

Hyphenated Selves: Muslim American Youth Negotiating Identities on the Fault Lines of Global Conflict

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In the wake of the events of September 11, Muslim-American youth found that the multiple cultures within which they live were suddenly and alarmingly in conflict. The developmental consequences of living in a world fractured by religious and ethnic terror have yet to be determined for Muslim youth in the United States. This exploratory, mixed-method study begins to examine how Muslim youth negotiate their identities in these challenging times. Documented in the surveys, narrated in the interviews, and drawn into their identity maps, Muslim-American youth (n = 70) ages 12 to 18, vividly portrayed their interior lives as a dialectic labor of psychological reconciliation – piecing together what we call hyphenated selves. The results show that Muslim youth experience discrimination, sometimes to an extreme degree. We observed diversity in how youth deal with the challenges of growing up Muslim in post 9/11 US, ranging from “telling nobody” to policing each other within the Muslim community. In addition we found that males and females negotiate their Muslim and American identities in different ways.

“I guess you could say I live on the hyphen.”

Hadice, Syrian-American, age 17

Adolescence is a developmental period during which young people form, and then reform, their cultural identities (Erikson, 1980; Fine & Torre, 2004; Fine, Burns, Payne & Torre, 2004; Helms, 1990; Solis, 2003; Way & Robinson, 2003). This may be a particularly complex psychological task for youth living in contexts, or historic moments, in which their diverse racial, ethnic, national, religious, sexual origins stir in tension (Willis, 2002). When one’s social identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse either through formal institutions, social relationships, and/or the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and political fallout is in the lives of young people. As Willis (2002) suggests, youth embody and perform the very economic, and we would add cultural, conflicts that constitute global politics. Adolescence is precisely the

moment in which international, national, social and personal ‘crises’ erupt most publicly and spontaneously, and, unfortunately, they are more often than not misread as simply personal, hormonal, disciplinary or developmental “problems” (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Appadurai, 2004; Fine, et al., 2004; Sen, 2004; Sirin, Diemmer, Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005). Growing up in the midst of what Fazal Rizvi (2005) calls Islamophobia, Muslim American youth offer us a lens into the developmental challenges that confront teens who live on the intimate fault lines of global conflict; teens who carry international crises in their backpacks and in their souls.

For Muslim youth living in the US, negotiating their identities across different cultural terrains became decidedly more challenging after the events of 9/11 (Cainkar, 2004). On one hand, their lives, like those of everyone else in the U.S., were under attack. On the other hand, they were perceived as a potential threat to the safety of their neighbors. Ideologically represented as a threat, since 9/11 “they”—Muslim Americans—have been watched, detained, deported, and invaded in order to protect and save “us.” Just as life in their ‘home countries’ erupted in international and

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domestic conflict, these youth and their families came to be perceived as potential threats to U.S. national security. This situation did not dissipate after the initial attacks of 9/11, but rather, it continues today, reinforced every time there is news of a security threat. At this moment in history in the United States these young people are at once becoming more religiously grounded and nationally rootless; transnational yet homeless (Bhabha, 2005; Levitt, 2000).

Since 9/11, we have learned much about the U.S. attitudes toward Muslims and other cultures (see Gerges, 2003), but the developmental consequences for youth of a world fractured by religious terror and global conflicts have yet to be determined, particularly for Muslim youth upon whom the heaviest burden may lie—at least in the U.S. We take seriously young people's experiences of witnessing and critically speaking back to global, national, cultural and economic contradictions (Fine, Roberts, Torre, Bloom, Burns, Chajet, Guishard, & Payne, 2004), and believe they bring passion, loss, desire and critical action to ongoing, shifting cultural formations. It is our view that these young women and men offer a theoretical lens on many groups of youth who struggle with economic/cultural oppression, hegemonic representations of self (Deaux & Philogone, 2001; Solis, 2003) and diminished opportunities for selfhood in the post 9/11 U.S. context.

In our efforts to build a conceptual framework that can guide our study, given the paucity of specific research on Muslim Americans, we gained insights from three areas of related research on immigrant minority youth. Research on immigrant youth shows that the successful integration of both one's own culture and the dominant culture, leads to more positive developmental outcomes (Berry, 1997; Berry & Kim, 1988; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Oppedal, Røysamb, & Sam, 2004; Oppedal, Røysamb, & Heyerdahl, 2005; Phinney, Cantu, Kurtz, 1997) whereas marginalization, that is disengagement from both cultures, is associated with mental health problems for immigrant youth. Previous research on minority youth in general (e.g., Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Lorenzo, Frost, & Reinherz, 2000; Romero & Roberts, 2003), and immigrant youth in particular (e.g., Berry, 1997; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Suárez-Orozco, 2005), also show strong evidence that minority stress (i.e., discrimination and stress associated with one's social status) can lead to mental health problems in terms of depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints. Thus, the developmental process for immigrant youth not only originates from the challenges of reconciling multiple cultural systems of reference but also

from discrimination and stress due to one's minority status (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

Further, drawing theoretically from the writings of Amartya Sen (2004), we also recognize that culture is but one aspect of self, flowing in interaction with other complex dimensions of selfhood; that culture is "not a homogeneous attribute" (43) but rather is filled with the tensions and delights of discordance; that "culture absolutely does not sit still," (43) and that "cultures interact with each other and cannot be seen as insulated structures." (44). We add to Sen's working definition by noting that when a culture is under siege, it becomes particularly prominent for those who live within the diaspora, like immigrant Muslims in the U.S. The social and psychological tensions are exacerbated when home countries shatter in conflict, when one's culture is hijacked by terrorists, and when one's new country marks you as suspect. In times of tension and conflict, as Yuval-Davis (2001) notes, cultural binaries and oppositions proliferate. The intense stereotyping and dehumanization of Muslims in the U.S. reflects this dynamic poignantly. It is in the very sinews of adolescent lives that we come to see how culture and global politics enter the body and soul of U.S. youth (see Rao & Walton, 2004).

In this article, we offer a theoretical and empirical analysis of *hyphenated selves*; Muslim American young men and women who live intimate lives on the fault lines of global conflict. By hyphen we refer to the identities that are at once joined, and separated, by history, the present socio-political climate, geography, biography, longings and loss (Fine, 1994). In this exploratory study of what seems to be a rather complex and complicated developmental phenomenon, we hope to lay the groundwork for a workable hypothesis, a conceptual framework based on a mixed-method investigation of "hyphenated" lives of Muslim American young men and women.

The focus of this exploratory study is to understand how Muslim youth in the U.S. carve their identities under surveillance and collective suspicion. In a mixed-method design of quantitative surveys, focus group interviews, and identity maps, we theorize hyphenated identities in the crosshairs of global conflict. Specifically, our goal in this study is to explore: (a) the challenges of being young, Muslim, and American; (b) the ways Muslim American young men and women negotiate their gendered identities, and (c) the difficulties faced at home and within Muslim communities as these youth try to find their unique voices.

Methods

Young men and women were recruited from a number of mosques, community based organizations, social networks, and schools, all located in the New York metropolitan area. A multi-method design was created involving surveys, focus groups, and identity maps. Surveys primarily focused on Muslim youths’ perceptions of acculturation and discrimination, and the psychological consequences of these, in terms of indicators of anxiety. Focus groups were conducted with a subsample of the survey participants to give voice to the young people themselves in order to better articulate their multiple cultural, ethnic and psychological identities. Additionally, the majority of the focus group participants produced identity maps to portray how they incorporate their hyphenated selves.

Participants

Participants were 70 (32 girls, 38 boys) self-identified Muslim American adolescents, ranging in age (12 to 18; mean age of 15.27, *SD* = 1.92) and grade level (6th to 12th). All participants took the surveys and a representative subsample (*N* = 27, 14 girls and 13 boys) also participated in the focus groups. Identity maps were voluntarily produced by the 19 young men and women who participated in the focus groups.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic background of the full sample. The majority of the participants (84.1%) were born in the U.S., speak English as a first language (77%), go to public schools (76.8%), and wear traditional dress such as Hijab (head scarf) for women and skull cap for men (51.7%). They represented a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, based on their parents’ country of origin, which varied from Guinea to Malaysia, with Southeast Asians and Arabs representing the two largest groups. This ethnic distribution parallels the national trends for Muslim

Americans (Leonard, 2003). A majority of parents were born outside of the U.S. (84.3%), which makes most youth in the participating cohort first generation Muslim Americans. In terms of education, parents of participating youth represented a highly educated group. The modal educational level for this sample was a college degree for mothers and an advanced degree for fathers. Only 14.7 percent of fathers and 23.5 percent of mothers had an educational degree of high school or less. These statistics parallel the trends in the overall Muslim population in the U.S., as their educational level tends to be higher than that of the general public.

Instruments

We utilized data gathered from surveys, focus groups, and identity maps to understand hyphenated selves of Muslim American youth in the post 9/11 U.S. Surveys included demographic questions, as well as measures of discrimination, acculturation, and anxiety.

Discrimination was measured by a 10-item measure of ethnic and religious discrimination (Krieger & Sidney, 1996). The measure assesses the degree to which one experiences discrimination because of one’s “religion” or “ethnicity” in various settings including school, playgrounds, while shopping, on the street, and in a public setting. Frequency of discrimination was described using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” (1) to “almost daily” (5). The internal consistency Alpha for the current sample was .89.

Acculturation was measured using the Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents, (AHIMSA) by Unger, Gallaher, Shakib, Ritt-Olson, Palmer, & Johnson, (2002). This scale was designed for immigrant and “bi-cultural” adolescents to measure their engagement in a variety of social (e.g., “My best friends are from . . .” or “I am most comfortable being with people from . . .”) and cultural activities (e.g., “The holidays I celebrate are from . . .” or “The food I eat at home is from . . .”). Respondents indicate whether they engage in these activities with people from “the US” (Assimilation), “the country my family is from” (Separation), “both” (Integration), or “neither” (Marginalization). The integration score represents the degree to which the person combines different aspects of both cultures by adding the number of times one checks off the “both” column.

Anxiety was measured using the Revised Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS; Reynolds & Richmond, 1985). The RCMAS is a 37-item, self-report inventory used to measure anxiety in

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Parentages
Gender	54% Female 46% Male
Study abroad	17% Studied abroad a semester or more.
Birth country	84% USA 16% Abroad
Language	77% English first language 75% Fluent in two languages 24% Fluent in three languages
School type	76.8% Public 14.5% Private, non-religious 8.7% Private, religious

children, ages 6 to 18. The RCMAS provides three factor scores. The *Physiological* component measures the degree to which the person experiences physiological signs of anxiety, such as sweaty hands or stomach aches. The *Worry/Oversensitivity* component assesses the degree to which the person internalizes experiences of anxiety and the extent to which he or she may feel overwhelmed and withdraw. The *Concentration anxiety* component measures the degree to which the person is likely to feel inadequate, unable to concentrate on tasks, and unable to meet the expectations of other important people. Numerous other studies show the internal consistency level for the full score above .80 (Gerard & Reynolds, 1999). In the current sample, the internal consistency Alpha was .87 for the full scale and it ranged from .62 to .79 for the three components.

The *focus groups* were conducted to increase understanding of how Muslim American youth negotiate multiple identities and deal with the developmental challenges of being young Muslims in varied academic, religious and community contexts post 9/11. Because there were more volunteers than needed for the focus groups, we constructed three diverse groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and school type for the focus groups. Each group was designed around a) the main question of "What's it like to be a Muslim teenager in the U.S., post 9/11?" and b) the group discussion of the identity maps that each participant constructed prior to the focus group session.

There were three focus groups: one gender-integrated ($N = 6$), one all-male ($N = 12$), and one all-female ($N = 9$). Participants were randomly selected to be in mixed versus all-female and mixed versus all-male groups. Focus group discussions were transcribed but one taped session did not record well, so for that session we relied upon handwritten notes taken by the two co-facilitators, Michelle Fine and Selcuk Sirin. The authors coded the transcripts using themes anticipated theoretically, including identity negotiations, social representation and experiences and reactions to discrimination, all of which were drawn from our readings of cultural psychology and adolescence among historically oppressed groups (Du Bois, 1982; Fine, et al., 2004; Helms, 1990; Phinney, 1990; Solis, 2003; Steele, 1997; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Other key themes emerged in the focus groups and during the map exercise and were thereby generated as grounded theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Our analysis of the qualitative data sought common themes across the sample and key axes of intra-group variations.

Identity Maps. Drawing on the writings of Wilkinson (1999) and Milgram (1976), we asked the participants to design pictorial descriptions of their identity as a Muslim young person in the U.S. They were provided with drawing materials and drawing paper. The identity maps were constructed individually by the same gender focus group participants ($n = 21$). Two of the young men in the all-male group did not produce identity maps so we had 19 usable identity maps (9 girls and 10 boys). After constructing the maps, the participants were asked to describe their maps in the group. Analytically, maps were coded based on the way they integrated both aspects of their identities using the framework of "integrated" and "fractured." The inter-rater agreement level between the two coders was 87%. The final identity category was decided only after the two coders reached full agreement, which was achieved for all the maps and codes in the study.

Procedures

The participants were recruited in community settings and through a snowball sampling method. Once the parental and youth consent forms were signed, research assistants distributed the surveys in person in participants' homes, community centers, and at a university campus. Each participant was asked whether they would like to take part in the focus group session, from which the focus group subsample was generated. All the names of the participants were changed in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each participant was paid \$20 for their time and effort.

Results

The results section is organized around the three questions that guide this study, namely the experiences of discrimination and stereotypes, identity negotiations, and pressures within the Muslim community. In addition to the statistical analysis of the survey data, we also identified several *common themes* from the qualitative data that were voiced collectively by the sample of Muslim American youth. Thus, for the purposes of this exploratory study, we collapsed the data from the surveys, maps, and focus groups, treating the data as a whole rather than analyzing them separately by method (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative).

(a) Challenges of Being Young, Muslim, and American

We heard stories of airport delays, dates broken because "my parents wouldn't understand," and

tongues bitten in history class for fear of being sent to the principal for a dissenting opinion. If there was one thing that all the participants in this study agreed on, it was that 9/11 made life much more difficult for them as children, students, and families. As one focus group participant, Aisha, age 16, described:

“I remember that day (9/11/01) my father drove home a number of children from school, a religious school. As he dropped them at the elementary school, where they would meet their parents, the police were there, taking names, phone numbers, and licenses. That was frightening enough, but as we drove off we found ourselves in a big traffic jam and some woman screamed out of her car, ‘Why don’t you just go home?’ I knew then that everything was going to be different.”

A similar experience was shared by Basil, age 15, who attends a racially/ethnically integrated, middle-class public high school.

Basil: “I know they’re thinking I may be a terrorist.” Michelle: “How do you know?” Basil: “I know...” [voice drops] “I just feel constantly violated.... even if they say nothing.”

Ahab, the youngest and smallest in our group, at age 12, joined our conversation with a whisper, “I don’t like it either when people think me, or my father, is going to throw a bomb.”

Survey data also confirmed the everyday experiences of discrimination and its implications for the youth. Specifically, 84.3 percent of the survey participants (59 out of 70) reported that they have experienced discrimination because of their religion or ethnicity during the past year, either at school, on the playground, while shopping, on the street, or in other public settings. Eight of the youth in the survey sample, 4 girls and 4 boys, reported experiences of daily discrimination. We also observed a developmental trend in perceived discrimination. There was a significant correlation between participants’ age and their worries ($r = .27, p < .01$). The older they were and/or the longer they had been in the U.S., the more

likely they were to perceive more discrimination due to their religious and ethnic backgrounds.

When dealing with peers the assaults and fears were relentless, particularly for the young men. As one young man, Zeki, age 18 spoke of playing football with neighbors in his new “White” neighborhood (Clifton, “new city”) and was shocked to be called “Palestinian” (he is Syrian). He was told “Go back to where you came from!” In his more integrated community in Patterson (which he refers to as a “ghetto”), he felt embraced by young men of color, “brothers who know what it is like.” There he believes youth subscribe to the lyrics of the singer Jadakiss, “No more hating in the world.” But not in his working-class, “White” neighborhood, where the schools mandate an English-only policy. As he spoke, other young men in the group nodded their heads signaling they understood the kind of experiences Zeki was describing. In his map and discussion, Damascus is considered his home, and although the way he depicts this is vague and lacks detail (“where I’ve been so far”), his map of the depictions of family and buildings from Damascus appear tension-free.

(b) Negotiating Hyphenated Selves—A Gendered Journey

We examined survey data for possible gender differences. There was no statistically significant gender difference in the three study variables (e.g., discrimination, acculturation, and anxiety). In gender-specific correlational analyses, however, we found several important patterns. First, as can be seen in Table 2, there was a unique pattern in how discrimination was related to the acculturation and anxiety indicators. For boys, discrimination was significantly related to the indicators of acculturation, whereas for girls it was significantly related to anxiety. Specifically, for Muslim boys, discrimination was positively related to integration ($r = -.53, p < .01$), and not significantly related to any of the anxiety indicators. For Muslim girls, on the other hand, discrimination was not related to any of the acculturation indicators, but it was related to physiological ($r = .42,$

Table 2. Intercorrelations between scales for Females ($N = .38$) and Males ($N = .32$)^a

Measures	Mean	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5
1. Discrimination	1.67	.74	1–4.6		-.04	.42**	.32*	.26
2. Integration	4.19	1.79	0–8	-.53**		-.22	-.08	-.16
3. Physiological anxiety	2.88	1.98	0–9	.19	-.30		.56**	.59**
4. Worry anxiety	4.75	2.97	0–11	.12	-.19	.54**		.63**
5. Concentration anxiety	2.51	1.97	0–7	.33	-.34	.68**	.55**	–

^aCorrelations for females are on the right side of and correlations for males are on the left side of the diagonal matrix.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

$p < .01$) and worry anxiety ($r = .32, p < .05$). It seems that the more Muslim boys were integrated in social and cultural activities in *both* the mainstream U.S. culture *and* their home culture, the less likely they were to report discriminatory acts. For Muslim girls, however, their acculturation practices did not appear to be associated with their perception of discrimination at all. Rather, in girls, discrimination was related to their physiological anxiety and worries: the more they perceived being discriminated against, the more they felt physiologically anxious and worried.

To get a better sense of the role gender plays in the lives of Muslim American youth we turned to the qualitative data. Both boys and girls narrated a geographic sense of living in a vibrant but troubled diaspora. While all articulated complex hyphenated selves, the psychological labor of “working the hyphen” varied dramatically by gender. In our conversations with Muslim youth in the U.S., we heard stretchy connections, longings and commitments to both “home” country and the U.S. Although all of our participants articulated a sense of self across multiple worlds that are fracturing under their feet, they varied in their responses to this shift. The young men’s stories were streaked with a sense of despair and defeat, but also with, a strong romance with the idea of “peace at home.” A young boy, Malik, age 12, exemplifies this. When asked for his input on being a young Muslim during an all-men focus group session, he mumbled, “It’s just hard.” We probed him, but he was unwilling to elaborate. “Just hard.” The air was heavy, vacant of spoken words but filled with emotions, as was true so often in the boys’ group.

In marked contrast, the young women in the all-female group—all but two veiled—filled the air with a powerful sense of authority, protection, a mission to educate others, and a confident sense of their global “expertise.” Many of these young women mentioned times in school when everyone “turns to me, like about the war. Like I am supposed to educate them.” We asked if they mind being singled out as an authority. Most said that they didn’t mind, although they were a bit discomforted by the attention. Hadice, age 17, offered an elaborate retort:

“I guess it’s better that I educate them than they stay ignorant. I want to tell them there is more to know than just today, them alone, the mall, boys, music. I want to tell them to learn about what’s going on in the world. But they don’t watch the news or read the paper. I listen to CNN, Fox News, Al Jazeera, and French news every night. So maybe it’s best that I do answer their questions. There is a big world out there,

and I personally believe I am just one small dot in this world. There is something much bigger than any of us. I wish the American students understood that.”

Both boys and girls were equally frustrated by the absurdity of questions tossed their way (Are you a terrorist?, Why do you dress like that?, etc.), but the girls were, nevertheless, eager for others to “just ask me a question . . . don’t assume I’m gonna throw bombs . . . or I’m an uneducated woman!” They wanted the opportunity to share themselves, to teach, and to change minds.

The very gendered work at the hyphen was even more evident when we looked at the identity maps. Almost 90% of the young women (eight out of nine) designed maps that reflected fluid movement between being a Muslim and being an American. Independently, they generated maps that reveal an attempt to blend elements of their Muslim and American selves. In contrast, 70% of the young men (seven out of 10) designed “fractured” maps of conflict, tension, institutional and personal struggles with racism, white supremacy, U.S. aggression, and war.

As the two identity maps below reveal, (see Figures 1 and 2) Muslim American youth craft *hyphenated selves* in a sea of contested global relations and representations. *How* young people negotiate at the hyphen varies widely, and often by gender, class and type of schooling (public, religious, home schooling). What is common across all of these youth is that they all work the hyphen or “live at the hyphen.” Consider the map on Figure 1, created by Muhammed who, at age 14, humanizes what we heard from so many



Figure 1. *Split selves of a young Muslim boy.*

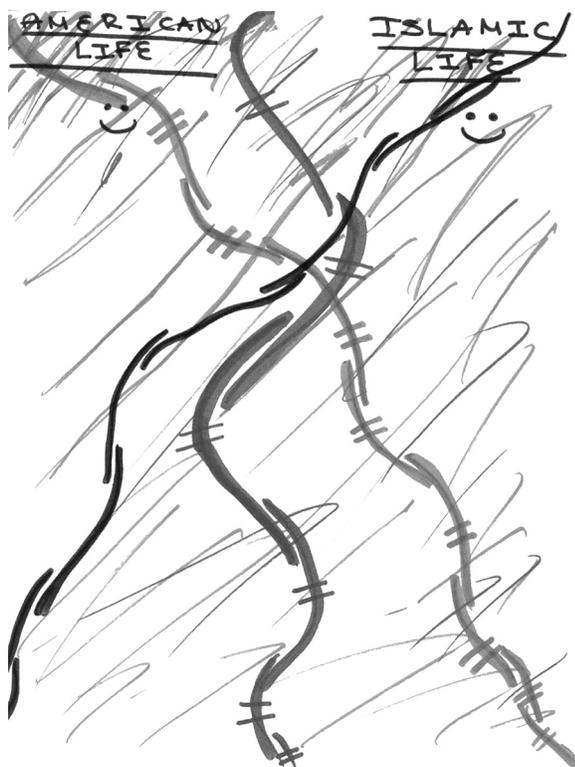


Figure 2. *Fluid selves of a young Muslim girl.*

of the young men we interviewed: the fractures of being Muslim and being American have seared him in half, filling him with “tears for racism,” a frown, a severed soul. Living with the haunting ghosts of “terrorist” looming around him, he, like so many young Muslim men, feels swallowed by a representation he can’t actively resist, lest he embody the hegemonic trope—young Muslim man filled with rage.

Selina, age 15, draws a distinct, yet equally powerful visual narrative of fluid selves—American and Islamic—at the hyphen (see Figure 2), voicing what so many of the young women told us. Actively refusing to separate the currents of Islam and America that move through the river of her body, yet still recognizing the distinct pools of water from which they gather, Selina insists on the psychological project of synthesis, a fluid sense of identity, rightfully claiming both currents at the same time, decorated with smiles and (in color) a beautiful blending of shades. Not at all naïve to the flood of stereotypes held about Muslim women as uneducated, oppressed or dupes of religion, she explained in our focus group that she looks for ways to educate those who stereotype and “don’t know any better.” To resist the trope of “oppressed woman,” the young women exhibit strength, authority and confidence in re-presenting themselves,

their families and their community as they see it, in their own terms.

Particularly during the all-female focus group session, young women also spoke a great deal about veiling, their reasons to cover or not to cover their hair and the constant questions they get for their choices. Hadice, the veiled 17-year-old, has described this situation eloquently: “I finally figured out what to tell people about the Hijab. I wear it like a bicyclist wears a bike helmet. It protects me from danger, and it gives me the freedom to wander where I dare not without it. Then they leave me alone!” Filled with confidence and wonder, the young women, ages 13 to 17, voiced concern that “people are afraid to talk to me because I wear the Hijab.” Nevertheless, they seek contact with a larger world, eager to tell their peers, “Yes we shower!” “No we don’t swim in Hijab!” “It’s not that my parents won’t let me go to the dance, I don’t want to go!” “We use cell phones, and can tuck them in, hands free!”

In contrast, in our discussions with the young men, hyphenated selves were splintered with the weight of the world; split open with the searing knife of global conflict. As Muhammed and Jabor articulate in their identity maps, so many of the young men view the U.S. as an oppressive force on their souls (“get rich,” war, country sucks). Some wax eloquent with a mystifying romance (“wanna go home”) to return to their “homelands of peace.” This is despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of the participants were born in the U.S. and have very limited, if any, real life experiences outside of the U.S.

Adamant about the splits between the U.S. and “Muslim countries,” Hasim, age 15, wrote on his map, under U.S.A.: “People are accused of some terrorist attacks that did not even happen, and taken action against them. Muslims [in the U.S.] are hated and discriminated against because of something probably (sic) one person did and all have to pay back for it. [The U.S.A. is] Land of opportunity, rich, war, get drafted, and die.” On the other side of his map, the heading reads “Muslims in other Countries” and under that is written: “People are accused but are not hurt or no action is taken against them. Muslims love each other and take care of each other. Land of peace.”

Similarly, Ahmed, age 16, provided text on his map: “[In] Pakistan and other Muslim states, they teach us to pray and put our belief in god and follow the Islamic law. And teach us to prohibit fighting (sic).” Under “America” he writes, “We get blamed and pushed around for something we didn’t (sic) do.”

Torn between the land where they live and feel persecuted, and a strong imaginary ideal of peace

abroad, these young men carry global conflict in their bellies. Taunted often at school and on the street, they try to prove the stereotype wrong and in turn struggle to contain their anger, their rage, and to not fight back. Usually they succeed. Sometimes they do not. Either way, the price seems to be a looming sense of despair, an itching desire for some to go back “home,” coupled with a fierce, if justified, anger at the U.S. for some of the young men.

(c) Dealing With the Weight of the Hyphen

Despite high incidences of discrimination, most youth in the study indicated that they did not accept discrimination as a fact of life. Approximately, 70% of the participants (49 out of 70) who took the survey reported that they try to do something about such unfair treatment. Interestingly, the youth who try to do something about discrimination tend to have very different experiences than those youth who accept discrimination as a fact of life. Specifically, those who try to do something about discrimination reported significantly fewer incidences of religious and ethnic discrimination than those who did not, $M = 1.54$, $SD = .59$ versus $M = 1.96$, $SD = .95$, $t = 2.26$, $p < .05$. More importantly, young people who resisted discrimination also appeared to be significantly less worried compared to their counterparts who accepted discrimination as a fact of life, $M = 6.35$, $SD = 3.07$ versus $M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.81$, $t = 3.1$, $p < .01$. In other words, youth who accepted discriminatory treatment as a fact of life reported more discrimination and more anxiety. It is not clear whether the internal coping style changes the perception of discrimination, or whether the experience of discrimination shapes the coping style. It may be that because youth who tend to internalize their experiences and feel helpless (it is a fact of life) are more sensitive to discrimination and experience more anxiety than youth who cope by taking a more active approach. It is also possible that young people who experience more discrimination might be more likely to adopt the belief that it is a fact of life, while youth who experience less discrimination might have more confidence when they do encounter it.

Following up these survey results in focus group sessions, we asked the youth who they turn to when they are treated badly because of their Muslim background. Most of them admitted in surprising unison: “I don’t really tell my parents. They have enough to contend with.” Another boy added just as much: “[I] tell nobody . . . because I don’t want to upset my parents, they have too much to deal with, and if I tell my teachers, I can get in big

trouble. So I work it out myself.” When we specifically asked whether they turned to their non-Muslim friends, only one boy believed that his “non-Muslim buddies” would understand and defend him. As one young man, age 13, explained, with a kind of fatalism about how to deal with discrimination:

“Yeah, basically, my opinion on the whole thing is that wherever you are and wherever you go, you’re always going to face racism. So, basically, the only thing you have with you is your faith and you have to have a strong faith in God, and you have to have humility and humbleness among other people, and God will help you and you’ll start gaining respect from other people for it.”

Salma, age 16, points out another aspect of parent-child support when it comes to being Muslim in the U.S. Originally from Macedonia, her father works in the food industry at a major hotel. Importing a long and deep history of hiding his Muslim identity, at the hotel he remains silent about his ethnic and religious commitments. Asked by the hotel chef to ‘taste’ a new chicken dish dipped in wine, he politely refused and later told his family that he told the chef he was “allergic to chicken.” Salma laughed, “Dad, this is America. You can say you are Muslim and you don’t drink wine.” And then turning to the focus group, she continued, “My parents hide everything but we’re free here.” Protecting parents from knowledge of persistent discrimination and “parenting parents” about U.S. ways of life appear to be two of the related labors of adolescent hyphenated selves.

In the focus group discussions, we also witnessed the practices of intra-group policing, in response to the growing outside pressures, about being Muslim in the U.S., with young people separating “good Muslims” from “bad” ones. Cennet, a 15-year-old nonreligious Muslim girl, who does not wear Hijab but “practices all the religious traditions,” told the group, “I feel like *the bad Muslim girl*. The aunties—mothers of her Muslim friends—see me as the corrupt one because I talk to boys. They think I’m loose or going to get pregnant or something.” As she spoke, her friend Selina, age 15, much more devout, but also without Hijab, explained: “I feel like I want to be pure Muslim inside but I don’t have to wear Hijab to show that.” Another young woman, Ima, age 18, who was the only non-veiled female in the mixed-gender group, simply justified her flowing hair by saying, “I’m just not mature enough. I have to be honest, I love movies, and makeup, and the mall. I swear I’m going to wear Hijab, but I’m not mature enough. And (giggling)

I really like my hair.” All three of these young women in both groups felt that they needed to justify their obvious decision not to wear Hijab. In fact, in the all-female group, the two young women who did *not* wear Hijab seemed a bit worried about being judged by other Muslim American women and offered stories of veiled cousins who could have been placed in the “bad Muslim” basket.

Islam sets very different standards for girls and boys ranging from the way they can dress to the way they can socialize, and we could certainly hear Muslim youth feeling the press for standard setting and enforcement, especially for how Muslim females should behave and dress. For example, Hadice, a 17-year-old daughter of a Euro-American Muslim mother, challenged her Syrian father when she wanted to visit a mosque in Damascus (only men were permitted to enter the mosque during regular times there). Clear in her justification, she did not understand why her father, who is open-minded and Western educated, did not side with her in breaking the sexist (or “cultural” as she put it) barriers. In another example, Melek, experienced another challenge of diversity in her community—frustration with inconsistencies in head covering and dress codes among Muslim women. She told the focus group members, “I used to be the only, really the only Muslim girl in my school but now another girl came, and she wears Hijab but she takes it off for gym!!! And I just got finished telling everyone that we don’t take Hijab off in public! I really hate that!”

Discussion

The results of surveys, focus group interviews, and identity maps highlight a wisdom born of social oppression—gathered too young. These young U.S. citizens anticipate the onslaught of misrepresentations, delight in the [rare] goodness of strangers and remain buoyed by the Koran, structured spiritual and religious beliefs, strong commitments to culture, religion and ritual. On the one hand, these youth pay the price of a global conflict through humiliation and mistreatment, on the other hand, many participants also seemed to reject discrimination and tried to do something about it, mostly on their own and sometimes by tightening the lens of their own internal judgments about what is and what is not a “good Muslim.”

Overall, young men and women did not differ in terms of their perceived discrimination, acculturation practices, and anxieties, but the ways in which they negotiated their identities was quite different. On the one hand, Muslim young men see

and live in a much more fractured world where they perceive “Muslim” and “American” as two, almost contradictory parts of their hyphenated selves. Even when they may have experienced less discrimination by integrating in both worlds, they seemed to still feel “split” between immersing in their home culture and integrating in both cultures. Partly as a result of the complex nature of their identity formation process, we observed much more anger and frustration, more silences and even a sense of hopelessness in the all-male group. These findings parallel what Hopkins (2004) observed among young Muslim men who live in Scotland. Research with other immigrant youth also confirms our finding that immigrant girls appear to have more flexibility to embrace hyphenated, bi-cultural identities than immigrant boys in the U.S. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 1999).

On the other hand, young Muslim women see and live in a much more fluid, intertwined world where “Muslim” and “American” are not two contradictory influences on their identity, but are rather complementary “currents,” each offering its own opportunities and challenges. The young women seem to have gained more freedom in the U.S. to choose their own path in terms of their religious practices, educational goals, and career expectations. They see both of these worlds as equally important parts of their identity, as illustrated in Aisha’s picture where two rivers become one. This, however, does not mean that they do not struggle with the same set of issues as their male counterparts. Rather, the young women seem to feel more empowered than their male peers to take the best of what both worlds have to offer. They walk under the shadow of the stereotype of the “oppressed woman” because of their choice to wear Hijab, but they also recognize that in the U.S. they are *choosing* to wear it, and, hence, they feel empowered by their choice itself. In addition, the young women voice a skeptical but also romantic view of the freedoms available to women in the U.S.

While one would expect that Muslim girls who are veiled, and therefore more visible, to have a more difficult path than [relatively invisible] Muslim boys, young women in our sample helped us understand what, initially, seemed like an anomaly. For many of the young women, the U.S. offers a questionable but desirous freedom, a deep sense of power and the opportunity for young women to engage Islam without fear of repercussion. These young women spoke as if in a chorus of women about the liberties available in the U.S., the “fluidity” of their hyphenated selves, the authority and power they carry and

the strength of education, religion and peace. Still, these young women do worry about the fragility of the world that they live in, as is evident in their elevated salience of anxiety in relation to perceived discrimination. It appears, however, that although they experience anxiety, their mode of coping is to draw on their inner sense of conviction and to reach out to teach. While so many of the young men in our sample come to see themselves as homeless or displaced, most of the young women present themselves as transnational, or belonging to multiple places as citizens of the world.

Documented in the surveys, narrated in the interviews, and drawn into their identity maps, Muslim American youth in the present study vividly portray their interior lives, post 9/11, as a dialectic labor of psychological reconciliation—piecing together what we call *hyphenated selves*. As if they had read George Herbert Mead (1934), Edward Said (1978) or Gayatri Spivak (1987), these young people describe daily walks to school, on the streets, at the mall, in the library, on the bus, escorted by the specter of *terrorist* (for boys) and *oppressed/uneducated* (for girls). Walking in the shadow of the Other (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1987), they are forced to contend with the press of media produced and socially legitimated (mis)representations (Bhabha, 2005; Deaux & Philogone, 2001; Gordon, 1997; Moscovici, 1984).

On September 12, 2001, Muslim-American youth found themselves evicted from the moral community of psychological citizenship in the U.S. (Opatow, 2004) and, as Homi Bhabha (2005) described, "... amongst those whose very presence is both 'over-looked'—in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal—and, at the same time, overdetermined—psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic." (13). From that point forward, maybe before and certainly after, these young people experienced a relentless undertow of challenges to their psychological well-being, social relations and public life. These youth were placed at once under intense surveillance and rendered fundamentally invisible as human, critical, engaged citizens. In a stew of distorted representations and high-stake threats to citizenship, these young people find themselves living in the new 'world,' but now as outsiders within (Collins, 1990). They deal with a considerable degree of discrimination in the larger society as well as intergenerational tensions at home and within the community, and, sometimes, enjoy a proud sense of their global expertise.

We heard young women and men in our sample reference relatives who were "not good Muslims." Mimicking what happens from the outside, the gaze glides across bodies, within the borders of

the group. There is, perhaps, no age cohort more attuned than adolescents to comment upon, and re-enact the judgments made from the outside and from within. Indeed, teens are terrific radar stations for the beams of conformity, resistance, and what constitutes transgression. It is predictable that a marginalized group, under siege and under surveillance, like Muslim Americans post 9/11, is not only judged routinely but learns to judge itself, to engage in what Cohen (1999) calls self-policing. As they challenge the external hegemonic gaze, they tighten the lens of their own internal judgments. Foucault (1997) also writes on the panopticon as a dynamic of profound, pervasive and penetrating institutional surveillance, a social prison, where all are witnessed, judged and watched, and soon all learn to watch themselves and watch others. This dynamic of oppressed groups suffering under surveillance, and turning around to survey themselves, has a long and painful history which doubles for the history of coercion and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). As in the Panopticon, the young people in our focus groups feel preyed upon visually, "violated" as one young man told us, watched and under surveillance. Over and over in our focus groups young people reiterated, "Don't judge a book by its cover." "Don't judge us. We are not who you think we are." "Ask us questions and find out!" And yet, from outside the group and also within, accusations and judgments proliferate.

Conclusions

The present study provides findings from a mixed method, exploratory study focusing on Muslim American youth living in the New York metropolitan area. We believe that our findings, although preliminary, highlight important patterns, themes, and even some explanations for how Muslim youth deal with historical, cultural, and global challenges that create a difficult context for their identity formation process. While all of the youth identify as Muslim American, and this study was designed to understand that particular identity, our collapsing of youth across country of origin, class, neighborhood, and immigrant generation should not be read as an essentializing of the group. This work lifts up and complicates the concept of *hyphenated selves*, which could be theorized and tested in any variety of political/ethnic minority groups. The research further reveals how cultures form and reform in context; how culture must be studied in relation to history, questions of power, class and gender. From the young people we learn that in the cultural spaces

of contention and compliance, among youth and across generations, culture is made, and remade, in the prayers, around the dining room table, in schools and gym class, and in the midst of family arguments.

Finally, the evidence gathered here suggests that government policies, social relationships and media representations fundamentally affect youth development, although the trajectories may be hard to see empirically, and will vary by gender, community and context. Mixed methods in this exploratory study allowed us to begin to theorize the webs of influence and reciprocity that connect youth to adults, everyday life to government policy, marginalized communities to the very core of U.S. values, and state policy to the terrified souls of youth. Psychology may, indeed, be at its most useful in illuminating these strings that connect, so that we may design social conditions in which positive youth development and aspirations flourish in contexts supportive of democratic participation and respect for differences.

Future Research

We see this study as an opening for future research that can address many of the issues raised in this study. There are several areas that need further work. First, given the size of the sample we could not more directly test how gender mediates (or moderates) the identity formation process with our survey data. Although correlational analyses provided initial evidence for the critical role gender plays in lives of these youth, future studies should more directly test this assumption concurrently with both survey and qualitative data.

Second, although we used several surveys, some of which are reported here, we found several important problems with the validity of these measures for Muslim youth. Despite satisfactory internal consistency levels, we suspect that some of the themes that emerged from focus group sessions and identity maps should be used as a building block for future survey studies with this population. Since this is an under-studied population, it is possible that many of the quantitative measures available are not capable of capturing important aspects of their lives. Furthermore, strong themes emerged in the focus groups that we simply could not capture quantitatively. Thus, the qualitative work should act as a means for establishing a knowledge base about this population. As this knowledge base grows, we can gain insight into how to adapt existing measures, or to create new measures, that are valid with this group. For example, although our qualitative data shows a very clear gender difference in how young people

perceived and dealt with discrimination, there were few gender differences found in the quantitative data. We need culturally validated survey measures to better understand how Muslim youth negotiate their identities across contexts.

Third, we found that some of our assumptions about gender differences were inaccurate, and more research is needed to better understand how young men and women negotiate their identities. Contrary to our expectations, young women showed strength and an empowered desire to educate others, rather than fitting into a stereotype of the oppressed, Muslim woman, while boys appeared to be struggling in their efforts to claim their Muslim-American identity. Muslim-American women bring a lot of resources to their identity formation process. At this point we do not know the source of this gendered pattern but one possibility is the unique challenges of hyphenated selves for young men and women. While being a Muslim in America may bring up the status of women it may act in just the opposite way for the young men, taking away some of the privileges taken for granted in their home cultures. As the “hyphen” provides girls with more privilege to pursue education and to educate others, as well as the choice of practicing their religion on terms similar to Muslim men, being Muslim in the U.S. may take some power away from men. Thus, given the gendered nature of the patterns that emerged in focus group interviews and on identity maps, future research in general, and survey research in particular, must find ways to test this and other assumptions in order to explain why and how gender emerges as an important marker for this particular population.

Finally, the finding with regard to age is important to note for future studies. It was found that as the young men and women get older their perception of discrimination also increased significantly. Given both the cross-sectional and correlational nature of this data we did not elaborate about this particular finding, but we believe there are important developmental processes that these youth go through and which can only be truly captured via a longitudinal study. For example, in Hopkins' (2004) study, focusing on an older group of young Muslim men, ages 16–25, physical markers (i.e., dress, having a beard, or darker skin color) mediated their acculturation and perceived discrimination. Given the limitations of the present study we could not verify such an effect but suspect that those young men visibly appear “Muslim” may have somewhat different experiences in the U.S. than those who can “pass.” Thus, future studies should employ longitudinal methods

to capture unique developmental trajectories of Muslim young men and women. This will allow researchers to better understand important shifts and transitions in how Muslim youth negotiate their identity across contexts.

Although attitudes toward Muslims have long been tinged with disparagement, in the U.S. there is ample evidence that the events on and after 9/11 have created a sea change in how Muslims are perceived both globally and in the U.S. In this changed context, we do not know what the future holds for this particular group, but what is evident in our data was the urgent need to learn more. We hope that our study serves as a vehicle to open up the dialogue about both the vitality and the variability of research on Muslim youth in the U.S.

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