer schedule. Daily, after lunch, students make *wudu* (washing before prayer) and congregate in the prayer hall, along with *masjid* congregants, for *dhuhr* (mid-day prayer). The Friday schedule is revised to include the longer *jum'ah* service. Students at ISC all speak at least enough Arabic to be proficient at *salat*, and many are fluent. ISC maintains a small and close-knit Islamic community where many students spend their entire primary and middle school years and where several sets of cousins in attendance is not unusual. After graduation, most ISC alumni attend area public high schools, with an occasional student choose home schooling or study overseas.

Approximately one hour down the interstate from Conway and ISC is the town of Jacksonville. Located on the outskirts of the River Bend area, Jacksonville serves a similar sized population and also is the home of a research university and several smaller colleges. Jacksonville's racial composition includes a more substantial minority population, with around 55% of residents being white, 37% black, almost 5% Latin@, almost 3% Asian, and the remainder other minorities. Median income is about \$40,000.

In an upper-middle class neighborhood of Jacksonville, surrounded by wooded neighborhoods and relatively upscale shopping centers, is the Beth El Academy (Beth El), a Jewish day school with approximately 120 students from preschool through eighth grade. Beth El was founded in 1972 and prides itself on being not only a staple of the Jacksonville community but also a producer of high achieving young men and women. Middle school students, enrolled in grades six through eight, have their own classroom wing, where teachers largely remain in their rooms dedicated to each subject area. The only Jewish teachers in the middle school are those who teach Jewish Studies and Hebrew; two are Israeli-American. Beth El's student body is almost entirely white, and a small minority of families are first and second generation immigrants from Israel, South Africa, and the nations of the former Soviet Union.

Like ISC, Beth El teaches a dual curriculum. Students take classes in all of the standard secular subjects, including Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and P.E., and also in Hebrew, Torah/Bible, and general Jewish Studies. Additionally, students attend more occasional (i.e. once or twice a week) classes in Art and Music, and all seventh and eighth graders take Spanish; recently, two students have begun independent online studies in Mandarin and Latin. Beth El is completely co-ed and does not separate students by gender at

any time; students do not wear uniforms. Middle school students start each day at *T'fillah* (prayer) in their multipurpose room, which follows an abbreviated version of *Shacharit* (the morning service) and is largely student-led. Each day after lunch, several students lead the middle school in *Birkat HaMazon*, the grace after meals. Friday classes are abbreviated so that Friday afternoons conclude with *Kabbalat Shabbat* services, co-led by teachers/administrators and students, and the whole school gathers on Thursdays for a service where students read from the Torah. Again, like ISC, Beth students have often attended Beth for their entire school lives, and small class size means that the student body is close and familiar. While most graduates go on to a local public high school, a minority enroll in a Jewish college preparatory school in the Jacksonville area or secular, private, college preparatory schools. In fact, the public high school that draws so many Beth El alumni created a Hebrew program especially to attract the generally high performing Beth El students. Students who do not live in the draw area can commit to taking four years of Hebrew in order to attend this highly-ranked public school.

Taken together, Beth El and ISC form a case study of parental characterizations of difference of students in minority religious schools. The schools clearly vary in their theology and practice. However, their student bodies share a common experience of minority status both within and outside of their school communities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Typically, we expect that young people who attend religious schools will be, at some point in their lives, “more religious.” What this looks like varies by tradition and even by school, and in some cases, we know that religious schools are simply better options due to failing local public schools. However, there was consensus among the interviews in this

sample that ISC and Beth El students were *not*, in fact, more religious as a group than their public or secular private school counterparts. When asked this question, parents chuckled, saying things like, “it comes from home, actually” (HM). So, even if the hopes are there, parents know that they will have reinforce school lessons about religiosity for them to stick. Given that extra work, and given that the public schools in the Beth El and ISC draw areas are at least above average, why don’t parents settle for the afternoon and weekend school that other young Muslims and Jews attend? These findings suggest that first, parents want their children to have the opportunity to be in a sheltered and singular environment where they won’t feel overly different; second, that they teach their children how to manage difference in a setting that is pluralistic within a tradition they can all call home; and third, that they place Jewish or Islamic education within an overall educational experience that *will* include negotiating difference at the high school and college levels.

“It Felt Just like a Small Family”: Difference and Decision Making

When families speak of their decisions to send their children to Jewish and Islamic schools, one of the first descriptors they use is the analogy of the school being like a family. Using the family analogy allows for several rhetorical opportunities, centering on the idea that here is an exclusive environment where being exclusive is not necessarily a bad thing. If these kids are going to feel different anyway, why not make them feel different in a way that affirms who they are rather than putting them down? The family metaphor also connects with the fact that so many of these families are transplants. They have Jewish family members in New York or Muslim family members in Jordan, but in River Bend, they do not have that strong link to religious or cultural transmission. As Hannah Saltzman’s mother notes, “She kind of was here in the South, and no grandparents lived nearby, and so, so this

was her family here, and this was the, the background that I wanted to have for her. I think my husband and I, we're members of [the Reform temple], we're Reform Jewish, we don't keep kosher at home, um, but we find, we have a strong Jewish identity. And so, therefore, you know, sending her here was perfect.” Had Hannah been raised in the northeastern city where her parents grew up, they say it was doubtful they would have sent her to a Jewish day school. But since she is in the South and away from the socializing factors that helped to hone her parents’ Jewish identity, the family of Beth El steps in to maintain the difference that might well be lost were Hannah to continue in public school.

The Samuels family concurs. As an interfaith family, they had had lingering doubts about Jewish day school, but what changed their mind was the feeling they got when they walked in the door: “And it felt, it felt just like a small family, just, it was just a neat little community. And, um, we felt very connected to everybody that was there.” Prior to enrolling their oldest daughter at Beth El, the Samuels family had not reached a conclusion about whether to raise their children Jewish, Christian, or neither. Feeling that sense of family was a deciding factor. In this case, a sense of community framed by a familial relationship offers continuity for a family that might have turned away from Judaism altogether. Instead, Melissa (now in college), Diana (now a high school sophomore), and Caleb (a current Beth El sixth grader) identify strongly as Jews, name their closest friends as being those they made at Beth El, visit Israel regularly, and are active in Jewish youth groups.

Even a family that regrets its involvement with Beth El still praises the school’s ability to provide that familial context that might come more naturally in another setting. Mrs. Cohen, responding to a question about how important her children’s Jewish identity is

to her, says, “Very important. Especially here in Jacksonville, where you kind of have to seek out other Jews.” Asked why the context makes that identity so important, Mrs. Cohen explains, “Just that they feel like they're not outsiders, they feel that there's other kids and other people like them.” An ISC family mimics this concern about children feeling like they do not belong outside of particular religious environments. Mrs. Al-Karim, who had sent all four of her children to public school and had been happy with the results, relates an anecdote wherein her youngest son brought a non-Muslim friend to the *masjid* to play basketball. Having already described her son as having an “identity crisis” and “an edge to him,” Mrs. Al-Karim grows teary-eyed as she says that Bashir’s friend referred to a sign forbidding gender mixing as “lame,” prompting her son to agree. When Mrs. Al-Karim and her husband decided to pull Bashir from public school to enroll him at ISC, she describes the difference she saw: “After Bashir started coming here, the group of students at ISC who are doing the same thing gave him that yearning, that feeling that he is a part of a group. He is a part of something that he never felt somehow, he never felt that even as a part of our family, it's like he wanted to feel it in a group of children his own age somehow. I don't know how to describe this feeling.” Mrs. Al-Karim makes a point of noting that none of her other children had experienced this “truly, truly hat[ing] the idea of he is Muslim and he’s growing in a Muslim home,” but that the social ties at ISC accomplished what her family alone could not. For both the Cohen and Al-Karim families, wanting to eliminate difference rather than reinforce it is what motivates their day school choice. Having homogeneous peer networks, even if they are quite small, cuts back severely on the overwhelming feeling of difference experienced in other settings.

Being surrounded by Jewish or Muslim friends is at the top of many parents' lists when considering religious school. Parents hope that these friends will not only be "just like" their children, eliminating the difference that Jews and Muslims feel in public schools. The Morgan family goes so far to say that they see no need for youth groups outside of school, because "they are now surrounded by Jewish kids, and that's the whole point. . . . You put yourself around people you want to be with. Or as parents, you put your kids around people that you want them to be with. Whether it's a religious thing, whether it's because they're smart kids from good homes, or they're, you know, academic, whatever it is." Spoken tag-team by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, this sentiment expresses their desire for their children to be around those who will influence them in creating the kind of identity they desire. This identity contains an element of difference, in that deciding which peers they want their daughters surrounded by also implies which they do *not* want around them, but generally, the focus is on the positive. Friends can even be seen as having a direct effect on students, as in the case of an ISC eighth grader, new to the school that year, whose parents wanted to pull her out mid-year when they pulled out her brother for other reasons. Asma's teacher says that what kept the Zehri family from enrolling Asma in a local public school was assimilation – except that instead of referring to assimilation in the context of becoming more American, less different, Asma's peers helped her to assimilate to the distinct Islamic lifestyle and identity. According to the teacher, "the mom was telling me with tears in her eyes, she said, now Asma is fasting, she's doing salat at home, she said, these two girls are her like angels. She called them her angels. It's like she assimilated so fast here." So, parents acknowledge that the schools are different environments. Their negotiation of difference in choosing

minority day schools involves both making their children feel less *and more* different. Their difference has a purpose and a focus.

Sadly, not all of the discussion of difference takes place in a constructive way. Several families note that discrimination, whether experienced or perceived, is a main consideration in their school choice. Taking difference a step further than merely the lack of a peer group, parents call attention to Islamophobic and anti-Semitic incidents in tandem with the general difficulties of early adolescence and the middle school years. Some families focus on the latter, emphasizing a general sense of protection with comments like, “that's what we feel, like they're in a bubble, they're protected” (Mr. Williams, Beth El) and “it's such a sheltered, it's a blessing to have such a sheltered Islamic environment for the children, particularly, you know, the male child, and the female child, they're not the same, but each has its reason to be sheltered and protected” (Mrs. Miller, ISC). But taking this theme a step further, some refer directly to concerns about what might happen if children were in public schools, like when Michael Greenberg’s mother mentions that “being Jewish in the south, it was really important that he did not feel unusual in any way.” Notably, the families with the more indefinite remarks above are all “lifers” – those whose children have never been educated outside an Islamic or Jewish day school. For those with experience with public schools, the experience of difference as a negative gets more concrete. Mrs. Senturk, whose sons spent a few years in public school for the ESL component, says that even her sons’ friends “called him as a terrorist, to make jokes, or some kind of stuff, he was not so much comfortable.” Mrs. Lawson notes ironically, given her family’s convert status and African-American identification, “even when we’re with the kids, “Osama bin Laden!” or they'll yell, “go back to your own country!” After relaying several anecdotes of her Beth El alumni

daughters having been advised they are going to hell, made fun of for being stingy, and told horrifying Holocaust jokes, Mrs. Samuels responds to a question about why other area

Jewish families do not send their kids to Beth El:

But I think in the early years, it would be very hard in the South to raise Jews without putting them in a day school. That's my personal opinion. Just because people are prejudiced, people feel like they're right to witness to people, and um . . . I just don't understand it. I do not understand it. And then we have friends, and these are friends of ours, who took their son out, and I think they took them out and regretted it, they took all three of their kids out. And then, they're like shocked when they're on the playground and somebody says, "you can't play with us because you're Jewish." I mean, that is the real world, don't get me wrong, I mean, but what I'm saying is, why would you, when you've got a great Jewish day school, with 30 or more percent interfaith, they can meet other non-Jewish kids, I just don't understand why you would do that to your children."

Mrs. Samuels' comment cuts to the bone of the difference paradox. Here, we see that putting Jewish children in a Jewish day school is not a bonus but a necessity. In the eyes of these parents, Muslim and Jewish children *will* experience difference in the form of discrimination. They simply do not have the skills at a young age to maintain prideful, positive identities in the face of prejudice. However, as I will show next, parents see even their school "bubbles" as places where their children can begin to understand and explore difference in a safe way.

"We're All Very Different": Difference within Sameness

Parents express a wide range of opinions on how to teach their children about diversity and difference within what is commonly perceived to be a homogeneous community. One technique they use is to focus on the difference-within-sameness that they see in their religious traditions more broadly and in the schools more specifically. Talking about the eighth grade Israel trip, Mrs. Gerber notes that one of the most important things she hopes Joel will come back with is an understanding of the diversity of the Jewish tradition. Calling attention to her older son's surprise at encountering Ethiopian Jews on the Beth El

trip several years back, Mrs. Gerber says that one of her goals for Joel is related to her idea that “it's interesting to see how Israelis are different, Israeli Jews are different from American Jews, and we're different from other Jews, or whatever. We're all very different.” Parents like Mrs. Gerber underscore their children’s encounters with the diversity either at the school or at events sponsored by the school in order to shore up their belief that their children are being isolated due to their choice of religious school.

This is ultimately easier at ISC, where the ethnic and racial composition of the student body makes noticing difference quite simple. When asked whether she felt like sending children to Islamic school makes it difficult for them to be in a diverse society once they leave, Mrs. Suleiman responds, “No, because we have here children from different places, not all kids here are the same place. We have American kids, Somalian kids, from Sudan, from Algeria, it's diverse here also.” Mrs. Miller echoes this idea, answering, “Like there are so many different people from so many different places. You're in the *masjid* and it's like, you got the whitest of white to the blackest of black, and every color and culture in between. So I definitely think Islam has like opened up our eyes to different cultures, even though, even though religiously not everyone's on the same page, but, as far as different cultures, different foods, we've definitely been more exposed, you know, in Islam than outside of Islam.” Asked directly if she would choose to send her African American child to an Islamic school where he would not be a minority, Mrs. Miller immediately disagrees. For her family, the diversity *within* the Islamic community of Conway is a characteristic reflecting a core value of Islam. The Miller family chose to move to Conway specifically *because of* the diversity in the Islamic population there. In Mrs. Miller’s words, “Islam is not

a racist religion. I don't go near people who try to make it that way. Because it's not that way. . . . This is one of the benefits of our community, because it's so diverse.”

However, not all families share this unequivocally positive assessment of the diversity, calling attention to the cultural and theological differences that can emerge from having so many ethnic and national backgrounds in one setting. Interestingly, these differences seem to be most salient in students’ experiences with one another. When asked about things at the school they disagreed with, several families noted the difficulty of explaining why their family made a particular behavioral or theological choice when others choose a different path. Mrs. Aquino says, “Kayla will come home, and this is the first time when we lived here that she would come to me and question certain things that we were doing that she was learning from her other friends that they were not doing. So I'd have to explain to her, because, you know, because it's culture, and their parents are coming from overseas, where I grew up here.” However, this issue is not limited to immigrant status. Mrs. Senturk, whose children are two of only a handful of children not born in the United States, says that one of the biggest challenges of ISC is supplementing her son’s education by introducing shades of grey:

Of course, as Islam, we have different schools, like the practices. And we have some - the main things are the same, but we have differences, of course. And Ali and Emir, they have difficulties, sometimes, to understand these differences. . . . And Ali is coming and asking me, he is always asking, Mom, is music *haram*? I told him, is it in Qur'an? He said no. Then you can not say that it is *haram*. You have to think about it. First you need to read it's related to music if you can find, then you have to think about it, if I listen to music, how I feel, that Allah will be happy with this, or not happy, what kind of music are you listening, don't take everything like *haram* and *halal*, like white and black. There are some things in the middle.

Mrs. Senturk emphasizes that these questions are not ones that Ali would ask when enrolled in public school. It is only upon entering an Islamic school that he is exposed to this much variation within Islam.

Even when difference is difficult to process, though, families talk of the good that can come from it. For Mrs. Senturk, she has increased opportunities to talk about Islamic issues with her children and to impart her own perspective. The very fact that the topic is raised allows her to have conversations about what values her family holds dear in Islam, including critical thinking. Along these lines, Beth El families who acknowledge that their school is not particularly diverse “looking” also note that it can be diverse in other ways. Like the schools of thought that are problematic for the Aquino and Senturk families, Michael’s mother says that the fact that they are one of the more observant families has become a touchy subject: “Because, you would think you're in a Jewish day school, that's the whole reason we put him here, so he wouldn't feel different, and yet now he kinda is within his own group. So that was kind of a bummer that it wasn't, that everyone wasn't like that. I didn't want him to feel different or unusual. But that made him, even in this environment, feel different.” Though Mrs. Greenberg acknowledges that latent consequence of the ideologically diverse environment, she also says that it becomes a benefit: “Even though we're not diverse in the kind of kids we have, as far as race and religion, um, you have to tolerate a lot of different personalities in a very small place, and so, these kids just learn how, they can't run away from their problems.” Like the Senturk family, the Greenberg family highlights the pedagogical advantage that transforms disagreement and divergence into a useful skill. In fact, other Beth El families contend that this disagreement and presence of difference is endemic to the Jewish tradition. In order to fully understand their Jewishness,

students need to know that they will encounter both Jews with whom they agree and with whom they disagree. Laughing, Mr. Williams identifies especially with the “critical thinking” component of the Beth El mission statement, because “put ten Jews in a room, you're gonna have 11 opinions, right, um, Torah, the traditional study of Torah, the traditional study of, you know, all the related *halakhic* laws and Jewish laws, is, has always been a debate.” Here, in another way, difference is again framed as sameness. There are acceptable ways in which Jews differ from one another. Beth El also distinguishes itself from other, more conservative day schools by its high percentage (30-40%) of interfaith families. Though children must be Jewish to attend, the school actively works to create an inclusive atmosphere through means such as an interfaith families group. A former leader of the group epitomizes the appreciation families have for a community where a certain kind of difference becomes almost normative: “And that's why I like it, because there are so many people similar to us!” Parents thus talk about their experiences at Islamic and Jewish day schools as ones fraught with negotiation of difference. Though many talk about their decision to put their children in these schools as one based on wanting their children to attain a minority identity in a community where they are *not* minorities, their observations indicate that they do, indeed, experience difference at school. The school becomes a place where students can test the waters of what it means to be different before moving on to environments where that will almost certainly be the case.

Being a “Citizen of the World”: Anticipating Future Difference

Adding to the distinction between Jewish and Islamic day schools in the American South and those in areas with higher Islamic and Jewish population density is the lack of a range of secondary school options within the religious traditions. There are some options:

Jacksonville does boast an excellent pluralistic Jewish high school, though it is very small and very expensive. Some ISC families choose to move overseas to predominantly Muslim countries for the high school years, and some talk of home schooling their children from ninth through twelfth grade. But by and large, most ISC and Beth El graduates will go on to public high schools. Any sheltering and difference-within-sameness that these students encounter in middle school will come to an abrupt halt after graduation. How do families deal with the cognitive dissonance of privileging religious education while knowing it is for a limited time only?

Some families decry the lack of Jewish and Islamic options or others' failure to take advantage of them. These families do everything they can to make sure their children will *not* encounter religious difference in high school, some going so far as to move (or plan moving) to other cities or countries that do provide this option. One such Beth El family sought out work specifically in Jacksonville so that their daughter, beginning there in eighth grade, could make an easy transition to the Jewish high school. Even that mother, though, frames her surprise at others' families choice not to send their Beth El graduates there in terms of the diversity she knows is lacking: "So if you've been paying for your kid to be in Jewish education and you felt that it was important that they be in Jewish education throughout elementary and middle school and you have an incredible option, like, that, it just doesn't make sense to me. But, you know, maybe people want a bigger environment, maybe people want more diversity, I mean, I get that there are certain things that people might be looking for, um, it just doesn't make sense to me." When I relayed that comment to a mother who stated outright that she would never ever consider the Jewish high school, that mother spoke to exactly the final sentence in Mrs. Morgan's comment by saying, "I don't think it's

wise to do it. I don't think that you give your child all the tools necessary to be a citizen of the world. . . . Naomi needs to be around, she wants a diverse experience. She's had it for eleven years, and that's enough. Enough.” The Sachs family could easily afford a Jewish secondary education; their decision is very much about a confidence that Naomi has had the foundation she needs and anything else would lead to diminishing returns. In fact, only one member of the class of 2011, Leah Morgan, has plans to attend the Jewish high school.

While other families mentioned the financial difficulties, their comments indicate that that was really secondary to this desire for a more diverse environment, an environment encouraging and dealing with difference on a grander scale. Caleb Samuels’ parents, whose two older daughters attended a public high school after graduating from Beth El, see not only diminishing returns from the Jewish high school but a “handicap.” When probed about their word choice, Mr. Samuels explains,

Linda [his wife] and I both felt like, it, it was important at this point to start transitioning into being exposed to the real world. You know, to being exposed to kids from lower income families that, that were different religions and different beliefs, and it was just important for them to start integrating with that, and, if, I, honestly, I mean, I know academically [the Jewish high school] is a great school, but, I mean, if your child's been there, uh, you know, been in a, you know, in a Jewish day school and then they move there and then they move into college, I would say, I would say, that, that, I'd say it'd be a difficult transition into college.

Here, we see parents looking beyond high school as the future and towards college. If only a small percentage of Beth El graduates go on to a Jewish high school, an even more minute percentage go from there to the very small number of universities that boast Jewish majorities. The reality is that these families must at some point teach their children how to be members of a minority. Attending a middle school with members of that same minority is the first step. The second step is attending a high school where they are different from most of the student body but are still under the watchful eye of their parents.

Parents who have already encountered public schools offer caution about that transition. To them, ISC and Beth El could do a better job at this transition-within-a-transition. The fear is that the difference will be so great and so enticing that it will be easy for students to move from the restrictive environment of their middle school years into a lifestyle where they do not feel different. Mrs. Al-Karim, whose son will have attended ISC only for the middle school years before he enters public high school and who teaches elementary school at ISC, cautions against rigid rules there, “Because I see it's a big difference, I feel like, umm, it might be a rough start for them, and that's why I keep telling other teachers, please please please, please don't pressure them a lot, don't be extreme. Allow them to mix with boys. Allow them to be comfortable to wear something that is not way, way too reserved, conservative. Allow them to be confident and to be, you know, open. I just do not want them to have to go through somehow a shock when they go.” Similarly, in another constructive critique of ISC, Mrs. Senturk says that the school needs to do more to prepare students to encounter those different from them. Her concern, though, is not due to a fear that her children will abandon Islamic precepts but that they should be ready to be representatives of Islam: “They will like, an ambassador to this community, to introduce Islam and Muslim. Maybe they will be the first friend of a Christian or other religion person as a Muslim friend. They will learn Islam from their character, how they behave. It is very, very important. . . . If they go to high school, they are surrounded with non-Muslim people and it is very, very different than ISC. They need to know how to behave, how to go with these people.” For Mrs. Senturk, being different is less a hindrance than an opportunity.

Significantly, both Mrs. Senturk and others link this opportunity to ISC's ability to fulfill its mission statement, as do Beth El families with their version. Mrs. Senturk notes

that in order for ISC graduates to be the ambassadors she thinks they should be, ISC has to achieve the “strong Muslim identity” that is at the core of its mission. Similarly, Beth El’s limitation of Jewish content in its mission to building “future Jewish leaders” allows parents to extrapolate that leadership outside the nesting Jewish environments of Beth El, Jacksonville, and wherever their children may go later. For Mr. Williams, a foundational educational experience at Beth El in combination with a public high school education allows students the best of both worlds. Beth El’s mission, followed up by a liminal high school period, is “also great for society in general, I hope, you know, because the Jewish core value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, right. So, you know, each, if we teach our kids to be leaders in these areas, I think they're gonna be more aware of, uh, social justice. They're gonna be more aware of ecological considerations. So, you know, it umbrellas, it balloons beyond just this small Jewish community.” Those who do not necessarily identify with the mission statement still agree that its emphasis on the future helps students to contextualize their Jewishness within a broader community. Mrs. Greenberg interprets the “future Jewish leader” aspect of the mission statement with a bit of skepticism, saying, “Um, well, you know, not everyone's a leader! Um, and, but I think what it does is prepare them for, to know, someone once said, to know who they are before someone else tells them who they're not.” In each of these cases, we see difference re-framed from a potential harm to a potential asset. Having a strong Jewish or Muslim identity means to these parents that their children will be able to manage being different, because it will be a source of pride and connection to the world at large.

This is really the core of how parents are able to negotiate difference in the transition from religious school to public school. What these parents want for their children

is the ability to maintain a prideful identity without that identity becoming excessively exclusive, arrogant, or incompatible with those of non-Jewish or non-Muslim peers. Parents have mixed feelings about whether or not the schools are actually able to accomplish this. Though her son has had a wonderful experience in a local charter school, Mrs. Fayed says that generally, “graduating from ISC, the students who graduate from this school are usually closed-minded. They haven't seen much except from what they hear from their friends that have been in public school. So, they don't know what to think, what to do, once they get to public school and see all those different kinds of people.” However, Mrs. Suleiman disagrees, asserting as a middle school parent and ISC teacher that

We teach them how to respect, respect not only Muslims, we focus on them respecting the non-Muslims too, they live in this country, they have to love people, respect them, not think if you are Muslim you are better, you know, 'cause, yeah, we teach them, 'cause we are here from everywhere, many people from all over the world, so we focus on teach them respect, and we prepare them, when they leave this place, that it's easy for them to interact with the people outside, easy for them to be in public school and be with other people, and they don't have any problem when they go to public school, *mashallah*, they just adjust quickly.

What accounts for this difference? It may be a case of teachers' best intentions not being fully realized by students. But the important thing is that parents do actively *want* their children to be able to interact with others respectfully after graduating from Islamic school. Those that know their children will be going on to public school do not talk about hoping that their children will only have Muslim friends there or stay segregated as much as possible. Essentially, what they hope for is respected difference, as Mrs. Al-Karim highlights when she says, “We don't think other people are wrong, but we don't think we are wrong either, and we are entitled to our own way of thinking.”

Down the road at Beth El, parents echo this sentiment of future respected and respectful difference. Supporting this claim is the Samuels family, who not only concurs that

graduates of Beth El need to know how to find commonalities with others but cite it of their own accord when asked about the school's greatest strengths. After listing the school's strong academics and nurturing environment, Mrs. Samuels says, "I think, you know, our kids, and I think our kids are a good example, to be tolerant of everybody's religion. I mean, it's, it's just as important to each individual person what they believe in their heart and what makes the world a better place for them is, when they leave, I can't force that on them any more than you could force it on me. So if anything, I think that's what we, we should teach our children." Mr. Samuels concurs by following with, "and Beth El really reinforces that. I believe this school really, really is."

Again, though, what the school works and hopes to accomplish and what students absorb may be different. If ISC parents worry that their children and their peers may leave Islamic school closed-minded, Beth El parents worry that their children may leave Jewish school with a lingering sense of superiority. After all, these parents have prioritized Judaism to the tune of thousands of dollars each year. Even families who identify as secular or cultural Jews maintain the importance of Jewishness in their lives. How can the school achieve the objective of "building Jewish leaders" without somehow subordinating the non-Jews who will inevitably end up being led? An exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Morgan demonstrates the difficulty in balancing an appreciation for multiple perspectives with consistent placing of Judaism at the top of the heap. In the response, peppered with pauses and "umms," the parents talk about their goals for Leah in high school:

Mrs. Morgan: "I want her to know, I want her to know about, um . . ."

Mr. Morgan: "The good and the bad"

Mrs. Morgan: "Yeah, yeah, but of course I always want to make sure that, that the Jewish perspective is the right perspective, and that, um, yeah."

[They both laugh a bit hesitantly.]

The Morgans' hesitation demonstrates their discomfort with such direct reference to any kind of statement that could be perceived as a "better than," even while they want to reinforce the importance of their daughters' salient Jewish identity. Some parents even note that they had to speak to the school when their children mixed up pride in being Jewish with disparaging of other traditions. Mrs. Sachs, who noted that she only originally enrolled Naomi at Beth El because it had openings and the Sachs family was dealing with an immensely stressful family crisis, recounts the only time when she ever considered taking Naomi out:

So, she has been exposed to everything, which is good, but when she was six, she used to um, she told this one, well she goes, you know, Judaism's better than Christianity. And I found out, this girl told me, and I said, she *what?* And I said Naomi, are they teaching you this at that school? But they weren't. But just by sheer volume of what, you know, she had changed her tune. She started, well she's always questioned, you know. She was very proud of it. And I said, speak to her accordingly, guys. Talk to her accordingly. And they did.

Mrs. Sachs highlights the imperative nature of proactive efforts religious schools must take if they wish to accomplish respectful difference. Just as at ISC, Beth El can think that its policies and pedagogies are encouraging strong religious identities without maligning others, but without careful, constant attention, the latter may happen regardless. Ultimately, though, the schools do go out of their way to teach both particularity and inclusivity. This is nowhere better seen than in the schools' enthusiasm and encouragement of the interfaith values seminar that took place as part of this project. Not only did the schools give free reign to a researcher to take over up to a dozen class periods with limited supervision, but they also invited news cameras to film the process and broadcast daily life at the schools to a national audience. When the news piece aired, both schools placed the video clip front and center on their webpage and newsletters and emailed a link to current families, alumni, and other community members. So, concerns about religious schools being extremist, harboring

isolationist sentiments, and making it difficult for students to integrate into mainstream society (Jones 2008) may be extremely limited in scope. Schools that exist in pluralistic communities and that additionally are populated by pluralistic families have little choice but to begin to address how their graduates will respectfully enter a world where they are a minority also deserving of respect.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the place of difference in parental discussions of their reasoning in sending children to Islamic and Jewish day schools, their and their children's experiences while attending the schools, and their anticipation of what will come next. Most studies of religious schools focus on what those institutions teach students about their own traditions, including what an identity within that tradition should look like. These studies run the risk of making the "religious congruence fallacy," conflating religious beliefs with religious actions without enough attention to the decision-making situations that could incorporate other factors (Chaves 2010). The literature on religious education also does not explain how schools of minority traditions might operate differently than Christian schools, given the potential effects of marginalization. In contrast, studies of multicultural education assess the difficulties of balancing teaching the validity of multiple identities at once. However, their public school settings do not allow for an assessment also of teaching a singular identity concurrently. Finally, studies of minority identity in the sociology of education primarily focus on the problematic relationship between strong racial identity and typically low achievement. This paper contributes to all three areas by demonstrating that difference pervades decisions regarding minority religious schools, with parents providing a

positive assessment to schools that can both teach a strong minority identity and incorporate pluralism.

What we have learned is that parents of students attending Jewish and Islamic middle schools do obviously hope for their children to develop the identities associated with those traditions, they exhibit a sense of being torn between particularity and universalism. The religious identities are not to be undertaken “at all costs” but instead must be developed in the context of future integration. This allows parents to acknowledge the experiences of difference that they and their children have undergone, including blatant acts of discrimination, while also upholding these same children’s ability to not only get along with but befriend non-Muslims and non-Jews later in life. Parents engage in a “cultural politics of difference” (West 1990) in order to both critique the marginalization that their families experience and to see the benefits of secondary education in the very environments they did not want for their middle schoolers. The key mechanism here is parents’ conception of the small “families,” “bubbles,” and “havens,” to draw from the multiple metaphors employed, as manifesting difference themselves. Building upon a fear that too much seclusion from the “real world,” to cite another metaphor used by many parents, will lead to even more hardship and further bad feelings, parents highlight difference-within-sameness in order to conceive of a way in which their children will be transformed from outsiders to leaders. Ultimately, they look forward to the time period after middle school graduation as one filled with opportunity to find commonalities across religious traditions. The value of the mainstream becomes its ability to force students to draw connections across different types of people. Students in minority religious day schools thus learn to be “cultural straddlers,” proficient at the skills

necessary to thrive in the particularistic setting of their own tradition while fluent in mainstream culture as well.

Recent work in the sociology of religion approaches discussion of difference and religion by examining congregations that either encourage difference by maintaining mono-ethnic status (Kim 2010; Min 2010) or discourage it by offering a theological standpoint that transcends ethnicity (Marti 2005). What we see from this paper is that another type of religious organization, the minority religious day school, is conceived by parents as a place where students do not have to be different. However, the school also exists as place for students to test out difference, as families representing a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives must co-exist before students re-enter the pluralistic world outside their “safe havens.” So, these schools are both intentionally discouraging *and* encouraging difference. We can continue to move this literature forward by looking at other case studies that frame religion itself in terms of privilege rather than focusing solely on the ethnic/racial privilege that drives the study of difference in religion.

Speaking of her daughter’s participation in the eighth grade interfaith values seminar, one parent summarized its contribution in a way that epitomizes these parents’ ideal framing of difference. Mrs. Sachs says that having participated in the seminar as part of her Jewish education allows her daughter to be both different and same. In her words, “it makes her feel comfortable in her Judaism to make her think you can be Jewish and be part of a bigger, of a bigger thing. Be a part of something bigger than yourself.” Minority religious day schools in the American South are constantly confronted with an entity “bigger than [themselves,” indicating that understanding them sociologically means paying close attention to their context. Future research should also explore the “equality-difference paradox” in Christian

schools, especially those in more religiously diverse contexts and those with transdenominational orientations that take on a similar challenge in making a variety of students feel accepted. The first step was to begin to parse out the outcomes of a variety of Christian schooling options (Uecker 2009). The next step should be to continue to reject the temptation of the religious congruence fallacy by asking if and when difference arises as a primary parental concern in Christian contexts. Understanding religious socialization requires that we attempt to step back at times from association with religious preferences and instead zero in on negotiation of difference.

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