

The Impact of September 11th on Arab-American Youth

Reem Sabha

Mentor: Dr. Karam Dana

Introduction: The September 11th terrorist attacks altered the way in which nations and citizens interacted with each other. The United States, and its citizens, were forced to confront a new reality: the manners in which governmental institutions and individual citizens went about recovering from the attacks, however, did not always manifest itself positively. International and domestic policies reflected a renewed fear of individuals who could not be classified as a ‘typical American’ or ‘typical Westerner,’ leading to hostility, suspicion, and tension between the mainstream and minorities. The government’s main goal, after the attacks, was to combat terrorism, yet the definition of terrorism was left broadly open, allowing stereotypes to take form and to instill fear in the general populace. Sweeping generalizations were constructed about who the terrorists were, leading to hasty conclusions and suspicion among individual citizens. In particular, the Arab-American community suffered from those generalizations, as Arab-Americans were scrutinized and questioned, subjected to hostility, and discriminated against. The September 11th attacks solidified pre-existing negative stereotypes of Arab-Americans (Cainkar), exacerbating the tension. An entire generation of young Arab-Americans grew up during this confusing and turbulent time, which extends to the present day.

The post-9/11 landscape therefore presented a unique challenge to Arab-American youth in terms of forming their identity. The response to September 11th was overwhelmingly divisive, drawing a clear boundary between the concept of being an Arab and being an American. Within this divisive atmosphere, Arab-American youth had to cultivate an identity that incorporated both cultures simultaneously, with varying rates of success. In addition, the response to September 11th involved changes across the board: in domestic policy, international relations, education, and social relations. Every aspect of life was altered by the suspicion, fear, and hostility that spread rampantly after the attacks. Despite the overwhelming amount of media

coverage on Arab-Americans, there is an astonishing lack of awareness regarding the issues that Arab-Americans, especially Arab-American youth, confront on a daily basis. Arab-Americans are represented only by their potential connection to terrorist activities domestically or abroad—they are rarely shown in a positive light, and their identity is tied to foreign policy (Said). Arab-Americans are mostly depicted on the defensive, issuing statements condemning terrorist attacks and attempting to deflect hostility or accusations of conspiring with the perpetrators; mainstream media rarely comments on the discrimination Arab-Americans are subjected to or the difficulties they face in attempting to integrate into society.

Arab-American youth are particularly underserved by society. What little research that has been done regarding Arab-American life post 9/11 focuses on Arab-American adults and the experiences of first generation Arab-Americans. There are very few examples of scholarly research specifically dealing with Arab-American children growing up in a politically tense, ethnically divided nation. Post-9/11 foreign policy expanded the United States' involvement in the Middle East, creating a difficult situation for Arab-Americans who identified both with the United States and with the "homeland" (Naber, Suleiman). In addition, new domestic policies expanded the scope of internal policing, creating the perception that Arab-American individuals were now under greater scrutiny by investigative forces. These factors add complexity to the process of growing up for Arab-American youth, as they were forced to confront political, social and religious divides in society as a whole at a much younger age than normally expected (Wray-Lake). Arab-American youth had to be cognizant that their individual identities were tied to the United States' imperialistic aims and the overarching focus on combatting terrorism.

I explored the impact of September 11th on Arab-American youth and their identity, specifically focusing on college students at the University of Washington, a public four-year

institution in Seattle (with branches in Tacoma and Bothell). The choice of University of Washington students was deliberate as it allowed me to investigate local and national realities simultaneously. The University of Washington is located in a relatively diverse large city; the institution itself is large and diverse in terms of student population. In addition, the university is known for its liberal, open-minded and tolerant environment. College campuses are generally viewed as safe places for individuals who are of a minority background; however, the recent murders of Arab-American Muslim UNC Chapel Hill students living close to that campus undermines that assumption. An examination of the resources available to Arab-American University of Washington students reveal that there are few formal support systems specifically for Arab-Americans. While other ethnic groups have commissions, scholarships, and on-campus organizations tailored specifically for their needs, Arab-American University of Washington students have few formal registered student organizations to choose from, and no scholarship or commissions specifically for them. The lack of Arab-American-tailored organizations at the University of Washington may indicate a general lack of support for Arab-American college students at other institutions. However, there are significant difficulties in attempting to gauge the level of support offered to Arab-Americans, especially since Arab-American students are classified as racially white, which masks the fact that they have “ethnic” problems. The question of identity is inextricably tied to solving issues facing Arab-Americans, as identity “signals the way in which a person understands her or his relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton). Identity shapes Arab-American perceptions of their environment while their environment shapes them, and how Arab-Americans construct their identities are key aspects of their future plans.

Given the state of political and social affairs post 9/11, I hypothesized that Arab-American youth faced challenges that youth from other ethnicities did not have to deal with; these challenges took multiple, intersecting forms, and often compounded on each other. Arab-American youth would have difficulties integrating into society due to hostility from non-Arab-Americans, as well as the perception that they were not really “American.” In addition, negative media portrayals of Arabs and Arab-Americans would force Arab-American youth to question their Arab heritage and identity. Therefore, Arab-American youth would have to grapple both with the concept of “being an American” and “being an Arab,” interpreting and incorporating both cultures into a cohesive identity. Furthermore, I hypothesized that these overarching questions of identity would continue to color Arab-American college students’ experiences on campus, and that supposedly liberal and tolerant institutions have yet to reach out to Arab-American students and make their presence on campus known. It is important to note that for Arab-American youth, the world after September 11th is the only world that they know: they were too young to remember the world before September 11th. Therefore, growing up Arab-American after September 11th, for these youth, is equivalent to simply growing up: September 11th was a reality that had to be dealt with in the present. There is no notion of pre-September 11th life and post-September 11th life: growing up Arab-American for these youth is completely tied to September 11th.

Examining the impact of September 11th on Arab-American youth is a difficult task given the complex nature of the subject population and their experiences. Firstly, there is no general consensus on what it means to be an Arab-American. The dictionary definition of Arab-American states: “a citizen or resident of the United States of Arab birth or descent.” Within this ambiguous and wide definition, there may be individuals who would technically be considered

Arab-American, but for some reason, do not identify as such. These reasons could include removal from Arab culture, an unwillingness to identify with Arab culture, or fear of outwardly identifying as such. Individuals who grow up in extremely assimilated homes, with little preservation of Arab cultural values, are not likely to identify with the culture of their relatives or ancestors. Some individuals may cast off their Arab heritage in order to assimilate or escape perceived discrimination—they may fear social or political consequences if they actively identify with Arab culture. Still others may inwardly identify as Arab-American, but will not admit to others outside the Arab-American social circle out of fear that they will be discriminated against.

The hyphenated nature of Arab-American identity points to additional complexities in attempting to describe general trends. A hyphen denotes “identities that are at once joined, and separated, by history” (Sirin). An Arab-American identity requires negotiation between two cultures, each with their own set of values, norms, and histories—often, those histories collide in conflicting manners, as ‘Western’ imperialism in the Middle East did. Negotiating two identities is itself a difficult task, as the two cultures could be perceived as operating against each other, especially among youth who do not understand the nuances of each culture. Furthermore, the mainstream view of the Arab world is one that is inherently opposite that of Western civilization—barbaric, backwards, and oppressive (Asani, Said). There is little discussion of the similarities between the two cultures; instead, there is a pervasive view that a “clash of civilizations” is underway (Lewis, Said).

Furthermore, the list of factors that potentially need negotiating is lengthy and heavy in terms of subject matter. Arab-American youth may be forced to interpret and synthesize conflicting information from institutional sources (the media, the government, schools) and from others in society about what “Arab” and “American” culture mean. The influence of the media,

stereotypes, culture, gender, and religion in the post-9/11 world compound to create a confusing and conflicting world for Arab-American youth attempting to negotiate a bicultural young adulthood. These factors stack on top of other challenges that youth face growing up, including the overarching concern of being considered an “outsider.” For Arab-American youth, these factors carry through to the university level, where a lack of support from institutions reinforces the lack of importance attached to Arab-American issues, contributing to the increasing sense of distance and marginalization between Arab-Americans and the rest of society. Arab-American youth are forced to confront large-scale realities with little understanding or support from the mainstream, adding to the turbulence that they experience growing up.

Background: Previous research on the topic of Arab-Americans focuses mainly on Arab-American adults attempting to integrate into society and deal with discrimination and hostility. September 11th, then, is mainly a continuation of patterns already in formation before the attacks (Abraham, Cainkar). These scholarly sources focus on Arab-Americans as a whole, differentiating between age groups only in a few instances. The impact of the post-9/11 landscape on Arab-American youth focuses solely on their experiences in primary education and does not carry over to the university level. Furthermore, the subjects of prior research live in areas that have had traditionally large communities of Arab-Americans, such as Dearborn, Michigan. My research therefore can be differentiated from other scholarly sources in that I am examining Arab-American university students at a four-year public university in a relatively liberal and diverse city. I seek to understand how the response to September 11th affected these college students as they were growing up, and also how those experiences continue to shape their lives in college. The examination of being Arab-American in college is of particular importance because there is a pervasive general assumption that all groups are equally welcome at college

campuses. However, college campuses are not immune to negative attitudes towards people portrayed as “the other” by mainstream forces.

In my examination of what it means to be Arab-American today, I will continue to rely on the framework established by other researchers with regards to Arab-Americans. From prior research, I have pulled four main themes that pertain to my specific project and appear to be general points of congruency across sources. The first is the complex meaning of identity: how Arab-Americans identify themselves, how they define their culture, and how outsiders to the community define them. The second broad theme is the divisive and hypocritical role of gender in creating divisions between “American” culture and “Arab” culture. The third commonality is the ambiguous role of religion in Arab-American life: religion serves as a cohesive force in the Arab-American community but is ultimately more divisive than differences in ethnicity. Religion and gender appear to be the greatest factors contributing to different experiences within the Arab-American community. The final theme is the complex role of politics and how international policies reflect and affect Arab-Americans domestically. It is important to note that all of these themes intertwine and connect back to the overarching issue of integration into “American” society. While I will attempt to deal with these themes individually in order to extract their particular relevance, the interplay between all four categories contributes to the complexity of the Arab-American experience.

Before beginning the discussion of themes, however, it is imperative to understand the demographics of the Arab-American population. According to the Arab-American Institute, there are between 1.9 and 3.5 million Arab-Americans, mostly in California, Michigan, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The general consensus is that the Arab-American population is severely undercounted because the Census Bureau

identifies “Arab” only through the “ancestry” section of census long form; Arab-Americans, according to the government, are considered white. The majority of Arab-Americans are of Lebanese or Egyptian descent, although the wars in Iraq and Syria have dramatically increased the number of Iraqi and Syrian Arab-Americans. The majority of Arab-Americans are Christian, although Arab-American Muslims are the fastest growing segment. Arab-Americans tend to have higher than average median incomes and higher than average education levels. In Washington state, the census count places the Arab-American population at about 20,000 (based on data from 2005-2009), although the Arab-American Institute believes it is closer to 60,000. Similar to the national trend, the majority of Arab-Americans in Washington are of Lebanese or Egyptian descent, although the number of Arab-Americans of Iraqi or Sudanese descent is increasing. The county with the largest Arab-American population is King County, where the University of Washington is located (“Demographics”).

Identity: The question of identity deals first and foremost with classifications: how do people label themselves? Identity is heavily shaped by government policies, media images, social interaction, and social definitions. In addition, the patterns of identification among Arab-Americans can vary greatly when culture is not separated from religion. Within the Arab-American youth population, there exists a discrepancy between other’s perceptions of Arab-Americans and the view generally accepted by the Arab-American community. Firstly, there is the fact that Arab-Americans are officially classified as “white” or “Caucasian” by the federal government; however, most Arab-Americans do not consider themselves to be “white” because they are denied most of the privileges associated with that classification (Naber). Some Arab-Americans are able to fit into the classification that the federal government has created, but for most Arab-American Muslims, a “racialization of religion” prevents them from fitting neatly into

that classification (Naber). The media's impact on Arab-American youth has been significant on some subsets of the population. Arab-American youth are more likely to believe that they are labeled as "the enemy" by the media; furthermore, young Arab-American Muslim men are more likely to report a "fractured identity" (Sirin, Wray-Lake). While young Arab-American Muslim women attempt to link all aspects of their identity together, young Arab-American Muslim men view the different parts of their identities as separate (Sirin).

Due to the schism between how Arab-Americans view themselves and how the media and the government view them, Arab-Americans find themselves in a precarious condition with regards to political identity and nationalism. The domestic environment is negative, keeping Arab-Americans away from politics; this is manifested in the fact that there is little leadership to rely on, no media support, no protection from FBI investigations, and a widespread fear of being labeled anti-American or anti-Semitic. The concept of "imperative patriotism," that dissent in matters of governance or foreign affairs is unpatriotic, limits Arab-American involvement (Salaita). This is especially true if Arab-Americans hold political views that are contrary to the government's official line of business, such as the question of Palestine and the war in Iraq. During WWII, Japanese-Americans voluntarily committed themselves to the internment camps, as they believed that a patriotic performance would dispel accusations of disloyalty—the voluntary relocations "interpolated Japanese Americans into a mode of patriotic civic subjectivity that legitimized the negation of their civil rights" (Chambers-Letson). In a similar fashion, Arab-Americans may silence themselves about political issues in order to demonstrate a sense of patriotism, in the process negating their rights to free speech.

In addition to external forces shaping Arab-American identity, the community's values itself create a complex culture that can be distinguished from both Arab and American cultural

values. First, there is the matter of differing national identities and religious allegiances. Arab-Americans may identify with any one of the twenty-two Arab nations and feel more Saudi-American than Arab-American, for example. Others may identify with a pan-Arab identity. Some may even go so far and believe in a pan-Muslim identity; for these Arab-Americans, being Muslim comes first, Arab second (Naber). Within this blend of different nations and religions, a blanket “Arab-American” culture emerges, one that is an idealized concept “of Arab culture best understood as cultural sensibilities that become entangled in transnational modalities of power” (Naber). Arab-American culture, then, depends on maintaining relationships with the homeland, the state of U.S. politics in the Middle East, and local conditions (Naber).

Within the Arab-American community, self-Orientalism is also a mechanism that shapes identity formation, specifically with regards to drawing clear-cut distinctions between Arabs and Americans. The majority of these distinctions, interestingly, arise out of differences between how Arab girls behave and how American girls behave. These distinctions, therefore, arise out of arbitrary and highly subjective applications of the terms “Arab” and “American”—the Arab-American cultural standards when it comes to females is often more conservative than the cultural norms of the homeland (Naber). Arab-American self-Orientalism exacerbates the gulf between them and the rest of society, and in some instances almost legitimizes the Orientalist discourse that the majority white society uses to characterize Arab-Americans (specifically the stereotype that Arabs restrict females in all aspects of their lives).

Gender: The question of gender factors into any discussion of identity, irrespective of ethnic group. The gender dynamics of Arab-American culture reveal the influence of stereotypes and the tension of retaining traditional cultural values. Arab-Americans are viewed from the rest of society through an Orientalist lens that differentiates between Arabs and Americans in terms of

gender. At the same time, however, Arab-Americans differentiate themselves from the rest of society through their interpretation of gender relations.

The dominant, Orientalist view of Arab-Americans portrays Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim women as oppressed or absent from society—note that the terms Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim are almost always conflated by the mainstream media (Naber). Islam is a particularly heavy factor that plays into perceptions of Arab-American women. Muslim women are viewed as a “threat to Western cultural values,” and in “constant peril from Muslim men.” Perceptions of the hijab are manifestations of the racialization of religion—the hijab is a sign of otherness, of being anti-feminist and anti-Western (Selod). The hijab is not respected to the same degree as other religious identifiers—it appears that “American Muslim women receive the brunt of American rage” if they choose to wear the hijab (McCloud).

Arab-Americans themselves describe differences between themselves and mainstream American culture largely in terms of gender. Gender relations are typically based on degree of religiosity and ethnicity than religion—patterns of gender relations are not unique to Muslim Arab-Americans. Previous studies of Arab-Americans suggests that differences between Arabs and Americans unfold “almost exclusively through perceptions of white girls” (Ajrouch). Arab immigrants’ reversal of Orientalism relies on young women’s bodies as “key signifiers” between Arab and American stereotypes; in addition, there is the added cultural perception that a daughter’s rebellion against Arab culture is a loss to “al Amerikan” (Naber). The use of gender as a divisive tool outwardly appears to reinforce the stereotype that Arab culture is inherently unequal. At the same time that Arab-Americans are actively attempting to defeat this stereotype, they are reinforcing it with this division between Arabs and Americans that is largely based on how women act.

Religion: Although most Arab-Americans are currently Christians, the rapid increase in the number of Muslim Arab-Americans warrants a particular focus on the way that Islam is perceived in America—especially since the media’s attitude towards Arab-Americans is one of disdain and fear because of the false belief that all Arab-Americans are Muslims. Said notes that Islam has been “made to cover everything that one most disproves of”—many events and ideas have been reduced to one term—Islam—and the connotations are overwhelmingly negative (Said). There are clear differences between the experiences of Arab-American Christians and Arab-American Muslims; the role of religion in determining if one is accepted by society appears to be significant. Christian Arab-Americans may be able to use their Christian identity “as a bridge to the American mainstream;” Christian Arabs have a “greater latitude than Muslims in choosing their racial and ethnic identities.” Christian Arab-Americans appear to be more assimilated into American culture, and are more likely to report that others consider them white (Read). Of Arab-American immigrants who are considered to have a high degree of “dominant society immersion” (immersion into the predominately white society of the United States), Muslim Arab-Americans report higher levels of discrimination than Christian Arab-Americans, suggesting that Christian Arab-Americans can leverage their religious similarities to the majority white culture (Joseph).

Differences in discrimination between Christian Arab-Americans and Muslim Arab-Americans can be explained in terms of acculturation stress, and the “racialization of religion” (Naber). Acculturation, according to John Berry, can be viewed as the “multifaceted process of change that occurs when at least two cultures come into sustained contact with one another” (Awad). Acculturation stress, therefore, is the “distress experienced by individuals when the demands imposed on them during the acculturation process are too challenging to overcome.”

Lower levels of acculturation stress correlate with higher levels of acculturations. Christian Arab-Americans followed expected patterns of acculturation: higher rates of retention of Arab family and religious values correlated to greater acculturation stress. Conversely, Muslim Arab-Americans reported lower levels of acculturation stress with higher levels of “intrinsic religiosity”—Islam, then, served as a positive factor in Muslim Arab-American’s attempt to acculturate. Also significant is the choice of acculturation strategy utilized by both Muslim and Christian Arab-Americans: integration (Joseph).

This paradox—that Islam would be related to lower levels of acculturation stress, even though Muslim Arab-Americans are overall less assimilated into mainstream culture and experience higher levels of discrimination—illustrates how religion has become a key part of identity, and for Muslim Arab-Americans, it too often overshadows the rests of their parts. Naber’s concept of the “racialization of religion” refers to the way that Islam has been used as a racial classification. Although Muslims come from all races, they are all lumped into one racial category: Muslim. Clearly, Islam is not a race, yet its treatment as such demonstrates that misconceptions about Islam have been used to marginalize Muslim Arab-Americans, creating the notion that “true” Americans are not Muslim. The racialization of religion may explain why Muslim Arab-Americans are less integrated (they are not accepted due to the perception that their religion belongs to the “other”) and yet experience less acculturation stress when they are more “intrinsically” religious: Islam may be the means Muslim Arab-Americans utilize to deal with exclusion (Joseph, Naber).

Politics: After WWII, Arab-Americans realized that there was “no going back,” and a call for unity within the community emerged. There persists a lack of Arab-American politicians to address the issues that Arab-Americans face today; there is a perception that Arab-American

institutions have failed to help potential Arab-American politicians (Suleiman). In addition, neither major party actively encourages Arab-American support. Both the Republicans and the Democrats have shied away from alliances with Arab-American groups, especially Arab-American Muslim groups (Barreto). Despite the lack of Arab-American politicians and support from either major party, Arab-Americans do participate in politics through voting, lobbying, and supporting politicians who they believe mesh with their values. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that higher mosque participation rates increase political participation (Dana). In terms of party identification, Arab-American youth are more likely than their parents to label themselves as Democrats; however, it is important to note that ethnic, religious, and even economic identities shape party identification among Arab-Americans (Barreto, Suleiman). Despite increasing levels of political participation, many Arab-Americans feel that they must censor themselves when the debate turns to US imperialistic politics in the Middle East and its strong alliance with Israel (Salaita).

Methodology: I interviewed a total of eleven Arab-American students at the University of Washington. Due to the wide scope of the definition I used for “Arab-American,” international students were also included in my sample. Initial efforts to contact Arab-American students via email proved unsuccessful, prompting me to attend a meeting for the newly-formed Arabic Culture Student Association, one of the few Arab-American clubs on campus. I set up interview times with many of the club members: interviews took place in a variety of locations, including the HUB, Suzzallo Café, and Red Square, where ACSA was tabling to promote awareness for the club and for a fundraiser to build a cancer center in Gaza. One interview was conducted over the phone, as the student was at UW Bothell. Interviews typically lasted half an hour, and I typed

the respondents' answers as they were spoken, adhering to the original language used by the participant as closely as possible (including the use of fillers such as "like" and "um").

Of the eleven students interviewed, three were international students from Saudi Arabia. Seven of the eight non-international students were of Palestinian heritage, either completely Palestinian or a mixture of two Arab heritages (one student was Palestinian and Greek). The other non-international student was of Syrian heritage. Most of the domestic students had lived in Washington several years before attending the University of Washington: two students, sisters, had moved from Virginia one year before attending the university. The Syrian Arab-American student was out-of-state, from California.

All three international students were male. Two of the domestic students were male; other seven were female. Of the female cohort, all but two wore the hijab. All twelve of the students religiously identified as Sunni Muslim.

Participants were asked to state their name, their major, their ethnic background, and their hometown at the beginning of the interview. Respondents were again told that their names would be altered and that no personal identifiers would be released. They were then asked a series of eleven guiding questions:

- 1) How would you describe your family? Religious? Liberal or conservative? How would you describe yourself?
- 2) How would you describe the strength of your cultural connection to Arab or American cultural values?
- 3) How do you personally identify yourself culturally?

- 4) Growing up, did you perceive any cultural differences between you and your American friends? Did this manifest into any difficult situations did you feel excluded from your non-Arab-American friends?
- 5) How difficult was it growing up Arab-American after September 11th?
- 6) Describe any fluctuations in your identity
- 7) How would you describe Arab cultural values in comparison to American cultural norms?
- 8) To what degree are you involved in politics (voting, lobbying, etc.)?
- 9) Have you ever participated in politics with regards to the situation in Palestine? Describe how this has had any effect on your daily life.
- 10) What has your experience as an Arab-American student at the University of Washington been like? How are your opinions and background perceived?
- 11) In your household growing up, how were American cultural values/ “the American way of life” perceived?

Results: The guiding questions attempted to isolate Arab-American’s experiences into four broad themes: identity, gender, politics, and religion. In order to analyze their individual implications, I will analyze my results along these four categorizations, with an additional category added for “University of Washington Experience.”

Identity: Identity is a broad theme, which I will break down by analyzing the responses based on cultural closeness to Arab and American values, differences perceived between the two groups and the contextualization of identity. I will also touch upon how difficult it was for respondents to grow up Arab-American after September 11th, although all of their responses deal with this matter indirectly. For these young Arab-Americans, September 11th followed them throughout

their lives: therefore, all of their responses can be viewed as stemming from their experiences growing up in the shadow of that event.

Focusing on the domestic Arab-American students (since the international students still identify with Arab culture over American culture), there is an interesting discrepancy between how the students identify themselves. Immigrant status appears to have a role in determining which culture the student felt closer to—Hussein, who had immigrated to the United States six years ago, still felt closer to his Arab culture as an Egyptian. However, non-immigrants also felt more connected to their Arab heritage, perhaps because their parents were immigrants. Amira, the elder of the Virginia sisters, described her identity as feeling “closer to the Arab culture, even if I was born and raised in America. Just wearing this scarf on my head makes me feel like the other, especially with how I know others perceive me because of the media.” Similarly, Dema, the UW Bothell student, commented that she was “very connected to my Arab culture, very connected” and identified more with being a Palestinian than being an American. Other Arab-American students, however, identified as a mix of several cultures. Serene strongly identified as bicultural, stating that “I’ve been raised here, so I’m not 100% American or 100% Syrian. Like, it’s pretty damn clear to the Syrians that I’m not 100% there.” This concept of culture as a percentage was refuted by another student, Nada, who believed that she “can be 100% Arab and consider myself American because [...] there is no threshold of how American you can be.” Nada identified as being “exposed to a lot of different types of cultures” and identifying with all of them, including the culture of the Palestinian diaspora, the culture of Amman, Jordan and the culture of Virginia. For Nada, identity is not an either/or matter, Ali, the other male domestic student, had difficulties distinguishing “which values come from where” because he was “immersed simultaneously in a bunch of communities,” as a Greek-Arab-American.

The Arab-American students, therefore, had differing views on their cultural identities. The hijab, for some of the Arab-American females, appeared to posit them closer to Arab culture (Amira and Dema, for instance). Nada, Amira's younger sister and also a hijabi, however, felt that her identity was composed of multiple cultures simultaneously and did not feel closer to any one of them. Ali's testimony appears to refute Sirin's findings that Muslim boys are more likely to identify themselves as fractured, viewing the Arab and American cultures as separate and unmixable. It appears that some of the young women in my study clearly distinguish between their Arab and American cultural values instead. However, Hussein, who identified more with Arab culture, noted that the parents of many of his Arab-American friends "found in me an Arabic son that they never had because their sons and daughters were Americanized." Hussein's observation not only demonstrates the compartmentalization of Arab and American cultural values in separate spheres, but also illustrates how "Americanization" can be viewed as a cultural loss.

The concept of cultural differences was not widely immediately accepted by the students. There were a few students who expressed puzzlement that there were 'differences' between Arab and American cultural values. However, these same students were able to identify ways that the cultures varied upon further explanation of the question. As Ali succinctly stated, "social behavior was the point of contention" for most of the students. Perceptions of how females act in each culture were prominent throughout the interviews—this gendered perspective is discussed more in-depth in the "Gender" section.

The students pointed out cultural differences in behavior that included abstaining from alcohol, dating, smoking, drugs, and premarital sex. These values were associated with Islamic values, illustrating the importance of religion in these students' daily lives. Family was perceived

to be more important in Arab culture than American culture. Ahmad, an international student from Saudi Arabia, felt that “American culture is more about the individual than family. Family is not a strong thing.” He gave an example of his host family, where the twenty-eight year old son went to the grocery store at the request of his mother, and then asked for compensation for the things he had bought. Ahmad felt that “this was shameful, like you shouldn’t ask your mom for money for the service you do for her.” Respect for elders was also a common cultural difference that was pointed out, even if there is contention between the older and younger generations. Ali, who had built his identity as a Muslim independently from institutional sources, still respected the elders whom he viewed as more knowledgeable in religion. Sarah succinctly stated, regarding all the cultural differences she perceived: “they’re usually not as respectful of their parents and elders in general, and I don’t know, the list could go on.”

The cultural differences that the students identified were both serious and trivial in nature. A perceived lack of respect and lack of family values in American culture are clearly more serious points of divergence, as are the gendered differences in social norms. However, the students also discussed smaller matters of cultural difference that were important to them as youth growing up. For example, Nada explained that talking back would be considered a sign of being “too American.” Amira noted that talking back would be lamented by her parents; they would fret ““is this what raising you in America has done?”” One of Ali’s descriptions of cultural difference was quite humorous—he discussed not being able to put his feet up on the coffee table like his non-Arab-American friends did, because “if I did that, my dad would be like shame on you, like he would say a phrase of disgust.” Some of the students also indirectly referenced the Arab cultural concept of “*al-nas*.” This phrase, translating to ‘the people’ is tied to the concept of family reputation—*al-nas* (other people) are always watching you and scrutinizing your

behavior, ready to decry your family for lack of Arab values. The concept of *al-nas* is often used in Arab households to criticize behavior that is not in line with cultural values by appealing to what other people would think (Naber). Rima alluded to *al-nas* with her observation that “you’re willing to break the American cultural norms in order to properly portray yourself as Arab, but you’re not willing to go vice-versa because it kind of brings shame upon your family.” Similarly, Ziyad, one of the Saudi Arabian international students, noted that the “things that are nice here [in the United States] is that no one asks you why you are wearing this, why you are doing that.” The perceived confining effect produced by *al-nas* could be interpreted as tension between American individualism and Arab collectivism, with *al-nas* an agent of the latter that is hard to mix with the former.

Some of the students openly questioned my choice to discuss cultural differences between Arab and Americans, because they felt that there were strong similarities between the two or that the concept of being “American” was more nuanced than I had posited. Ali asked, “Is there a dichotomy? I mean, both cultures are defined by patriarchy and misogyny.” Hussein felt that American cultural norms were more similar to Arab norms than they were to European norms—he believed that American and Arab culture were characterized by high levels of religiosity and patriotism. Nada was highly critical of my questions regarding cultural differences, stating:

“I hate that so much because I hate the notion of American cultural values. Because there are none. What we’re supposed to be is a melting pot. If I’m an American, and I’m Arab, my values become American values. [...] My values equal American cultural values. American cultural values as an American equal my values.”

Despite these voices of opposition, the students were all able to eventually point out key differences. The tension between these two competing ideals, one of difference and one of sameness, can be summarized by the fact that American and Arab culture is not monolithic. As Ali puts it,

“the idea that there is a monolithic Arab or American culture is disingenuous because you’re denying the fact that power politics determine which culture, or which [...] persuasion in the set of cultures dominates, which one becomes the hegemonic culture.”

Ali’s quote ties in with the concept of the contextualization of identity, and by this I mean that identity can fluctuate based on the environmental context in which individuals are asked to produce statements of identity. Several of the students felt that their degree of “Arabness” or “American-ness” fluctuated based on their immediate context. Rima, for instance, noted that when she was in Palestine, the people there “were like wow, you don’t look Palestinian at all. You are totally not Palestinian.” When she was in Morocco, the people there told her that she didn’t look Moroccan, but that she looked Palestinian. Rima observed that this schism between how she perceived herself and how others perceived her also occurred in America, where people would constantly ask her ‘what’ she was. Amira prefaced her response to the question “Describe any fluctuations in your identity” with the words “If I’m here,” implying that she felt that her identity changed depending on whether she was in America or in Jordan. Not all of the students felt that their identities fluctuated (some were adamant that they always felt Arab-American, a mixture of both cultures at all times). Yet, even some of these students admitted feeling more of ‘something’ due to their involvement in activities related to that ethnicity. Ali, for instance, felt a bit more Greek than usual because this year he had “been immersed disproportionately in the Greek community.” He was quick to point out that that fluctuation was not large. The existence

of instances of fluctuations highlights several important aspects of identity that cut across ethnic lines: its fluidity, its relationship to context, and its ability to be appropriated in different ways in different situations. A poignant example of this shifting appropriation of identity relates to politics, especially the ways that Arab-American youth deal with expressing their opinions on the Palestine/Israeli conflict (discussed in “Politics” section).

Thus far I have focused on September 11th's impact on Arab-American youth in terms of how they are perceived by the mainstream American culture, and how they perceive themselves as Arab-Americans. I would like to touch upon the fact that Arab-Americans themselves were as much the victims of September 11th as any white citizen or resident of the United States was. Arab-Americans were, for the most part, excluded from the grieving process and portrayed as being on the side of the terrorists. One Arab-American woman interviewed after September 11th noted that “We suffered as Americans; we suffered as Arab-Americans” (Chambers-Letson). The idea of suffering twice emphasizes how Arab-Americans were victims of both the terrorist attacks and of suspicion and hostility from their fellow Americans after the event. The Arab-American students I interviewed viewed September 11th as an atrocity; Serene stated that as a citizen, September 11th was “a horrible thing to happen, any time lives are lost” and that she “definitely still feel it, I feel for it. It isn't like I shouldn't be sad about it, it's still a tragic thing.” Serene brings up a powerful point: Arab-Americans expressed the same emotions after September 11th that other Americans did—shock, sadness, and disbelief. However, there exists the attitude that Arab-Americans did not feel the same as other Americans, and instead celebrated the attacks. This viewpoint, which has escalated through the years after September 11th, grossly misrepresents the true sentiments of Arab-Americans. For Arab-American youth like Serene, September 11th was an attack on their identity as *Americans*.

Gender: The question of gender is always interesting to analyze from another culture's (or in this case, hybrid culture) perspective, because there are preconceived notions regarding women's status in those cultures. Women in Arab culture are stereotyped as weak, submissive, and oppressed, and this stereotype often applies unequally to Muslim Arab women (due to the other stereotype that all Arabs are Muslim). First generation Arab-Americans' idealized notions of Arab culture, however, often result in unequal treatment between their sons and daughters. This gender bias has been observed by many of the students, but also refuted, interestingly, with religious ideals.

Hussein, the first person I interviewed, was quick to point out that there should not be differences between the genders. He felt that restrictions on premarital relationships should apply to both himself and his sister equally, basing this concept of equality using religion. Hussein noted that a negative perception of Arabs is "that there is a sexist attitude towards women, which is present, but religion and culture don't support that at all." Referencing the Quran, Hussein explained that the consequences of adultery were the same for both men and women, finishing off with the statement: "equality comes back to the fundamentals of our culture." Amira refuted the belief that equality is inherent in Arab culture, stating: "forget religion, because religion has nothing to do with this. I feel that Arab culture diminishes the value of girls to some extent whereas in America they're working on empowering them."

Many individuals expressed clear the idea of gender differences that are perpetuated in Arab-American culture. For Rima, "the rules for social normality are different. So, I mean, you have to be more fitting of that feminine norm. Like there are taboo things." Ali labeled it as a "double standard [...] where men were given privileges over women." The students discussed relationships being taboo (for both genders, but especially for girls), restrictions on spending the

night, going to school dances, clothing choices that were deemed appropriate for girls, and how long girls could be out.

Many students also noted that their parents did not believe in treating the two genders differently. There were also many points brought up about the strength of Arab women and the lack of respect for women in Western culture. Serene described how in Arab culture, “the women are still very strong. A lot of times they try to paint Arab women as weak and dominant, but Arab women are so strong its ridiculous and they are the backbone of Arab culture.” She felt that “Americans misconstrue the importance of women in Arab culture.” Similarly, Nada attempted to disassociate Westernization with progressivism, arguing that “being Western isn’t being progressive, because if you look at the way women are looked at here, they are sexual objects.” Nada brought up Beyoncé as an example of this idea, explaining Beyoncé’s body is what most people choose to focus on, at the expense of her talent.

Religion: Previous studies of discrimination patterns among Arab-Americans have demonstrated that religion plays role in determining the extent of discrimination. Christian Arab-Americans are less likely to be discriminated against than Muslim Arab-Americans, and are more likely to perceive that others view them as ‘white’ (Joseph, Read). Although I was unsuccessful in finding Christian Arab-American students to interview, four students’ perspectives illustrate the ways that Muslim Arab-American youth felt marginalized after September 11th. Rima, who identifies as more spiritual than religious, felt that “there is a stigma attached to being an Arab and Muslim after September 11th. It’s like, you wouldn’t say your religion unless someone specifically asked you about it [...] My brother would always say ‘yeah, but we’re not religious’, to kind of cover up for being Muslim.” Rima was cautious in divulging her religious identification, sensing that being labeled a Muslim would cause others to treat her differently. Her brother’s qualifier,

“we’re not religious” indicates feelings of shame of being associated with Muslims, quite possibly due to the stereotypes floating around in the media. When individuals see their culture or religion portrayed negatively in the media, they may shy away from it, especially if they live in a community with a dearth of other Arab-Americans and feel pressure to assimilate, as in the case of Rima and her brother. This instance of qualifying religious affiliation was also brought up by other students. Serene noted that her stepfather was “pretty religious,” but that she “takes a more liberal tune.” Hussein categorized himself as mildly conservative, but “not radical.” These qualifiers demonstrate the students’ need to distance themselves from the negativity surrounding the word ‘religious,’ a word that has been dirtied by the media as applied to religious Muslims. By qualifying, however, these students reinforce the stereotype surrounding the word ‘religious’ and contributes to the growing schism between Muslim Arab-American students who consider themselves somewhat or not at all religious, and those who consider themselves very religious.

The issue of discrimination is most clearly linked to religious identifiers: the Arab-American students who wore the hijab claimed the most issues with discrimination and negative perceptions from others. Dema, who had lived in Lebanon for a period after September 11th (her father had sent her there out of fear of post-9/11 backlash), reported coming back to the United States in 2004 and still having to deal with discrimination. She recounted:

“People called me a terrorist, threw stuff at me, a woman tried to rip off the hijab off me in public. Some lady threw her coffee in my face, I actually have a burn on my neck because of it [...] I used to get called terrorist in high school, middle school. For a good time in high school I was called towel head [...] One day a guy literally held me by my shoulders and started screaming at me, yelling that I was killing his people.”

Nada also had issues with discrimination due to wearing the hijab. She was initially barred from participating in a karate tournament because the head of the tournament did not think she should be allowed to compete wearing the hijab. After Nada's family threatened to sue the tournament organizers and involve CAIR, Nada was finally allowed to compete wearing the hijab. Nada also discussed recurrent cycles of fear when an event occurred that linked Islam to terrorism. After the Boston Marathon bombings, for instance, she avoided going outside for a few days, fearing that her hijab would attract backlash.

Ali's experience being associated with Christians contrasts with the outright discrimination that Muslim Arab-American youth face. Although Ali is Muslim himself, he comes from a household that is half Muslim and half Christian—through his Greek heritage, he is involved in many Greek organizations, such as Greek folk dance. On a recent trip to California for a Greek folk dance showcase, Ali was able to go in the “fast track” TSA lane, the only time he had been able to do so. The reason, Ali believes, is that he was carrying his folk dance costume in a bag emblazoned with the words “St. Demetrious Orthodox Church” and a big Greek cross. In this moment, Ali was perceived to be Christian, which may explain the TSA allowing him to quickly pass through security. It seems difficult to believe that he would have been treated the same had the bag been emblazoned with a reference to a mosque or Islam. As Ali noted, “the way people perceive you definitely has an impact on the way you are treated.”

How does discrimination based on religion affect individuals' self-identity? The ability of discrimination to wreak havoc on self-esteem has already been noted, most prominently in the Supreme Court case *Brown v. The Board of Education*. Nada, who had “always been really proud with who I am,” felt that religious discrimination caused her to turn her back on her identity for a period of time. She would take off the hijab at time in school and revel in the

compliments her white friends would give her (compliments that noted her beauty after taking the hijab off, implying that women who wear the hijab cannot possibly be beautiful in the traditional sense). Other effects on self-identity, discussed above, include feeling the need to hide one's religious identification or qualify religiosity—discrimination and induce a sense of shame that causes individuals to suppress an important part of themselves in order to be accepted.

Politics: The vast realm of politics adds another layer of complexity to Arab-American identity. Politics appears to factor into Arab-American youth's identity in the same way that it affects other minority groups domestically. However, with Arab-American youth, especially after September 11th, there is the additional factor of international politics in the Middle East that shapes their political views and how they are perceived as Arab-Americans. The most contentious of these international affairs regards the decades-long issue between Palestine and Israel. The Arab-American youth I interviewed possessed strong opinions regarding the conflict, but for the most part felt the need to censor those opinions.

With regards to domestic politics, Arab-American youth view their identities as being highly politicized, similar to other minority groups. For instance, Latino Americans' identities are linked to the issue of illegal immigration and black American's identities are connected to gang violence and welfare. Arab-American's identities are inextricably linked to the “war on terror” after September 11th, yet even before that event their identities were connected to international politics. Discrimination against Arab-Americans (or those who looked Muslim, like Sikhs), often escalated in the wake of turmoil in the Middle East that resulted in American soldier's deaths or other contentious matters—this “jingoistic racism” appears to have escalated after September 11th (Abraham). In my interviews, Nada noted that she “thought that my culture had more to do with politics than them [white Americans]”—Nada constantly felt the need to be

involved in Middle Eastern related politics, because she felt that her identity was tied to it.

Dema's acceptance of herself as an Arab-American was catalyzed by politics. She stated:

“I think, one time I was reading an article and it was talking about Palestinians and how vicious they were and how horrible people they were and how they needed to be annihilated from Israel as a whole, and it stuck with me. And I thought to myself people aren't like that that, like I see my dad and I see my family. Why are they perceived that way? I think that was the first day I wanted to be intact with who I was.”

The politicization of Arab-American identity in terms of international politics also affects Arab-American youth's affiliation with domestic parties or domestic ideas. Many of the Arab-American college students I interviewed labeled themselves 'liberal' or 'Democrat.' One of the international students, Mohammad, viewed himself as a liberal as well—he claimed that he had tried to vote for Obama but was turned away from the polls. This left-leaning tendency fits in with the Democratic Party's image as the 'party of minorities.' Yet it should come as no surprise to note that Arab-American youth feel jaded with the political system, namely partisan politics and the role of lobbyists. Nada lamented how “the people who have the power [lobbyist organizations such as AIPAC] are the ones that are giving money to these politicians [pro-Israel].” Ali expressed frustration over the selective application of human rights, especially regarding the recent massacres in Gaza, where

“five hundred kids are killed and the person who is supposed to represent you as the president of this country says that's self-defense. And this is coming from a more liberal camp, you'd expect the liberal camp to endorse human rights. But they selectively apply human rights.”

Arab-American youth often find that their domestic faith in politics and politicians evaporates when they examine international policies.

The Palestinian/Israeli conflict elicits strong opinions from the Arab-American youth I interviewed, yet it is an issue that few of them feel that they can discuss as freely as they would like. These individuals' First Amendment rights were constrained by the fear of backlash for speaking out. Rima expressed concern over how "there is a stigma attached to it [the question of Palestine], and in terms of getting jobs and stuff I don't want my name attached to that because it can have detrimental effects [...] I have to be cautious about what I say." Amira possessed similar thoughts: "There's always the fear of am I gonna get a job, or am I gonna be targeted to be a victim of a hate crime?" Her sister Nada labeled the oppression of Arab-American opinion on Palestine as 'McCarthyism.' Ali's outlook on the whole issue was quite straightforward: according to him, there are "the politics of civility with regards to Palestine, what you can't say and what you can, in the public arena. You can easily be targeted as anti-Semitic."

The students linked being active in pro-Palestine issues with having their professional careers shut down, their prospects for graduate school eliminated, and the label "anti-Semite" branded on them. Many of the students told me that these fears were instilled in them by their parents, who were concerned that being connected to Palestine in any way would ruin their children's prospects. Nada recounted how her parents should not allow the word 'Israel' to be uttered in the house because they thought that the house was bugged. There was even fear that the family would be sent to Guantanamo if they discussed the issue at all. Those fears—of losing job prospects and being labeled an anti-Semite—are not paranoid overreactions, but the result of decades of being targets of "the Zionist lobby, which began to portray Arab activists as spies and propagandists for foreign interests." There was also concern over "Arab 'propaganda' on

American campuses” (Haddad). The domestic students’ inability to freely express themselves also contrasted with the international students’ perspectives, emphasizing how concern over future prospects could silence political speech. The international students, who were required to go back home after graduation, did not feel that discussing Palestine stigmatized them.

Mohammad’s attitude was that “whatever you do you will be targeted, whatever the issue. Even if you are Pope Francis or Muhammad, not everyone will like you. That’s the nature of life, that’s not an issue.” For the Arab-American students whose futures involved staying in the United States, however, the question of Palestine was very much an issue.

University of Washington Experience: The overwhelming majority of these students found that the University of Washington was an accepting, open place. Only the UW Bothell student had significant issues of discrimination on campus. There may be differences between UW Seattle, where most of the students attend, and UW Bothell due to size, funding, resources, and the types of students who attend each branch of the institution. UW Bothell is much smaller than UW Seattle and therefore attracts fewer international or out-of-state students. I will first discuss the “University of Washington Experience” at the UW Seattle branch before moving on to UW Bothell.

Students’ experiences at the University of Washington have been very good overall, with a few issues that have more to do with schisms within the Arab-American community than with discrimination. Rima, who came from a small town and did not know any other Arabs growing up, felt that she was “able to meet a lot more [people] who were similar to me or had similar values.” Ali felt that “its been easy being an Arab-American student on campus, because the campus is very diverse.” Ali jokingly added that “at times, you wish there were fewer of them [Arab-Americanas].” Similarly, Mohammad, an international student from Saudi Arabia, stated

that he feels welcome on-campus. Ahmad, another Saudi Arabian international student, corroborates Ali's perception of UW as a very diverse institution. Interestingly, Ahmad appears to have had to cast off stereotypes with regards to American students, noting that "they're nice, actually."

The students' experiences at the University of Washington—Seattle, however, have been far from perfect. Nada recounted a time after the Charlie Hebdo shooting where she felt uncomfortable on campus. She had attended the vigil for the victims of the Charlie Hebdo shooting to demonstrate solidarity. At the vigil, she was "really offended, on campus, a place I'm supposed to feel comfortable" due to the presence of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. These cartoons, Nada described, depicted the Prophet naked and in pornographic stances. She was "really astounded that it was OK for people to be so incredibly rude and mean and offensive about a whole group of people who have nothing to do with the deaths of these people." She continued, stating that she felt that the cartoons were ""trying to show you that you can't be mad at us because we have free speech, we can degrade your identity because we can."

In addition, three overarching issues were identified by the students as pressing Arab-American issues on campus. The first was a lack of recognition. Sarah expressed frustration about applying to the University of Washington and being forced to select "White/Caucasian" in the ethnicity section. She feels that Arab-Americans are a minority and therefore should not be classified as "white." This sentiment is common among many other Arab-Americans, who note that their identity as Muslims appears to 'cancel out' any association with other white people once their religion is known—this is especially true for women like Sarah who wear the hijab. The physical marker of being Muslim appears to strip them of their 'whiteness' and relegate them to the status of 'other' (Naber). Another issue was that of tokenism. Amira recounted

always being the unofficial ‘expert’ in all things Middle Eastern since high school. She recounted:

“If it came to conversations of being a patriot or people asking, for example, after bin Ladin died, people would ask me how I felt about that. Like, would you ask someone who is white that? No. [...] If it involved anything that involved the military or the army, anything that involved foreign lands like the Middle East, that’s when it would feel pretty heated and like I had the spotlight on me.”

At the University of Washington, she feels “like the token Muslim because I’m the only one that they [her non-Arab-American friends] know.” Her sister Nada discussed the ways that tokenism has affected her, without explicitly referring to the term. She noted that she feels the need “as a Muslim to constantly have to defend myself.” She notes:

“As a Muslim, you’re being portrayed to these people as a savage, backwards, oppressed as a woman, somebody who can’t think for herself. Culturally I have to be the outlier for my friends and show them that that’s not the truth.”

Nada took part in the vigil in honor of the people who died at Charlie Hebdo, “to show people that the Muslims you are attacking, by commemorating, also want to commemorate. We’re not the ones who want these people dead.” Nada feels a duty as a Muslim to ‘prove’ to her peers that Muslims are not violent or backwards, serving as a ‘model Muslim’ in order to emphasize that the individuals who commit such atrocities are the outliers.

The third overarching issue highlighted the schisms within the Arab-American community. Although the University of Washington is a place where these Arab-Americans meet other Arab-Americans, divisions exist within that community based on perceptions of “Arabness,” religiosity, and religious affiliation. Rima felt out of place in both the Muslim and

Arab communities at UW. She felt that for the Muslim community, “I’m not religious enough because I don’t wear the headscarf and I hang out with guys.” She also felt that she didn’t fit in with the Arabs because “I’m not as Arab, like I don’t speak Arabic fluently.” Nada described the UW as having “a lot more Arab-Americans,” but that the Muslim students she associates with “really cling together, there’s a group of Muslims and everyone else.” Ali noted that “there really hasn’t been much discussion in regards to Arab identity on campus aside from classes,” and that there is “this overwhelming commitment to religious identity over everything else.” Ali candidly discussed how religious divisions were rampant throughout the Arab-American community at UW. He noted:

“I’ve observed over four years, religious sectarianism that pushes aside more universal identities such as Arab and doesn’t allow for the kinds of coalition building that need to happen on campus, especially among students. So you see Christian Arabs who have never met Muslim Arabs, because there aren’t any places where these students can interact and collaborate.”

Divisions that plague Arab relations in the Middle East (religious sectarianism and nationalism) also have inroads within the Arab-American community at the University of Washington.

Dema, the University of Washington Bothell student, has had very negative experiences as an Arab-American on campus—these experiences are tied to her identity as a Muslim (she wears the hijab). Dema believes that her opinions and background are “perceived as narrow minded, uneducated, and surprisingly good at English.” She has been called names on campus and feels that there is a disconnect between the majority white professors and non-white students such as herself. While Dema feels that she can discuss her issues with her professors, “they won’t really understand. They’ll try, but they can’t fully understand the way I feel it.” She has

been active in trying to get a diversity center at the UW Bothell campus so that “there can be someone to talk to, more intertwined with all these issues.” None of the UW Seattle students reported being verbally harassed on campus, which indicates that the differences between the two branches may lie in the amount of funding dedicated to diversity efforts (much more at UW Seattle) and the characteristics of the students who attend each institution. The University of Washington Bothell enrolls around 5,000 students, 84% of whom come from just two counties: King and Snohomish (“Fast Facts 2014-2015”). In contrast, the University of Washington Seattle enrolls over 44,000 students every year, attracting out-of-state students as well as international students in larger quantities than UW Bothell (“Quick Facts”). There is more diversity at the University of Washington Seattle, both in terms of ethnicities and nationalities represented and the programs and support systems offered.

Discussion: The issues facing Arab-Americans at the University of Washington are many and varied. Although Arab-Americans have an easier time being Arab-American at the University of Washington than perhaps other universities, they still have to deal with issues that Arab-Americans across the nation must deal with on a daily basis. These issues include overcoming negative perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, tokenism, simultaneous inclusion and exclusion into ‘white culture,’ the stigmatization of discussing Palestine, and schisms within the Arab-American community that prevents the coalition-building requisite to address these issues head on.

Some of these issues can easily be fixed, or at least addressed with less controversy than others. By “simultaneous inclusion and exclusion into “white culture,”” I mean the fact that Arab-American applicants to the University of Washington must check “white” on the ethnicity section. According to federal government classifications, Arab-Americans are white, yet the

experiences of the Arab-Americans I interviewed clearly demonstrate that Arab-Americans do not feel “white” in the racial sense. They do not feel that they are accorded the same privileges as other white individuals. Adding “Arab” or “Middle Eastern” ethnic category on the University of Washington application would create that ‘recognition’ that students like Sarah believe are necessary. The University of Washington could also incorporate Arab-Americans into its many programs aimed at increasing diversity and helping minority students succeed, which include access to tutoring centers and pre-major mentorship programs. These changes would serve as an affirmation from the University that Arab-American students are minorities, which is a belief that many Arab-Americans hold.

The other issues that Arab-American students at the University of Washington face are more difficult to address because they involve many layers of complexity and have roots in the colonial history of the Arab world. Overcoming negative perceptions that the media perpetuates regarding Arabs and Muslims pairs with overcoming cultural tokenism. Unfortunately, even the most liberal and open-minded of students harbor misconceptions about Arab-Americans and Islam, which may manifest in them viewing Arab-American students as “the other.”

Islamophobia is a rising issue across the country, especially given the recent murders of three Muslim students near UNC Chapel Hill. Ali mentioned how he thought that Islamophobia was actually getting worse, and that the perception of Muslims right after September 11th “was better than it is now because the media has this crazy circus of Muslims imposing sharia and stuff like that.” Combatting decades of media stereotypes will be an arduous process, but the University of Washington can attempt to combat those stereotypes by incorporating the issues that Arab-Americans face into courses that address marginalized minorities. The university could also invest in courses that educate students about Arab-Americans and Muslims, such as the Honors

course “Islam and Muslims in Western Contexts.” Through these types of courses, students will be exposed to the issues that Arab-Americans face and can change their attitudes towards those students. Cultural tokenism can only be combatted by ensuring that students know more than one person of a certain minority group—if students can shed their misconceptions about Arab-Americans, students like Nada would not feel pressured to constantly prove that the majority of Arab-Americans are peaceful members of society.

Arab-American’s fear of discussing the issue of Palestine and Israel are widespread among the populace. The fear derives from uncertainty about how voicing opinions will impact future prospects, the general consensus being that any criticisms of Israel will be labeled as anti-Semitic and will therefore destroy career prospects. This fear of discussing the question of Palestine is an issue for several reasons. The first is that by labeling all criticisms of Israel as anti-Semitic, the true meaning of anti-Semitic is diluted. Anti-Semitic discourse is defined as “hostility to or prejudice towards Jews.” The Arab-American youth I spoke with wanted to be able to discuss Israel’s apartheid-like policies, its treatment of Palestinians as second-class citizens, and Palestinian’s lack of access to medical care, jobs, and education—in short, political and economic issues that had nothing to do with the mass media’s characterization of the issue as “Jews against Muslims” or “Arabs against Jews.” The core of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is political in nature: it is a struggle between two nationalisms, not two religions or two ethnicities. The Arab-American youth interviewed mentioned growing up with Jewish friends as well, which indicates that anti-Semitism is not what these students are attempting to voice when they discuss the issue of Palestine. Therefore, characterizing all criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic unjustly denies Arab-Americans their First Amendment rights to free speech.

This is the second major issue with regards to vocalizing political opinions on Palestine: the Arab-American students I interviewed felt that their First Amendment rights were being abridged by their constant need to censor themselves or to refrain from discussing the topic at all. The students felt that their opinions would be construed as anti-Semitism, and they feared backlash in their personal, professional, and academic lives. The University of Washington by itself cannot possibly reverse the widespread link between pro-Palestine opinions and anti-Semitism, but it can create an environment where Arab-American students feel secure and comfortable voicing their opinions. One way this can be achieved is by ensuring that professors' political views on the matter do not make them biased against Arab-American students. For example, as I was interviewing another student, Rima came up to us and started chatting (this occurred at the ACSA tabling on Red Square). She was wearing a sweatshirt that said "The West Bank" on it and was about to go in for her American politics midterm. She was apprehensive about wearing the sweatshirt into the midterm because she was unsure of how her professor would react. She wondered whether she should turn the sweatshirt inside out, fearing that a display of pro-Palestinianism would result in her professor grading her harsher than the other students. Students should never feel that their academic success is contingent on sharing the same views as their professors—the fundamental point of a college education is to challenge assumptions and opinions. Arab-American students should not be the exception to this rule: they should be able to express their political views just as all other students on campus are able to do.

The final large-scale issue that Arab-Americans at the University of Washington face is schisms within the Arab-American community. This was a point that was brought up by several students, who noted fragmentation between Christian Arab-Americans and Muslim Arab-Americans, and between female and males. In addition, there was some tension between

international students and Arab-Americans who had been born and raised in the United States, as well as between all the various nationalities that the students claimed heritage-wise. The first schism, religious division, is clearly demonstrated by the fact that I could only find Muslim Arab-American students to interview: the students I interviewed wanted to help me find more people to interview, but their referrals were all to other Muslim Arab-Americans. I was unable to find a single Christian Arab-American because the students I interviewed did not associate with them. This also appears to be true with regards to Shia Muslims—again, not one student referred me to someone who identified as Shia Muslim. I have had discussions with the few Arab-American students I ran into before these interviews, and from the basis of those discussions, it appears that there is very much a stigma attached to being Shia Muslim from the dominantly Sunni Arab-American population at the University of Washington: Shia Muslims are not very welcome in the Muslim Students Association, for example. The Muslim Students Association is an excellent example of the gender schisms the students have interviewed have pointed out. I attended an MSA meeting, and immediately noticed that all the males sat on one side, and all the females on the other. There was little interaction between the two groups. Nada, walking back with me to the library after being interviewed, launched into a length rant about how the males in the MSA were ‘taking over’ and claiming credit for the work that the females were doing. Some of the more conservative elements of the MSA were circumscribing the role of the women, preventing the whole community from unifying in solidarity against the stereotypes that Islam is oppressive and sexist—in effect, the more conservative students in the MSA were reinforcing gendered stereotypes of Islam.

The reinforcing of gender bias stereotypes connects with the fragmentation between international and domestic Arab-Americans. Post-interview, Ali lamented how the international

students did not appear to understand that the domestic Arab-Americans were American as well as Arabs, and that there were cultural norms that domestic Arab-Americans possessed that the international Arab-Americans were not respecting. One of these norms was interaction between opposite genders and between different religions. The international students, being primarily Sunni Muslim, were reluctant to associate with non-Sunni Muslim Arab-Americans and held more conservative views about how female Arab-Americans should act. In addition, there existed a disconnect between the various nationalities, with some of the non-Palestinian Arab-Americans voicing the opinion that the Palestinian Arab-Americans needed to ‘tone it down’ when it came to the question of Palestine (because they did not want their student organization to be affiliated with the pro-Palestine group, SUPER, out of fear of being called anti-Semitic). The Palestinian Arab-Americans criticized the non-Palestinian Arab-Americans for being too complacent and cowardly.

These schisms involve patterns of social organization and social contention that have existed in the Middle East for long periods of time, and are therefore impossible to eradicate quickly. However, the University of Washington can attempt to reverse some of those entrenched schisms by initiating dialogue between the various groups that incorporate Arab-Americans. By acting as a mediator between these groups, the university can bring together all the cultural, religious, and political aspects of Arab-American identity and initiate a holistic conversation about the issues that Arab-Americans face on this campus. Unity is crucial for addressing these issues head-on, but right now the Arab-American community at the University of Washington is fragmented and weakened by those intra-group divisions.

Limitations of the Data: There are several key limitations to my study. The first being a sample of students that was less diverse than I desired: all of the students were Sunni Muslims, and most

of them were of Saudi or Palestinian heritage. It was difficult to find and reach out to non-Muslim Arab-Americans, most likely because they were more assimilated into American culture. Therefore, my attempts to isolate Islam and the state of being Arab-American somewhat backfired. I believe that many of my respondent's observations apply to Arab-Americans of all religious identification, but some of the impacts of September 11th on Arab-American youth are specific to Muslims only, such as dealing with discrimination from wearing the hijab.

Another limitation is due to the reluctance of some Arab-American youth to talk to me; my outreach was not always successful. Therefore, some valuable opinions are not represented because their respective owners would not agree to be interviewed. I cannot precisely pinpoint the reason behind this reluctance, but part of it may stem from a sense of suspicion directed at authority (due to post-9/11 interrogations of innocent Arab-Americans by authoritative governmental institutions). The business that accompanies college life is most likely the biggest factor.

Finally, I cannot possibly claim, under any circumstance, that my study can explain all of the myriad ways that September 11th impacted Arab-American youth, because the diversity of Arab-Americans means that every individual had a unique experience. There were common threads between my respondents' stories, but there were also stark differences that arose due to geographic location, gender, family life, political leanings, and degree of religiosity. Identity is a fluid concept and is thus subject to great variation. Arab-American youth identity is a product of dozens of factors, including government policies in the Middle East, religion, gender, immigration, the colonial histories of each Arab nation, and the media. There is also the matter of personal choice: each Arab-American individual faces unique challenges every day, and the ways that they individually choose to navigate through life heavily contribute to their identity.

Conclusion: Arab-Americans are incredibly diverse, coming from a variety of backgrounds and holding a variety of opinions. Their experiences growing up after September 11th cannot be summarized in blanket statements. Their identities are a blend of several cultures that intersect and contract each other, creating a unique hybrid—“Arab-American.” Arab-Americans at the University of Washington are incredibly fortunate to attend school at a more diverse and accepting campus; however, there are still significant issues that continue to limit their full inclusion. The lack of explicit discrimination often masks Arab-American students’ issues, and I hope that the voices of these interviewees will be able to shed light on some of those unspoken obstacles.

The post-9/11 landscape presented challenges and confusion for Arab-Americans as they created their identities. The different contexts that they found themselves in, as well as their perceptions of how others viewed them, how their parents viewed American culture, and how they thought they should behave as Arab-Americans, all contributed to the formation of their identities. Religion, gender, and political leanings all had an impact as well.

Despite the difficulties in growing up in a world that constantly portrayed Arab-Americans as “the other,” the Arab-American youth I interviewed were determined to challenge the negative perceptions of Arab-Americans and to elevate Arab-Americans’ status in society. Nada was determined to become a lobbyist one day in the hopes of challenging the entrenched pro-Israel interests in Washington DC. All of the students I interviewed were incredibly hard-working and determined to succeed, in part to showcase that Arab-Americans are ‘good’ people who want to contribute to society. I sensed that these students felt that their generation was going to enact change through activism.

There is one stereotype in particular that these students collectively wanted to shatter—that of viewing identity and culture in monolithic terms. As Mohammad phrased it:

“I would say that personally I am multicultural. I understand people from other cultures. I understand that there are differences between people, and I respect that and try to adjust to that.”

This desire to be multicultural—not just Arab or American or even Arab-American—was shared across the board. The students wanted to be perceived holistically, as more than the sum of their religion, ethnicity, culture, major, background, age, gender, or political views: they wanted to be seen as the people they were on the inside, kind and intelligent and giving. These students were, to quote Tariq Ramadan, resisting “the temptation to reduce one’s identity to a single dimension that takes priority over every other.” By doing so, these students were demonstrating that identity is entirely subjective and too often defined in the narrowest terms possible, limiting diversity in the process.

Bibliography

- Abdo, Geneive. *Mecca and Main Street*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006. Print.
- Abraham, Nabeel. "Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States." *The Development of Arab-American Identity*. Ed. McCarus, Ernest. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 155-214. Print.
- Abu El Haj, Thea Renda. "'The Beauty of America': Nationalism, Education and the War on Terror." *Harvard Educational Review*. 80.2 (2010): 242-274. Web.
- Abu El Haj, Thea Renda. "Race, Politics and Arab-American Youth." *Educational Policy*. 10.1 (2006): 13-34. Web.
- Ajrouch, Kristine J. "Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity among Arab American Adolescents." *Sociological Perspectives* 47.4 (2004): 371-391. Web. 7 January 2015.
- Asani, Ali S. "'So That You May Know One Another': A Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 588 (2003): 40-51. Web.
- Asi, Miriam and Daniel Beaulieu. "Arab Households in the United States: 2006-2010." *Census.gov*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2013. Web. 7 April 2015.
- Awad, Germaine H. "The Impact of Acculturation and Religious Identification on Perceived Discrimination for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16.1 (2010): 59-67. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 15 April 2015.
- Bakalian, Anny and Bozorgmehr, Medhi. *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond*. University of California Press, 2009. Web.

Barreto, Matt, and Dino Bozonelos. "Democrat, Republican, or None of the Above? Religiosity and the Partisan Identification of American Muslims." *Politics and Religion* 2 (2009): 1-39. Web.

Cainkar, Louise. "Chapter 3: The Social Construction of the Arab (and Muslim) American." *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009. 64-109. Web.

Chambers-Letson, Joshua Takano. *A Race so Different: Performance and Law in Asian America*. New York: New York University Press, 2013. Web.

Chen, Krystal and Sheldon, Jane. "Arab American Emerging Adults' Bicultural Identity, Acculturation Stress, and Perceptions of Parenting." *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*. 10.4 (2012): 438-445. Web.

Dana, Karam. "Mosques As American Institutions: Mosque Attendance, Religiosity And Integration Into The Political System Among American Muslims." *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association* (2011): 1-24. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 19 Apr. 2015.

"Demographics." *Arab-American Institute*. Arab-American Institute, 2015. Web. 7 April 2015.

"Fast Facts 2014-2015." *University of Washington Bothell*. University of Washington Bothell, n.d. Web. 25 April 2015.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Becoming American?* Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011. Print. s

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. "Maintaining the Faith of the Father: Dilemmas of Religious Identity in the Christian and Muslim Arab-American Communities." *The Development of Arab-American Identity*. Ed. McCarus, Ernest. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 61-84. Print.

- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon." *Sociology of Religion* 68.3 (2007): 253-267. Web. 12 February 2015.
- Henry, Hani M., et al. "Perceived Parental Acculturation Behaviors and Control as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being in Arab American College Students." *Family Journal* 16.1 (2008): 28-34. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 16 April 2015.
- Joseph, Hovey. "Socio-Demographic Difference in Acculturation and Mental Health for a Sample of 2nd Generation/Early Immigrant Arab Americans." *Journal of Immigrant & Minority Health* 9.4 (2007): 335-347. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 18 April 2015.
- Lewis, Bernard. "The Roots of Muslim Rage." *The Atlantic Monthly* Sept. 1990: 47-60. Web.
- Naber, Nadine. "Ambiguous Insiders: an Investigation of Arab American Invisibility." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23.1 (2000): 37-61. Web. 5 January 2015.
- Naber, Nadine. "Arab-American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/American(ized) Whore." *Feminist Studies* 32.1 (2006). 87-111. Web.
- Naber, Nadine. *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print.
- Naber, Nadine. "Decolonizing Culture." *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender Violence and Belonging*. Ed. Abdulhadi, Rabab, Alsultany, Evelyn, and Nadine Naber. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010. 79-90. Web.
- Naber, Nadine and Amaney Jamal. *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008. Print.
- Nassar-McMillan, Sylvia C., Richard G. Lambert, and Julie Hakim-Larson. "Discrimination History, Backlash Fear, and Ethnic Identity Among Arab-Americans: Post-9/11

- Snapshots.” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development* 39.1 (2011): 38-47. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 16 April 2015.
- Norton, Bonny. “Chapter 5: Identity and Poststructuralist Theory in SLA.” *Multiple Perspectives of the Self in SLA*. Multilingual Matters, 2014. 59-74. Web.
- McCloud, Aminah. “American Muslim Women and U.S. Society.” *Journal of Law and Religion*. 12.1 (1995-1996): 51-59. Web. 18 February 2015.
- “Quick Facts.” *The University of Washington*. The University of Washington, n.d. Web. 25 April 2015.
- Read, Jen’nan Ghazal. “Discrimination and Identity Formation in a Post-9/11 Era.” *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*. Ed. Jamal, Amaney and Nadine Naber. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008. 305-317. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Covering Islam*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981. Print.
- Salaita, Steven. *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA*. Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006. Print.
- Salaita, Steven. “Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans Before and After 9/11.” *College Literature* 32.2 (2005): 146-168. Web. 16 February 2015.
- Selod, Saher. “Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women Post-9/11.” *Critical Sociology (Sage Publications, Ltd.)* 41.1 (2015): 77-95. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 4 April 2015.
- Sirin, Selcuk R, and Michelle Fine. “Hyphenated Selves: Muslim American Youth Negotiating Identities on the Fault Lines of Global Conflict.” *Applied Developmental Science* 11.3 (2007): 151-163. Web. 16 February 2015.
- Song, Sarah. “What Does it Mean to be an American?” *Daedalus* 138.2 (2009): 31-40. Web. 16 February 2015.

Suleiman, Michael. "Arab-Americans and the Political Process." *The Development of Arab-American Identity*. Ed. McCarus, Ernest. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 37-60. Print.

Ramadan, Tariq. *What I Believe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

"Unwelcome: Muslims Next Door." CNN. 27 March 2011. Television.

Wray-Lake, Laura, Amy K Syvertsen, and Constance A. Flanagan. "Contested Citizenship and Social Exclusion: Adolescent Arab American Immigrants' Views of the Social Contract." *Applied Developmental Science* 12.2 (2008): 84-92. Web. 14 February 2015.