Manufacturing Muslimerican:
The Construction of American Identity among Second-Generation Muslim Americans of Michigan and Missouri

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To Mama,
who always preached Muslim and fostered American

To Abdulrahman,
for the inspiration to succeed and the permission to fail

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Abstract

In this study I investigate the construction of American identity among second generation American Muslims using semi-structured interviews with a sample of participants from two communities: Dearborn, Michigan whose Muslim community is racially homogeneous and highly concentrated in size and Columbia, Missouri whose Muslim community is racially heterogeneous and much less concentrated. The Dearborn sample exhibits a civic identity centered on political and economic ties to the United States, while the Columbia sample tends to develop socio-cultural affiliations to American culture. Additionally, interaction between religious and ethnic identity is dependent on the particular mosque composition. The racial homogeneity of Dearborn tends to merge religious and ethnic identities while the diversity of Columbia encourages a separation of the two.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, Muslim Americans have increasingly been at the center of both academic and public discourse (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Cainkar 2009). After the attacks of September 11th, 2001, this minority moved from near invisibility to heavy scrutiny (Cainkar 2009). A considerable amount of the debate has centered on the question of the identities and loyalties of Muslims living in the United States. Neither scholarship nor public discourse has fully emerged from the shadows of Orientalism, which placed the 'East', often, but not always, represented by Islam and the 'West', in binary opposition (Abu El-Haj 2005). This tendency often leads to an assumption that the identities "Western" [and by extension "American"], and "Muslim" are mutually exclusive. The presence in the United States of a significant Muslim population since the late 1800s suggests that some individuals consider themselves both American and Muslim (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). We know little about the ways in which individuals reconcile these identities. In this study, I investigate how second generation American Muslims construct their American identities.

Muslim Americans

The first significant wave of Muslim immigration to the United States took place in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when Arabs of mostly Syrian and Lebanese origin began migrating to the country. However, xenophobic attitudes following World War I resulted in the enactment of the National Origins Act in 1924, which established quotas on immigration from certain countries. The act was designed to encourage immigration from Western European

countries while limiting immigration from other areas like the Middle East. The National Origins Act essentially ended Muslim immigration until 1965 when it was abolished by the Immigration and Nationality Act of the same year. This legislation eliminated the country quotas, allowing immigration from these previously limited areas. This created the opportunity for critical masses of Arabs and Muslims to form in the United States. The late 1960s and 1970s then saw the greatest wave of immigration to the United States by Muslim immigrants who were simultaneously pushed by political and economic turmoil in their home countries and drawn to the States by a preference system emphasizing skill and family reunification (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009).

The decades following 1965 saw a steady influx of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia, who were mostly professionals or small business owners. Their economic resources allowed them to build mosques and establish institutions such as Muslim student associations on college campuses, which then gave birth to the Islamic Society of North America and other organizations (Leonard 2003). Despite the growth in the size of the Muslim population and the proliferation of these organizations, before the events of 9/11 Muslims were largely invisible.

The majority of Muslim in the United States are either Arab or South Asian. Census continues to exclude "Middle Eastern" or "Arab" as a racial category, and South Asian Muslims are normally lumped into the "Asian" category on government surveys (Cainkar 2009). This, along with the fact that it is illegal to collect data on religious affiliation in the Census, makes it impossible to ascertain the exact number of Muslims in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2010) or the racial diversity of

their population. This is especially the case for the 'unmosqued', those who may not participate in Muslim organizations or visibly identify as Muslims (Leonard 2003). Estimates have placed the number of Muslims in the United States between one and seven million (Peek 2005).

In 2007, the Pew Research Center published a study based on survey results of 60,000 Muslim respondents. Its estimate for the Muslim population of the United States was 1.5 million adults and 2.35 million total. It estimated that 65% of adult Muslims in the US were born elsewhere, while 39% came to the US after 1990. African Americans constituted 20% of Muslims in the United States. Overall, the study found American Muslims largely assimilated, economically stable and happy (Pew Research Center 2007). However, not all scholarship on this community has painted such a rosy picture.

Unsurprisingly, the 9/11 attacks not only brought Muslims under the spotlight but also subjected them to significant hardship. In the years following 9/11, government policies, individual attacks and harassment, and stereotypical portrayals by the media led Arab Muslim Americans to feel unsafe in the United States (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Cainkar 2009). This stigmatization, however, was not simply a reaction to the attacks, but rather a function of decades-old prejudice against Middle Easterners, Muslims, and those associated with them (Cainkar 2009). While essentialism—assigning essence or "natural" quality to a group on the basis of a social identity (Cerulo 1997)—has been a mainstay of American racism; Arabs and Muslims have faced a unique set of stereotypes in the United States. Corroborating this view is a 1999 study of the image of Muslims and

Arabs in the United States which showed that for decades they were portrayed by the media as alien, violent and barbaric (Suleiman 1999).

Vacillating between invisibility and stigma, American Muslims face a unique challenge at constructing an identity. Although an increasing number of scholars are taking an interest in this group, the social sciences so far have shown a paucity of studies dedicated to Muslim identity (Peek 2005). Even fewer focus on the construction of American identity. To begin a discussion on the studies that do exist on this topic, it is useful to first examine basic currents in sociological scholarship on Muslim American identities.

Muslim American Identity

The aforementioned study by the Pew Research Center found Muslims in the United States to be "assimilated with their lives and moderate with respect to many of the issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world" (2007: 1). Yet 53% of those surveyed said it was more difficult to be Muslim in the United States after 9/11 and indicated they felt the government "singled out" Muslims for "increased surveillance and monitoring" (36). Of those interviewed, 43% responded that Muslims should adopt American customs after having migrated to the United States, and 63% stated they saw no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society, with the younger subset of the respondents who believed that being 54%.

These statistics only provide an interesting background of information to compare to the sociological studies of Muslim Americans, which provide far greater detail and nuance. Across the few studies that do exist on this topic, four major and

often overlapping themes emerge: 1) the diasporic vs. claiming America discourses that occur in contradistinction to each other within the Muslim community, 2) the debate over identity salience among Muslims, with Islam emerging as the salient identity, especially among the second generation, 3) the alienation and marginalization of American Muslims, and 4) a confidence and assertiveness of Muslim individuals and institutions emerging to counter this context.

The diasporic narrative is the term commonly used to describe those American Muslims who maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their countries of origin. This is in contrast to the 'claiming America' narrative, which places focus on engaging with American society and issues in the United States. Scholars speak of the two as coinciding with a transnational versus a cosmopolitan approach, the first being the tendency to recreate one's culture in the host country, and the latter being the ability to adapt to new environments (Leonard 2003). This particular approach offers interesting predictions for the potential effect of neighborhood on identification among Muslim Americans.

If ethnic enclaves represent an instance in which Muslim immigrants recreated elements of their "home" culture in the states, then individuals residing within that space would claim the diasporic narrative, therefore being less likely to identify as American. Another scholar, Khan, refers to the diasporic narrative as "isolationist", critiquing Muslims for having a split personality wherein they simultaneously hate and love the West.. He argues that the new generation of American-born children of immigrants is more willing to claim its rights and claim the United States as homeland.

The hesitation to engage the United States is not simply a matter of denial of a changed situation; it is often characterized as a response to American foreign policy in the Middle East, which is frequently perceived to be harmful, intrusive and/or imperialistic (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009, Haddad 2000, Khan 2002, Naber 2000). Muslims feel the U.S. government targets Islam as a whole *both* on an international *and* domestic scale. Most Muslims take serious issue with US foreign policies like the War on Terror, War in Iraq, the unwavering support of Israel, and support for dictatorships across the Middle East (Pew Research Center 2007).

On the domestic level, Muslims feel targeted and discriminated against by law enforcement and, by extension, by the American government as a whole (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Ewing and Hoyler 2008; Haddad 2004; Naber 2000). Naber and Haddad take this notion a step further. Haddad (2004) claims that Muslims see this marginalization as a function of an oppressor-oppressed dynamic between American society and Muslims, the former of which had a tendency to fear and distrust the latter so formidably as to prevent it from integrating. Naber (2000) argues that one of the root causes of the alienation is the simultaneous racialization of Islam and exclusion of Arabs and Middle Easterners from official racial categories on government records, a simultaneity that therefore prevents them from acquiring the institutional advantages that are meant to counteract the disadvantages of targeted status.

These challenges had the surprising effect of strengthening Muslim institutions and individuals. While invisibility before 9/11 led to a resigned complacency about the negative images of Muslims circulating the American psyche,

after 9/11, Muslims had no choice but to attempt to counteract these images and claim their rights. Muslim institutions and groups have emerged more assertive and more attached to the "claiming America" narrative (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Bilici 2008, Ewing et al 2008; Haddad 2004; Leonard 2003; Shyrock 2008).

It is worth noting that several studies focus on second generation American Muslims in the context of the aforementioned social and political circumstances. These studies have largely found the younger generation to be more orthodox, more willing to claim Islam as their most salient identity, and also more comfortable and confident invoking their rights (Ewing et al 2008; Ewing and Hoyler 2008; Maira 2008; Peek 2005; Pew Research Center 2007, Shyrock 2008). Muslim American Youth not only found the tension between American and Muslim identities unnecessary (Ewing and Hoyler 2008), but also demanded not only legal citizenship but also cultural inclusion in American society (Maira 2008). In essence, for these individuals, American and Muslim identities are integrally tied together. Hence, the presence of Muslims and Muslim institutions only strengthen their claim to American identity. In other words, this set of scholarship essentially argues that the strength of American and Muslim identities is not inversely related. If one grows, so does the other because they are mutually reinforcing. If one were to accept this framework, one could argue that ethnic enclaves would produce stronger American identities by virtue of their likelihood to strengthen Muslim identities. This prediction, however, would contradict bulk of literature on ethnic residential concentrations and out-group identification, which places Muslim and American

identities on opposite paths where the strength of one signifies the demise of the other.

In a review of studies on immigrant assimilation, Waters and Jimenez (2005) identify four major benchmarks for assimilation. One of these is spatial concentration, which they argued had an inverse relationship with integration. The less ethnic concentration in an area, the less the individuals residing in it were assimilated. The less segregated the ethnic community, in other words, the more assimilated they had become. Although this is the most consistent view among scholars of immigration, there are is a growing trend of rejecting the idea of a linear path towards assimilation, which includes moving away from ethnic clusters. The idea that ethnic enclaves may present more than just gateway communities for new, economically disadvantaged immigrant families appears to be gaining speed. These scholars emphasize the variability in preference even within a single community, arguing that as negative feelings toward the out-group or mainstream grow, the preference for spatial integration decreases (Charles 2000).

This approach is particularly applicable to Arab Detroit, arguably the most famous enclave of Muslims in the country in the months following 9/11. Ethnographers of the Dearborn area argue that the city went from being an "immigrant success story" prior to 9/11 to a place of suspicion and alienation (Shyrock 2002). In response to this sudden marginalization, residents developed negative feelings to reciprocate the dominant culture's classifications. These in turn emphasized feelings of 'otherness' among the inhabitants (Shyrock 2002). Here, we see a case where feelings of otherness were perpetuated by the presence of a high

concentration of Muslims in the area. Assuming that these feelings would feed into a diasporic narrative, this suggests that enclaves will encourage that feeling among second generation Americans in the post 9/11 world.

However, the literature delineating the negative images of Muslims and Arabs in the media since the early twentieth century suggests that Arab Detroit would have faced stigma long before 9/11. To assume that, as an ethnic enclave, Dearborn only began feeding into a diasporic narrative after 9/11 is simplistic and ahistorical.

Clearly, the literature leads us to contradictory conclusions about Arab Detroit and American identity therein. While some suggest that, being the ultimate enclave, it would be the ultimate breeding ground for the diasporic narrative, others argue it creates a strengthened simultaneously Muslim and American identity. The contradictions speak to the weaknesses of the binary between the diasporic and claiming America narratives. This dichotomous model is far too restrictive to lend a hand to a nuanced vision of American identity among Muslims. It implies an inherent conflict between Islam and America by assuming that both identities are static and non-overlapping. This study complicates these assumptions by examining the negotiations of both identities through a constructionist framework for identity formation.

Theoretical Extensions

Contemporary identity theories can be considered in three broad categories: essentialist, constructionist and post-modernist. Post-modernist theories do not lend enough of a structural framework to be relevant to this study. Essentialism

bases identity on ethnic delineations and historical continuity. Scholars endorsing this perspective view ethnic, racial, and national loyalties as based on fundamental, primordial divisions, deeply established and little changing over the course of history (Cerulo 1997). Constructionist approaches to identity, which have been dominant among scholars during the last few decades, are based on the assumption that identity is socially constructed and is therefore subject to change and adjustment (Anderson 1991, Cerulo 1997).

Within this constructionist framework, symbolic interaction theory is particularly useful to our study of Muslim Americans. This paradigm assumes that individuals develop their identities through their encounters with social symbols, other individuals and society as a whole (Howard 2000). One of the most important works on both national identity and symbolic interaction was Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991). He who employed a historical perspective to argue that nationalism was a constructed affiliation born of cultural artifacts and moments of history. By being a part of American society, American Muslims are inevitably imbued with any number of the social and cultural symbols inducting them into the 'imagined community' of Americans.

The specificities of this identity and what it implies for this minority group are complex. In his famous *Human Nature and the Social Order* Charles Cooley argues that individuals actually create their identities based on what their understanding of society's perception of them (1902). This process, termed the Looking Glass Self (Cooley 1902), can help us understand how interactions with non-Muslims can shape American Muslims' views of their own American identity.

The mediating social symbols that present America's views of Muslims play a crucial role in the emerging identity. In other words, a Muslim American child could interpret society's view of his or herself through media images of Arabs and Muslims, direct interaction with other Americans, or Muslim institutions' presentations of the surrounding society. By examining the shape of the Muslim community and the way it manages these interactions, we can understand this socialization process and the American identity it produces.

Still, the identities that emerge are not stagnant. Impression management and self-presentation play a role in the consistent renegotiation of Muslim American identity. Here the negotiation of social systems by choosing the appropriate methods to present one's self generates identities (Goffman 1959). "A symbolic interactionist approach to appearance management offers a nexus of concepts that are vital to identity construction: agency, emergent meanings and negotiation. It also fosters an awareness of actions and transactions that enables individuals to vie for preferred identities in the face of stigmatizing or discrediting social labels" (Freitas et al 1997:324). Here Freitas et al. step beyond the binary restrictions of the master status to allow for a more nuanced analysis of a "fluid" and "tenuous" self that presents differing faces in differing situations.

Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity presents a schema for interpreting the salience of one identity over another in a particular social space (Brekhus 2003). He argues that location plays a key role in identity by categorizing suburban gay men into "lifestylers", "commuters" and "integrators". The first lead exclusively gay lives, surrounding themselves in every

social and professional endeavor with the gay community. The "commuters" compartmentalize their suburban work and home lives and their urban, gay social lives. The "integrators" on the other hand have minimal specifically gay endeavours and generally lead typical suburban lives (Brekhus 2003). This categorization is very useful for an examination of American Muslim identity as Muslims navigate purely Muslim, purely non-Muslim and mixed spaces.

Research Question

Although the above research studies provide crucial insight on various aspects of Muslim American identity negotiation, there is a clear gap in the literature on the construction of American identity. Studies of national affiliation tend to focus on loyalty to the country of origin and not the adopted country. In fact, I did not encounter any study that directly dealt with the question of the negotiation of an attachment to the United States among Muslim Americans

This study focuses mainly on the creation of an American identity, which accounts for a sense of belonging as well as a national affiliation. It provides an unprecedented comparison of Muslims living in ethno-religious enclaves versus Muslims living as minorities. There are several ethnographies and studies that focus on ethno-religious enclaves as sources of information on the American Muslim population as a whole. These studies rarely provide any comparative insight. None of the research I encountered controlled for the variations in Muslim communities and the effect this variation may have had on Muslim Americans' socialization, their levels of identification with the United States, or the construction process of their American identities. I studied these elements by querying how the size and racial

composition of the Muslim community within which a second generation American Muslim is raised affects how he or she constructs an American identity.

Hypotheses

Isolationist discourse among Muslims, associated with attachment to the country of origin culturally, linguistically and politically, tends to breed a rejection of the United States as a homeland. Thus, it would seem intuitive for Muslims living in ethnic enclaves to be less likely to feel a sense of belonging in the United States. In contrast, I predict that individuals without strong or large Muslim communities would be more inclined to identify as American and feel a sense of belonging in the United States. It's likely that such individuals will have had to carve a niche for themselves in exogamous circles, which, due to their non-Muslim nature, will generate identification with the United States as a whole.

At the same time, the experiences of discrimination and marginalization are likely to keep Muslims from identifying as Americans. While the aforementioned studies demonstrating the effect of Muslim institutions on second generation American Muslims provide some exceptions to this assertion, I predict that the overall strength of these narratives drowns among concentrated voices of Muslims in areas with a high density of Muslim immigrants. In those areas, it is more important to group dynamics that the boundaries of the Muslim identity be defined. In-group politics then probably push the 'claiming America' narrative to a marginalized position at best.

Research Design

This study focuses on second-generation college-age American Muslims. There are several reasons for choosing this particular subset of the American Muslim population. The focus on second generation comes from an attempt to move away from examining immigration stories, which although full of insight, can be far too nuanced and individualized to produce information on the question at hand. On a similar note, individuals' reasons for immigrating (economic, political, social, etc.) inevitably tie into their ability to identify as American or not, and more importantly, into how they construct that identity. At the same time, cultural and linguistic separation leaves immigrants with a very different relationship with the United States than their offspring. Even immigrants who wish to identify as American may feel barred from doing so by their accents or their lack of knowledge of popular culture. These issues persist to a much lesser degree among the second generation, which has more of a choice regarding American identity.

For the purposes of this study, I define second generation, Muslim and American as follows: Muslim American are those who were either born and raised in the United States, or moved to the States before the age of 12. Muslim is defined as an individual who primarily identifies him/herself as Muslim, believing in the fundamental tenet of the Muslim faith (That there is no god worthy of worship but God and that Muhammad Ibn Abdullah is his messenger). This study does not account for differences in level of adherence to the pillars of Muslim religious practice, because it examines Islam as a cultural and social identity rather than as a religious one. In other words, my interest lies in affiliation with Muslim communities and managing the stigma that emerges from said affiliation rather than

level of spiritual connection or religious practice. American is defined as any individual who has American citizenship or permanent residency status.

Then, the unit of analysis here is individuals, and the study population American Muslim second-generation individuals between the ages of 18 and 25. Ideally, this study would have ideally captured a representative sample of this population, but as there are no registries or lists through which to identify all Muslims within a particular area, participants were recruited through snowball sampling using personal contacts and Muslim organizations (mosques, youth groups, student associations, etc) as entry points. (See Appendix A for Recruitment materials.)

The independent variable here is the population density of Muslims in the area in which the respondent grew up. The dependent variable is whether or not Muslim Americans interviewed primarily identify as American and the manner in which they construct that identity. Since no consistent data exists on the number of Muslims in a particular area in the United States, it is difficult to categorize places based on population density of Muslims. However, since this study aims to assess the effects of engagement with a Muslim community and Muslim culture on identity construction, it seemed reasonable to offset the lack of exactitude in data on Muslim population densities with information on the number of Muslim institutions in the area. More specifically, during the pilot study each hometown listed by participants was placed into one of the following categories based on the following considerations:

1) Insignificant to No Muslim Presence

a. Estimated Muslim Population Density 0-1%

b. 0 mosques within reasonable driving distance (30 minutes)

c. 0 known Muslim-owned establishments in the area

2) Significant but Small Muslim Presence

a. Estimated Muslim Population Density 2-10%

b. 1-3 mosques within reasonable driving distance (30 minutes)

c. 1-5 known Muslim-owned establishments in the area

3) 'Ethnic Enclave' High Concentration of Muslims

a. Estimated Muslim Population Density 11-35%

b. More than 3 mosques within reasonable driving distance (30 minutes)

c. More than 5 known Muslim-owned establishments in the area

However, despite the comparative niceties of these categories, finding a large enough number of participants from a place of No Muslim Presence was incredibly difficult, since, by definition, it had no Muslims. I found a handful of individuals from various cities with small to non-existent Muslim populations, but then realized that comparing several different locations within each category would create an analytically unmanageable situation. I thus chose to eliminate the first category and focus on two case studies of categories 1 and 2.

As for the dependent variable, data collection was through semi-structured interviews of individuals meeting the aforementioned criteria, that is, who came from different categories of areas. I chose semi-structured interviews because

identity is a fluid concept that is difficult to capture with surveys or structured interviews.

I began each interview by gathering some biographical information through a basic paper-based demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The oral interview then commenced with asking for a narrative of biographical information. I asked participants about their family's immigration story, country of origin, the timeline of their life in America, and their family structure. Although most of this information was just background, it helped participants enter a mode of narration and detail. Next, I asked for some background information on their hometown and the Muslim institutions within it. Having described this, I asked them to discuss their involvement with the Muslim community chronologically, emphasizing shifts and changes over the years. Having attained this background, I went on to ask more general questions on American identity: how they defined it, how they thought others defined, and what the differences may be. Finally, I asked them to comment on the differences between they saw themselves identify and how the felt other members of society perceived them, pressing for details on who thought what and why. Last, but not least, I asked them generally about belonging and in what social settings they felt the most comfortable (full guide in Appendix D).

I analyzed the data on multiple levels. The holistic analysis emerged from writing notes and reflections on each interview directly after conducting it. This helped me identify broad topics and themes in the responses as well as general ideas about the research question that occurred to me during the conversation. The more specific analysis occurred while coding the interview transcripts using NVivo

software. The codes I used fell into the following broad categories based on the themes of the interview guide:

- Biographical Information

- Hometown Classification

- Involvement with a Muslim community

- Integration into American society and culture

- American Identity – Definitions, limitations

- Muslim Identity – Definitions, limitations

- Level of Disparity between internal and external definitions

- Belonging

Results

Previous scholarship on the topic of Muslim American identity describes two narratives regarding American identity. On the one hand, it describes a separatist "diasporic" narrative ambivalent towards affiliation with the United States and, on the other hand, an integration-focused narrative "claiming" the United States as homeland and thereby receptacle of loyalty. However, interview data suggests that second-generation Muslim American college students construct their American identities in ways that transcend this binary. The existing categories do not seem fit to capture the complexities of the process of identity construction. Instead, several themes emerge from the interview data: socialization & relationship with the Muslim community, the interaction between Islam and the culture of the parents' country of origin, as well as external versus internal validation of American identity. These themes suggest that rather than either claiming America or abandoning it,

Muslim Americans either merge it with their Muslim identity or compartmentalize it. If they do the latter, Muslim Americans see Muslim and American as mutually exclusive identities that must operate in non-overlapping spaces.

The interviews attempted to extract information on spaces of inclusion and exclusion for Muslim American respondents, thus revealing their most basic views on their relationship with surrounding society. Asking the respondents to define "American" tended to produce diatribes on the United States' economic opportunities, civic ideals, and citizenship criteria. The questions regarding belonging reveal definitions of America that ultimately return to the issue of cultural inclusion and exclusion. Muslims felt they were included in some parts of American culture, and excluded from others.

The ability to construct an identity that is simultaneously Muslim and American rests on the ability to construct definitions of American and Muslim that are inclusive. Respondents with a Muslim American identity had a vision of America that was at once cultural and pluralistic. In an America that accommodates multiple, authentic expressions of "Americanness", Muslim and American are not incompatible. Similarly, Muslim identity must also be inclusive. Muslim must mean a religious expression that is not tied to the specific country of origin.

Muslim institutions mediate the shape of Muslim identity and therefore help determine the compatibility of the two identities. Mosques and Muslim institutions that help attendees separate their ethnic and religious identities facilitate the creation of an inclusive definition of Islam, thereby creating room for an American cultural expression to replace an exclusively Arab or South Asian one.

On the other hand, racially homogenous Muslim institutions help merge Muslim and ethnic identities. For example, an entirely Arab mosque may help an attendee believe that being Muslim is an intrinsic part of being Arab, and vice versa. If being Arab is an intrinsic part of being Muslim, then an expression of Islam that is not wedded to Arab culture must not be truly Islamic. In this space, culturally American expressions of Islam are not authentically Muslim, which stands in the way of a Muslim American identity emerging.

Columbia's Muslim community is racially diverse. By binding together Muslims from different countries of origin, Muslim institutions[1] in Columbia expose community members to varying cultural expressions of Islam. Thus, these institutions separate racial/ethnic and religious identities. Second generation Muslims in this context mediate religious practice through these institutions, rather than through Arab or South Asian culture. This context allows for the development of a Muslim American identity.

Dearborn, on the other hand, is racially homogenous. Mosques and Muslim institutions develop identities based on their ethnic composition (the Yemeni mosque, the Iraqi mosque, etc.), hence attendees mediate their religious identities through Arab culture. In these spaces, non-Arab expressions of Islam are not considered authentically Muslim. At the same time, children growing up in East Dearborn have little to no exposure to non-Arabs or even non-Muslims. They thus come to see "American" as defined by a culture that is not their own. Instead of gaining awareness of other Americans through interaction, they construct an image

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[1] More details on the composition of these institutions will be provided in a later section.

of them that's based on Media portrayals of Islam and Muslim. Their interaction with media images of Muslims constitutes their interaction with the looking glass self as these images come to construct their understanding of soceity's perception of them. Without day-to-day interactions with non-Muslims to challenge this understanding, these negative images heighten the sense of stigmatization and marginalization among Dearborn Muslims.

Demographic Information

I conducted twenty semi-structured interviews. Ten of the interviewees spent their childhoods in Columbia, Missouri while the other ten spent them in Dearborn, Michigan. All respondents were second generation (born in the United States) or 1.5 generation (moved permanently to the United States before age twelve) Muslims (see Appendix B for details on each respondent's place of birth). Respondents otherwise varied in race, gender, levels of practice, and age.

As Table A indicates, I interviewed five women and five men from each location. Three of the women from each city wear *hijab* (cover their heads in accordance with the Muslim tradition), while two women from each city do not wear it. The number of women wearing hijab was not the result of targeted recruitment.

There were three major demographic differences between the Dearborn and Columbia samples: income, sect and race. Four of the interviewees from Columbia came from a household with an income above one hundred thousand dollars per year, one interview came from households with incomes between sixty and eighty thousand dollars per year, two interviewees' households had income between forty

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and sixty thousand dollars per year, and three interviewees' households had an income between twenty and forty thousand. On the other hand, only one interviewee from Dearborn came from a household of over one hundred thousand dollars per year, three had income between twenty and forty thousand dollars per year, four had income between forty and sixty thousand dollars per year, one had income between sixty and eighty thousand dollars per year and one had income between ten and twenty thousand dollars per year. The income disparity between the two samples may have influenced responses. Themes of racial marginalization are often linked so tightly with themes of class disparity; it is possible that some of the heightened sense of alienation among the Dearborn sample could have been linked to class tensions.

The other major demographic difference between the two samples is race. As the above figure illustrates, the Columbia sample was considerably more diverse than the Dearborn one. Interviewees from Dearborn were all Arab and majority Lebanese. Two interviewees were only half Lebanese and three participants had parents from other countries. Although the Dearborn sample does not include South Asian Muslim narratives, it is somewhat representative of the ethnic demographics of the Dearborn Muslim population, which is majority Lebanese but with significant pockets of Yemeni and Iraqi immigrants. Similarly, the majority of the Dearborn sample is Shiite[2] Muslim, all but one woman and one man from Dearborn identified themselves as Sunni. On the other hand, every Columbia respondent identified as

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[2] Sunni and Shiite are the two major sects of Islam. Their major difference lies in belief over the appropriate qualifications for leadership in the Muslim community. The theological differences between the two schools are minor, but historical conflict has tended to segregate members of each sect geographically and religiously.

Sunni. Although sect is important to Muslim identity, this difference between the samples is not significant for this particular study. The minor theological differences between the two sects do not change the ways their members will relate to the United States and American society. Sunni and Shiite Muslims construct institutions in much of the same ways, have similar social spaces, and face the same stigmas from an undiscerning dominant culture. Since these are the primary foci of this study, the differences between the two sects do not contribute to this analysis.

Columbia, Missouri

<u>City Background and Demographics</u>

Columbia, Missouri is a college-town with the University of Missouri's flagship campus as its central commercial and residential hub (City-Data 2009). In 2009, Columbia's total population was approximately 102,000, including about 23,000 university students. Education is the city's primary industry (City-Data 2009). About 50% of Columbia's population has at least a Bachelor's, and there's a higher concentration of Ph.D. holders in the city than the rest of the state (City-Data 2009). Median income is slightly lower and unemployment is slightly higher in Columbia than in the rest of the state (City-Data 2009), but this can be attributed to the high number of undergraduates.

Although it is 78% white, Columbia is more diverse than Missouri as a whole (City-Data 2009). About 5,500 of the city's residents (6.4% compared to 2.7% of Missouri residents as a whole) were born outside the United States. Of those, 10% speak Spanish and 90% speak another language. The ethnic background of Columbia's immigrant population is not immediately discernable, but the city is

about 4.5% Asian and 3.5% of Hispanic (City-Data 2009). Although we know the

numbers of Indian immigrants (712), Bosnian immigrants (276) and Iranian

immigrants (131); there doesn't seem to be any data on the number of Arabs or

other key countries in the Muslim community like Pakistan, Bangladesh or Libya

(City-Data 2009). Overall, it is not clear what percentages of the city's population

may be Arab or South Asian.

Columbia Muslims: Background & Key Institutions

Similarly, there does not seem to be any official records of the number of

Muslims in the city. The Muslim Speakers Bureau – Columbia, a local, mosque-based

organization that conducts presentations and sensitivity trainings on Islam in

schools, hospitals and law enforcement agencies, estimates that there are about

1000 Muslims in the city. The focal point of the Muslim community in Columbia is

the local mosque, the Islamic Center of Central Missouri (ICCM). Originally built by

international students in 1983, it is located in downtown Columbia, a short walk

away from the campus. It has always been closely tied to the student population and

Muslim life at the University.

Besides holding Friday sermons and congregational prayer five times a day,

the ICCM serves as community center with a library, meeting rooms, a dining hall, a

kitchen, an activity room and a playground that it shares with the Islamic School of

Central Missouri (ISCM). The ICCM hosts daily dinners during Ramadan, wedding

ceremonies and celebrations, and community fundraisers. Based on capacity and

use of the facilities, weekly Friday prayer services draws about three hundred

people, holiday celebrations draw upwards of five hundred people, and community

events gather about a hundred or one hundred and fifty community members on a regular basis.

Other influential Muslim institutions in the area are closely tied to the mosque. The ISCM, a full-time Islamic School has about 50 students and operates from Pre-School to the 5th grade. It combines the standard elementary school curriculum with study of Arabic, Quran, and general Islamic studies. Most ISCM classes are held in its building, which is on the same grounds and adjacent to the ICCM, while the remainder of its activities take place within the ICCM itself. Additionally, there are two weekend Islamic schools that also provide Muslim children with basic education. The Al-Ghazali school conducts its classes inside the ICCM building and holds classes on Arabic and Quran. The Al-Tawakul Institute, in a separate building down the block from the ICCM and ISCM, is a Quran school where children place into classes based on their age and knowledge of traditional Quran recitation techniques.

Besides the Islamic schools and the mosque, the other hub of Muslim activity in Columbia is the Muslim Student Organization (MSO) at the University of Missouri. This student-run organization maintains close ties to the mosque, but tends to focus on serving Muslim students. It is a registered student organization in the University system, engaging in campus activism and outreach. Similar to other Muslim Student Associations around the nation, it is affiliated with the Muslim Student Association National.

Despite the vibrancy of these local Muslim institutions, the numerical paucity of Muslims in Columbia is significant to their experiences as a minority group.

Columbia Muslims expect to be the only Muslims in their classrooms, at their jobs, on their streets and in everyday experiences like a mall, grocery store or restaurant. With only a handful of Muslim-owned businesses in the area, the possibility of complete immersion in the Muslim community is slim. Instead, Columbia Muslims develop multi-faceted connections with people of other faiths in their surrounding environment.

Columbia Muslims: Levels of Community Involvement

Respondents described childhoods that varied in level of engagement with Columbia's Muslim institutions. While complete immersion in the Muslim community was not possible for Muslim children growing up in Columbia, some respondents' early childhood interactions revolved around the Muslim community. Parents chose their children's levels of engagement with the Muslim programs coordinated by the mosque and the Islamic schools. To better understand these relationships, it is useful to divide interviewees into two broad categories based on involvement in Muslim institutions: minimal involvement (Mi) and significant involvement (Si). Those with minimal involvement attended the mosque only on events like weddings, holidays, and the occasional Friday prayer service. Those with significant involvement attended mosque regularly and were enrolled in one or more of the Islamic schools.

Interview responses point to two discernable and distinct paths for the construction of American identity among Columbia residents. The experiences diverge around the level of involvement; those who were minimally involved constructed distinct Muslim American identities validated both internally and

externally. Minimally involved individuals, on the other hand, had a harder time seeing Muslim and American as mutually inclusive. They tended to compartmentalize their interactions with Muslims and with non-Muslims, seeing the former as an insular group, and the latter as exclusively authentically American.

Significant Involvement – Separation of Ethnic and Religious Identity

Of the Columbia sample: Khalid, Nassir, Walid, Aisha, Khadijah, and Abeer exhibited significant involvement in the Muslim community as children. It's not unusual in Columbia to enroll one's children in *all* of the available Muslim programs: Al-Tawakul, Al-Ghazali and ISCM (for Pre-School through 5th Grade). Khalid, Nassir and Abeer were all enrolled in full-time Islamic school for the duration of their elementary education. They supplemented this education with Al-Tawakul, Al-Ghazali and youth groups, which Walid, Aisha and Khadijah also attended. Aisha describes this experience as follows:

> "I went to Islamic school on the weekends as a child, we had two Islamic schools, there was Al-Ghazali, which was more of an Arabic and Quran school, and then there was Al-Tawakul which was just a Quran memorization and understanding school. That was when I interacted with the most Muslims, I think I went to pre-K full time in Islamic pre-school then I want to public school for the rest of my education. Then in Junior High and High School, I was part of the youth group in the Masjid. So in addition to Islamic

school, I would hang out with them on the weekend for a couple of hours or

we'd do a service project or something like that." (Aisha, 21, CoMO, Arab, Si)[3]

These six interviewees naturally formed their earliest friendships within the context

of these institutions.

Having been initiated in purely Muslim settings, these friendships were

preapproved by the interviewees' parents. Parents helped sustain these friendships

by taking the children to play dates, parties, and other social functions where they

could foster relationships with other Muslim children as well. Thus, respondents

developed core friendships within the Muslim community. Even for respondents

who described branching out and making non-Muslim friends during high school or

college, these childhood relationships remained central. One respondent described

them as follows:

> Respondent: "We always had the same core group of friends, which were the
>
> people you grew up with, the people you knew the best and were tightest
>
> with, but you also picked up new friends along the way."
>
> Interviewer: "Who is the core group? Can you tell me more about them?"
>
> Respondent: "Predominantly Muslim kids, the people you kind of consider
>
> your siblings, literally the same exact upbringing, very similar backgrounds
>
> in terms of how you were raised, and just your family values. So I would
>
> consider those the core group, but then on top of that, you have good friends
>
> that you'll have classes with or hang out with at the cafeteria. Because you
>
> have the most in common with your core group, they have less influence on

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[3] Pseudonym, age, city (CoMO = Columbia, Missouri; DeMI=Dearborn, Michigan), race, involvement in Muslim institutions (Mi=minimum involvement; Si=Significant involvement)

the person you become as you grow older. They help you maintain your

upbringing and reflect those aspects of yourself; that's how you preserve

those core values, by having them in your core group." (Nassir, 20, CoMO,

South Asian, Si)

Aisha, Khalid, Abeer, Khadija and Walid all mention a similar attachment to their

childhood Muslim friends. From this base, they describe having layered on new

friendships based on shared interests with non-Muslims they met at school.

Columbia's ethnically diverse Muslim community made the mosque and

Islamic school institutions places of racial mixing. Hence, the core group of friends

was usually racially heterogeneous. Walid, a 19-year-old son of Jordanian parents,

describes his earliest friendships as being tied primarily to the mosque.

"The people that I met in Islamic school, they were not all Arab, but,

obviously, they were still Muslims. Not all of them were Arab that I made

friends with, like Mubarak for example, he's *Sudani*[4] [sic][5], he's not Arab.

There's variations here and there but Islam is the factor that keeps us—it's

the thing that we all have in common." (Walid, 19, CoMO, Arab, Si)

For these interviewees, this heterogeneity helped separate Islam from race. Rather

than see Arab and Muslim identity as inseparable, they spoke of their Muslim and

ethnic and/or racial identities as separate. Khalid describes his relationship to his

parents' native Bangladesh as follows:

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[4] Sudanese,

[5] Sudan is commonly identified as an Arab nation and Sudanese people are considered ethnically Arab.

"I identify as Muslim American, I don't give my ethnicity as much value as I probably should, just because my parents are very proud of their heritage and a lot of people died in the civil war for independence—the revolution, the Bangladeshi revolution. Bangladesh will always have a special place in my heart, but it's not something I actively associate myself with, like ten years down the line I don't expect myself to seek out Bengali communities because I hope to be actively involved in Islam, in hopefully a multi-cultural community." (Khalid, 20, CoMO, South Asian, Si)

Khalid and the other significantly involved respondents emphasized the separation of Islam from their ethnic identity. In Khalid's case, his Bangladeshi identity (or ethnic identity) was not linked to Islam. His Muslim identity, in turn did not hinge on his ability to connect to Bangladesh; rather, his Muslim identity flourished in an American context independent of his ethnic origin. The participants emphasized the value of a diverse Muslim community in creating the Muslim American identity. This was true even for significantly involved participants whose parents were adamant about helping them engage their Arab or South Asian culture. Abeer mentions the following anecdote:

"Mama was crazy about having us learn Arabic. She sent us to Egypt every single summer, and we weren't allowed to have cable when we got here [to the U.S.]. She definitely signed up for the super plus plus plus Arabic satellite package! We would be so bored of local channels so we'd watch a ridiculous amount of Arabic TV when the *musalsalat*[6] got really good. It was a good

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[6] Arabic word for TV series

strategy, my sister and I are more in tune with Arabic pop culture and more

comfortable speaking *aamiyah*[7] than any other Arabs I know—I mean like

Arabs that were born here. It's really important to me that my kids

eventually speak Arabic too, I'll probably be evil and do that to them

too."(Abeer, 20, CoMO, Arab, Si)

Yet, despite this high level of engagement with her Arab culture and identity, Abeer

describes her identity in the following way:

"A lot of our parents try to pass off their culture as Islam. I was arguing with

my mom the other day about lip piercings. Of course, she's like 'they're

haram[8]!' and I said, 'Mama, just because something would be weird in Egypt,

doesn't mean it's actually *haram*!' Here, we are able to go back to the basics

of Islam and figure out what it says and apply it to our context as Americans.

I think more and more people are doing that." (Abeer, 20, CoMO, Arab, Si)

The salience of Islam for participants like Abeer and their ability to separate it from

cultural expressions highlights the importance of the mosque as a hub of religious

activity, particularly in the face of contradictory messages from family.

<u>Minimal Involvement – the Marriage of Ethnic and Religious Identity</u>

While respondents who were significantly involved in the mosque

experienced a separation of their ethnic and religious identities, the exact opposite

occurred with individuals who were minimally involved in Muslim institutions. For

interviewees whose parents did not enroll them in Islamic school or take them to

the mosque frequently (Samir, Shireen, Zayid and Jamilah), friendships were still

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[7] Arabic word for a dialect of Arabic, in this case Abeer is referencing the Egyptian dialect.
[8] Forbidden according to Islamic legal tradition

based on parental social circles, but these circles focused on ethnicity rather than religion. For example:

> "We would socialize more with the Bengali community than we would go to the *masjid*[9] or anything. So when I was younger, there was actually-around my age there was like three girls and a boy so like there were a couple of us that were the same age, but there wasn't a whole lot of us, but since Bengalis they would have their *dawats*[10], I would get to see them every few weeks or so." (Shireen, 22, CoMO, South Asian, Mi)

It's important to note that the ethnic circle described above, like all of the ethnic circles described in the interviews, was religiously homogenous. South Asian parents developed friendships with other Muslim South Asians and their children found themselves developing a relationship to Islam *through* their ethnic identities.

Parents' decisions regarding involvement only tell part of the story. Two of the participants mentioned feeling disengaged from the mosque due to perceived judgment from within the Muslim community:

> "I try to go to *jumuah*[11] as much as I can. When I was younger, I had school on Friday so I tried to go whenever I didn't have school. That was the most Muslim communication I had… I feel like Columbia, our *masjid*[12] and everything, is a lot more conservative than others. I don't care or whatever, it is what it is. But I always felt like I was out-casted, like not really included. Even my Bengali friends I was close to, when we were at the mosque, they

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[9] Mosque

[10] Dinner party

[11] Friday congregational prayer at the mosque.

[12] Mosque

wouldn't be as social with me because they had all these other friends. I always thought, 'Oh, I'm not a good enough Muslim to hang out with you all, so from an early age I was like 'Oh I don't like Muslim people that much; they don't think I'm good enough' that was my mantra." (Samir, 19, CoMO, South Asian, Mi)

Zayid mentions similar concerns about engaging with the Muslim community. He describes feeling alienated from the other Muslim children from a young age and asking his mother to remove him from Al-Ghazali, which had been his only form of connection to the Muslim community.

Whether due to exclusion or a voluntary lack of engagement, the four interviewees with minimal involvement in the Muslim community all mentioned ethnic identity as more salient than Muslim identity; for them ethnic ties mediated a relationship to Islam as a religion. One example was Jamilah, ethnically half Libyan and half Venezuelan, whose primary interactions with Muslims growing up were through the Libyan community. In the following quote she describes how her Muslim identity is tethered to her Libyan one:

"I am an American Libyan that is half Venezuelan who tries to learn about each culture as much as possible. I think there is more Libyan in me than there is anything else, and with that the Muslim factor is in there…the Libyan act should indicate that I'm Muslim, because even though obviously Libyans- We have catholic Libyans, Jewish Libyans and everything like that, I just think what we're exposed to the idea that it [being Libyan] just implies that you're Muslim, even though there are different faiths, the predominant one is

Islam so it just comes with it, for me, in my head. " (Jamilah, 23, CoMO, Arab, Mi)

Islam for Jamilah is simply a component of Libyan identity. Similarly, Samir (much like Shireen) describes interactions with Muslims as centralized in communication with the Bengali community. Later in the interview, Samir says he really began to engage his Muslim identity in college through new-found Muslim friends.

"I recently, in college, found more of a Muslim community. I never really had very many Muslim friends before I came to college... How I really found people in college, was that in high school I had a few very good Hindu friends, so I got into Bollywood dancing. I joined a dance team here at MU[13], there were a lot Muslims on the team. From there, I was able to meet many [Muslim] people." (Samir, 19, CoMO, South Asian, Mi)

This interaction exemplifies the mediation of religious identity through ethnic identity. Samir was only able to find Muslims through the South Asian community, in a sense replicating the structure of his Muslim friendships within the Bengali community.

Engaging Non-Muslims

As mentioned earlier, Columbia is not an environment where total immersion with Muslims is possible. Each respondent from the Columbia sample mentions a point of recognizing his or her difference from non-Muslim children and general society. Several events served as catalysts for this recognition including: entering public school, donning the hijab or the events of September 11th.

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[13] The University of Missouri – Columbia

For some of the respondents, difference was ubiquitous and inescapable. Aisha recalls being unable to pinpoint the reasons for her difference despite feeling it constantly:

> "For some reason even in Elementary school, I remember being different even though I didn't wear the head scarf. It wasn't like—I don't think I was obviously not Caucasian or something like that; but for some reason I always felt different, like an outsider almost. My parents weren't friends with other parents, they weren't part of their social group or structure…Even things like, my parents would take me home from the holiday party, like the Christmas party, it was very clear that I'm leaving. I think for other students, they saw that and they saw that I wasn't just like them. Even food—I mean food wasn't a huge deal; I ate a lot of turkey sandwiches. But even then, there were some things that I would do and I can't pinpoint exactly how come everybody—I always felt like kids knew that I wasn't, and maybe I knew it and I was just giving that image off, but I really didn't—like it was a problem in elementary school, I always felt very different and I didn't know how to own that difference, you know? Until I started wearing the hijab, it was like: this is me and I'm accepting it, other people should accept it too." (Aisha, 21, CoMO, Arab, Si)

Even at a young age, respondents had recognized the Christian undertones of the practices of the surrounding secular culture. Themes of similar isolation and difference recur frequently within the Columbia sample. Here Aisha describes two distinct realizations: 1) understanding that she is different from her non-Muslim

peers at public school, and 2) coming to claim ownership and pride in the Muslim identity that she identifies as being at the root of her difference. Other respondents provide similar progressions through these realizations.

"I think a lot of Muslim pride after 9/11 is almost a reaction to a lot of Americans' Islamophobia, saying that our religion is something that it isn't. So I think that my Muslim identity post-9/11 been strengthened but not in a– like obviously before 9/11 I was really young so I had blind faith anyway. But after 9/11, because of everything that happened to strengthen my own faith, it had to be, you know, in a more knowledgeable way. You know, after 9/11 we had a lot of people asking us 'Well, doesn't the Quran oppress women?' 'Doesn't Islam promote violence?' and if you weren't knowledgeable, to a certain extent, you're just saying 'no, my religion is perfect so obviously that's not true' and then people are saying 'Well what about Afghanistan?' and you're like 'well, I don't know!' So after 9/11 you really had to become more knowledgeable and more vocal, and I think that strengthened my identity in a different way than it was before." (Shireen, 22, CoMO, South Asian, Mi)

But while both sets of respondents (the significantly and minimally involved) underwent similar processes of acknowledging their differences with their non-Muslim classmates, they diverged in the way that they related to these peers socially and culturally based on this difference. For the significantly involved, they had a core of Muslim friendships to which they added additional friendships based on interest. For the minimally involved respondents, they engaged Muslim and American in separate spheres that rarely overlapped.

As Diagram 1 illustrates, there is no intrinsic conflict between the Muslim friends and the non-Muslim friends that the significantly involved group have. The interviews describe a natural and comfortable "branching out" of the Muslim community. However, for the minimally involved group, there is a constant separation between their Muslim friends and their "American" friends. The differences between the two groups are comparable to the aforementioned differences Brekhus describes between gay suburbanites. The significantly involved group is more akin to the commuters, whereas the minimally involved seems similar to the integrationists. In the case of the Muslim community however, these designations seem to reveal an inherent tension between the two identities and a belief that they cannot coalesce. Delving into the interview responses reveals the contrast between the two groups.

As I alluded to earlier, early childhood friendships with non-Muslims were limited in scope for all Columbia respondents because of the dependence on parental involvement to sustain them. A common theme throughout the interviews was parents' hesitance to help perpetuate the new friendships the children made at school.

"I went to the public schools here so definitely school was more the Americanized—doing that thing, I had a lot of friends through that, but I would say up until high school, the people I hung out with outside of school were more Libyan or the Arab crowd because my dad knew their family so it was a little easier to go to their houses and kind of hang out with them. When I started driving… it was a lot easier to hang out with American friends, my

dad always trusted me, but when I was little and had to drive me, it was more

like 'let's go to the Libyan house.'" (Jamilah, 23, CoMO, Arab, Mi)

High school allowed participants to further explore previously inhibited friendships

with non-Muslims. Respondents used escaping the social structures imposed by

parents to exercise different freedoms. These reactions revealed interviewees'

identity patterns.

In the above passage, Jamilah illustrates the difference between her social

interactions before and during high school. She highlights how driving led her to

spend more time with her white, non-Muslim friends. Her response is typical of the

minimally involved group, for whom high school solidified compartmentalization of

Muslim and "American spheres."

"I am not saying I act differently in the context I am in, but to a certain extent

I do act differently in the context I am, so like the things I will identify with

and speak with my Muslim friends about is different than when I'm hanging

out with like my American friends or when Marwa[14] and I are at like a

dawat[15] together." (Shireen, 22, CoMO, South Asian, Mi)

This is a direct example of how participants culturally separated their Muslim lives,

their "American lives", in which they interacted with non-Muslims, and their ethnic

identities. By mentioning the primary social functions of the Bengali community

(*dawats*), Shireen highlights the role of her Muslim friends' ethnic homogeneity in

creating this dichotomy. Islam is embedded in the cultural expression: Bengali.

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[14] An aforementioned female Bengali friend, pseudonym used.

Shireen does not see this cultural expression as authentically American and thus her Muslim and American identities must be separated. Compartmentalization suggests a lack of overlap between the Muslim and non-Muslim spheres, this means that respondents were often the only Muslim person in otherwise religiously homogenous groups.

The effect of this compartmentalization can be seen even in the linguistic references to American and Muslim identity among this group. Jamilah, Shireen, Samir and Zayid all give answers that imply the mutual exclusivity of "Muslim" and "American". In a particularly telling moment, Shireen laughs as she describes her Muslim friends: "In Columbia, the Muslim are very Americanized as well, it's not like we would sit around and recite *hadiths*[16] together!" The implication here is that reciting *hadith* together would not be American or "Ameircanized". Jamilah's responses make many similar references. In one instance, she says "I've had a lot of American friends, but also a lot of Arab and Muslim friends," implying again that the two are separate groups.

On the other hand, the significantly involved tended to be extremely careful not to conflate non-Muslim and American.   Respondents from this group emphasized the layers of their interactions rather than their separation. Abeer describes exploring different relationships in high school and college.

"Eighty or eighty-five percent of Rockbridge[17] ends up in Mizzou[18], so in college, it was a lot of the same people. I got more and more involved in high

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[16] Sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, considered a form of scripture in the Muslim tradition.
[17] Name of the public high school she attended (one of two in Columbia)
[18] Another name for the University of Missouri – Columbia

school, and that translated over to college. I met a lot of people through student organizations and clubs and such. Many of those student orgs I was introduced to by Muslim friends—like Nadia, she really helped me jump into that scene here at Mizzou because she's always been so connected. She was always pushing me and the other freshmen to get into things." (Abeer, 20, CoMO, Arab, Si)

Other respondents mentioned similar layering of friendships. Nassir describes adding to his aforementioned "core group" of Muslim friends. He explains that as he developed his interests in high school, he acquired friends based on this interest. Making non-Muslim friends through interfaith activities and Masjid activities were things both him and Khadijah mention throughout their interviews.

Layering Muslim and non-Muslim friendships allowed participants to experience both internal and external validation of their Muslim American identity. Settings like the mosque and the Islamic schools, respondents interacted with other Muslim Americans in ways that affirmed their connection to both.

"I just had some older people around me that weren't people that grew up in a different country—they grew up in America, so I still looked up to them because they were older and they had experience, but I think they influenced my own interpretation and my own way of identifying myself because I saw them being okay with identifying themselves as American. Then it was like: okay, this doesn't negate the fact that I'm a strong Muslim, it's okay for me to like being an American." (Aisha, 21, CoMO, Arab, Si)

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Aisha goes on to identify these people as members of the Muslim community

including older friends she met at the mosque and youth group leaders. Validation

for Muslim American identity is thus a direct result of engagement with Muslim

institutions. As for affirming the acceptability of her Muslim identity in an American

realm, Aisha describes interacting with non-Muslims in the following way:

> "I think other Americans would agree with my definition … I think the ones
>
> that know me and that I'm in close contact with, they know that I'm very
>
> similar to them… People also who have engaged with Muslims, not like 'Oh, I
>
> just saw a TV special on Muslim Americans,' but people who have actually
>
> had interaction with other Muslims on a close level." (Aisha, 21, CoMO, Arab,
>
> Si)

Here, Aisha recognizes some need for interaction in order to establish validation. In

another part of the interview, she mentions that if non-Muslim Americans saw her

walking down the street, they may question her identity. As the quote above

indicates, however, interaction quickly absolves these questions. The Columbia

sample contains generally positive responses to the questions of perceptions of

American identity.

When asked if they thought other people saw them as Americans, the

Columbia sample tended to have answers that emphasized the diversity of opinions

among Americans. Respondents mentioned the person's previous interactions with

Muslims, the person's ethnic background, and the person's placement on the

political spectrum (liberal versus conservative) as factors that could affect the

likelihood of an individual questioning or accepting their American identity based

on race or religion. Respondents believed that previous interaction with Muslims would increase the likelihood of a person's tolerance toward American Islam. People of color, were also seen as understanding of American Islam due to their own history of marginalization. Lastly, respondents also saw politically and socially liberal individuals as more likely to accept their American identity.

As will be demonstrated further on, the Dearborn sample was far less optimistic about public perceptions of their American identity. They tended to think of white, conservative and upper middle class individuals when asked about "other Americans", and they believed people of this background would question their American identity. This difference between the samples could be traced back to frequency of interaction. Several of the respondents of the significantly involved members of the Columbia sample reference their experiences with close non-Muslim friends, neighbors and classmates to explain their optimism.

> "I don't really think about it. Of course they [other Americans] do [see her as American]! Maybe sometimes a hateful person who's Islamophobic will not, but honestly most people just want to know more. They know that what they see on TV isn't the full story. I think sometimes we stereotype white people as being ignorant or racist, but really they are just curious and have misconceptions that are cleared up as soon as they have a Muslim friend or neighbor." (Abeer, 20, CoMO, Arab, Si)

These experiences of external affirmation help validate an American identity that is distinctly Muslim, and a Muslim identity that is distinctly American.

Interviewees specifically describe this Muslim American identity in terms of its unique boundaries.

> "I think other Muslims do [see me as American]. When I feel recent immigrants or refugees who are Muslims, I think they do, and I feel clearly different from them. They see me as different; I do things that are not culturally Arab, I do things that are more culturally American. Even like, how late I stay out. People see that and are like 'oh my God, you're out of the house all the time!' It's not as acceptable in certain cultures to do that, but my parents are okay with it and so am I. So to other Muslims, they see me as American." (Aisha, 21, CoMO, Arab, Si)

Aisha recognizes the difference between not only her and other Americans, but also her and other Muslims. Muslim American identity is distinct from general Muslim identity. Abeer and Khadija similarly emphasize their difference from other Arabs whose immigration may have been more recent throughout their interviews. Walid echoes the same sentiments, upon being asked where he felt most like he belonged, he answers, "I am most comfortable with people like myself: people who are second generation American Muslims; people who were born here but come from a different place." (Walid, 19, CoMO, Arab, Si) These references highlight the contours of Muslim American identity as it occupies a space between monolithic and traditional images of Muslim or American.

Dearborn, Michigan

<u>City Background and Demographics</u>

48

Dearborn, Michigan is a suburb of Detroit best known for its ties to the automotive industry, especially the Ford Motor Company, whose headquarters it houses. About 20% of Dearborn industry relates to the car industry in some way, making it the city's key economic force. Dearborn has a median per capita income slightly lower than the median in the state of Michigan and home prices that are, on average, $10,000 cheaper. (City-Data 2009)

While Census data states that 91% of Dearborn's 99,000 residents are white (2010), the Census categorizes Arab, North African and Middle Eastern as "white." In reality, approximately 30% of Dearborn's population is Arab and Muslim, making it the highest density of Arabs outside the Middle East (Shyrock 2007). For the most part, the Arab population clusters around East Dearborn, which further exaggerates the density of their presence.

Dearborn Muslims: Background and Key Institutions

With a plethora of Arab and Muslim owned restaurants, grocery stores and businesses, East Dearborn is stage for a vibrant community in which total immersion among Muslims is possible. Public schools in East Dearborn are attended by predominantly Arab and predominantly Muslim populations. Specifically, Dearborn's Muslim population is majority Shiite (56%) as most trace origins to Lebanon and Iraq. There is also a sizable Yemeni community, which is comprised almost entirely of Sunni Muslims. Mosques abound. There are seven mosques serving the Dearborn area specifically. The mosques are formed along racial and ethnic lines (Shyrock 2007) which usually also happened to coalesce against sectarian lines. Even within Sunni communities in Dearborn, ethnic lines trumped

sectarian ones with Lebanese Sunnis more likely to attend a Shiite mosque if it's predominantly Lebanese than a Yemeni-dominated Sunni mosque.

Rivaling the mosques in influence are key Arab American institutions in the area. The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), the American Arab Chamber of Commerce (AACC), the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and, more recently, the Arab American National Museum (AANM) are all well-funded, highly influential establishments that are organized around Arab ethnicity. The presence and strength of these organizations ensure that "Arab" identity is at the forefront of discourse surrounding integration and progress in Dearborn (Shyrock 2007). Although 9/11 forced Islam into the conversation and helped increase community organizing around religious lines, questions of advancing Arab Americans and promoting a distinct Arab American culture still dominate the consciousness of Dearborn community leaders and activists (Shyrock 2007).

Muslim American Identity in Dearborn: Introduction

Interview responses reveal the importance of this context in the creation of Muslim American identity among participants from Dearborn. Due to their racial homogeneity, mosques and predominantly Muslim institutions mediate Muslim identity *through* ethnic identity and Arab culture. Thus definitions of Muslim among the Dearborn sample do not display the same inclusivity exhibited by the significantly involved segment of the Columbia sample. Rather, the Dearborn sample's Muslim American identity resembles that of the minimally involved Columbia sample, because their ethnic and religious identities are merged together.

The Dearborn sample's definitions of American are also restrictive. Having been immersed, since childhood, in Arab culture, they construct conceptions of American that center on political and economic ideals, rather than culture. Dearborn Muslims' definitions of the "average American" emerge from a combination of civic education in public schools and media portrayals of white culture. As for definitions of "American", their responses tend to emphasize foreign and domestic government policies. Despite the relative rigidity of these constructions, Dearborn respondents mention not having to question their American identity as children. Although they associated "American" with whiteness, they were seen within their own communities as Arab Americans.

Leaving Dearborn presents a moment of "culture shock" for the segment of the sample that had moved away from home. This moment is characterized by recognizing the cultural differences separating them from non-Muslim and non-Arab peers and classmates. In response to such culture shock, interviewees cluster with other Arabs and identify with other communities of color. Although some start transforming their conceptions of America to include cultural pluralism, most of the Dearborn sample describes developing an American identity with the central tenets of dissent, identifying with marginalization, and, ultimately, taking America to task on upholding its civic and economic ideals. This identity is essentially an Arab American one whose contours resemble those of identities developed among other communities of color. Islam plays a role only as an important facet of Arab identity. Thus, respondents from Dearborn tend to have highly racialized narratives even when discussing Muslim identity.

Dearborn: Narratives of Childhood in the Enclave

As mentioned earlier, Dearborn can offer its residents an immersive experience among Muslims and Arabs, more specifically. Unlike Columbia Muslims, Dearborn Muslims can easily live in majority Muslim neighborhoods, attend majority Muslim schools, and interact with majority Muslim shops and businesses. These same neighborhoods, schools and shops were also predominantly Arab. The two facts further reinforced the merging of those two identities. In fact, respondents of the Dearborn sample did just that. Immersion was unintentional and organic. There was usually no specific effort to engage the Muslim or Arab communities, because they were simply ubiquitous and unavoidable. One respondent, when asked who his childhood friends with or whether he was interacting with Muslims, said:

> "It never actually occurred to me that I was interacting *with Muslims*. I just hung out, you know? It was like, oh hey, I'm going to go play outside with the boys in the neighborhood, or hey, I'm going to chill with these kids after school, or, I'm going to go ride bikes with my cousins. It wasn't like: 'these are the Muslims, we are going to form relationships now!' It just sort of happened, Muslims were everywhere" (Qassem, 22, DeMI, Arab, CR)[19]

Qassem's narrative was quite typical for the Dearborn sample's descriptions of childhood immersed in a majority-Muslim environment.

All but one of the interviewees had family in Dearborn besides immediate family. This meant that their early social interactions centered on family gatherings

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[19] Name, Age, Dearborn, MI (De, MI), Race, Current Resident (CR) or Former Resident (FR)

and occasions. At the same time, once participants entered school, their parents seemed much more comfortable helping them foster friendships with acquaintances made there than Columbia parents were. Several of the interviewees described childhoods playing with neighbors who also happened to be classmates and making friends in school with whom they then spent time after hours as well.

Religious Identity

Members of the Dearborn sample, predictably, make no distinction between their Muslim and Arab identities. The specific country of origin of each participant shapes their points of emphasis within Muslim identity, but essentially Islam is a cultural expression for this group.

"Going to the mosque during Ramadan[20], that's been part of the culture of growing up in Dearborn. You don't get that elsewhere. My grandma would always make *kaak*[21] and we'd all shop for new outfits for Eid[22], you won't find that kind of Arab culture anywhere else." (Zahraa, 22, DeMI, Arab, CR)

Not only do residents of Dearborn describe Islam as a piece of their Arab culture, but they have a hard time identifying it as a separate identity. When asked how he identified, Zain said "Arab then American, for sure. Then Muslim, but I feel like that's definitely implied in Arab, given my community and because for me, they were the same thing growing up." Similarly, Ameerah says "Arab slash Muslim" when mentioning her identities.

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[20] The 9th month of the Islamic Lunar calendar, during which Muslims fast every day from sunrise to sun set
[21] Traditional Middle Eastern cookies
[22] Muslim holiday

Other respondents relegated their Muslim identities to a similar and more personal realm. Rather than identify with Muslim as a communal identity, they viewed it as a demarcation of personal, spiritual connection. Ahmad describes his identity in this way:

> "I definitely feel American, but I don't feel more American than I do Arab to be honest. I guess it's just another one of the many labels that is true for me, I have an Arab experience, I have an American experience, I have a Muslim experience although I think that wouldn't necessarily be analogous to the Arab and American one because the Muslim experience for me has been a lot more individual rather than a community thing. Islam for us has served as a really strong point of unity for our family and in unique times, deaths and celebrations, in particular religious anniversaries in our communities, but in terms of, I guess, my Muslim identity is very much on a level that is different than Arab or American, I feel like those are national identities that are different than my Muslim identity. I would have a harder time identifying with the Muslim *ummah*[23] than I would with Arab people in general because of the similarities in culture that are there, a lot of that has to do with language." (Ahmad, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Farah captures the level of Muslim identity by saying "it's more of an individual thing". When asked about his Muslim identity, Ali entered a long explanation about improving his personal level of practice mentioning a desire to pray more often and learn Arabic in order to read the Quran. On a similar note, Mina described not

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[23] Global Muslim community

having read the Quran in its entirety and being unable to connect to her Muslim identity without having done so. These themes did not emerge in the Columbia sample at all; their presence among the Dearborn respondents indicates entirely different conceptions of Muslim identity.

The Role of the Mosque

In Dearborn Islam is at once an expression of Arab culture and a personal act of devotion, the role of the mosque only reinforces these definitions. Interviewees were fairly evenly split between frequently attending the mosque (on a weekly basis or more) and attending only on special occasions like weddings and holidays. All of the participants mention a decline in their engagement with the mosque past childhood. A consistent pattern was engagement with a weekend Islamic school until middle school or junior high school, and then a drop or detachment from the mosque. None of the respondents' levels of participation in the mosque or Muslim institution paralleled responses from the Columbia sample.

These differences among the Dearborn population did not seem to correlate to the salience of Muslim identity or religious practice. As described earlier, both samples had a mix of religious conservatism and devotion. Even participants from Dearborn who described attending the mosque every week for prayer did not seem to engage with it on multiple levels. In other words, they used the mosque to stop in and pray, but it was not the focal point of their community involvement or, by extension, their Muslim identity. Instead the mosque played a minimal role in developing their relationship to other Muslims, it was an individual symbol rather than a communal one.

This indicates that the mosque reinforced the racial definitions of Muslim identity among the Dearborn sample. It failed to question the relationship between Islam and members' countries of origin. Sabrah describes her experience in the Yemeni mosque as follows:

"At our weekend school, they really pushed certain stuff that was totally gendered. Our teacher one time—I think we were talking about modesty— she was like, 'well obviously it's not appropriate for girls to be out past 9 or 10'. Another time, she was like: 'if you have a friend that wears jeans everyday instead of *Abaya[24]* you have to encourage her to dress more Islamically [sic].' For the longest I thought that was required in the Quran or something, really it's just Yemeni culture!" (Sabrah, 20, DeMI, Arab, CR)

Mosque administrators and Islamic school teachers in racially homogenous Muslim institutions felt no need to transcend cultural definitions of Islam. Unlike their Columbian counterparts, they had no pressure to create a Muslim identity identifiable to people of multiple cultural origins and expressions. The lines between Muslim edicts and Arab culture were blurred and both were taught as equally legitimate restrictions. Hence, even the small role the mosque played did not question the process of embedding Islam in Arab culture, rather it reinforced it.

American Identity

Another effect of living in an ethnic and religious enclave was a delay in the moment at which Dearborn respondents processed their identities. Specifically, they did not have to process their differences with broader society until much later.

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[24] A loose black robe or outer-garment, traditionally worn by Muslim women in the Middle East, especially the Arabian Peninsula.

While Columbians described being well acquainted with their differences as Muslims and individuals of color, the Dearborn sample came to recognize these facts much later.

"I would say my affiliation with my friends was more about just social interaction rather than a sense of belonging to a common community, a shared community. Yeah, I definitely wouldn't say that we all consciously or unconsciously identified a community or a shared sense of what we belonged to... Growing up in Dearborn and going to the school system that I did, which was actually less—it was always predominantly Arab but it was slightly less Arab than it is today, but growing up, I never had to question or I never had to recognize that we were Arab or we were Muslim, that was just assumed. In fact, it's never really something I reflected on up to a certain age—10 maybe 12 years old. For all I knew, at certain points growing up, everyone was Muslim; everyone was Arab because everyone I had known was that way. I never had to think that—to me Christian meant white, or American. I didn't even see myself as American, American meant that white kid. It was something I had completely internalized for the longest time—that I was Arab and I was Muslim." (Bassem, 21, DeMI, Arab)

This narrative about not having to recognize race or religion, until much later than usual for a minority, is typical among the interviews. Not only does this quote illustrate the link between Muslim identity and Arab identity, as Bassem uses the terms as synonymous and interchangeable, but also the tenuous relationship respondents growing up in Dearborn had. Other interviewees described a similar

inability to recognize or process identity, but claimed this was true of their American identity as well.

> "I don't think I've ever, until now obviously I don't think growing up I ever questioned my American identity, I think that it was always a given. I am born and raised in America, we have to sing the national anthem or we have to say the pledge of allegiance every day in class. Those kinds of things are engrained in your mind growing up. You're American, you're American; whether we know what that means or not is a different story, but at the end of the day you're American. I knew I was Arab, obviously, I was never shy to say it because I came from a city where it's not something you have to be shy about." (Mina, 19, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Farah similarly never questioned her American identity. She associates this lack of acknowledgment with a lack of knowledge about how Muslims fair in racially heterogeneous communities.

> "I guess growing up in my community, from day one through high school, I don't ever remember questioning my American identity. It was more so like, you're growing up in a community where you're all kind of the same so you never really have to deal with pressure, you hear about it outside of your community, but you never really have to deal with it within the community – I never really felt it. Maybe more so when I learned a lot more, just about the negativity that was associated with being Arab or Muslim in America."

Farah associates the identity formation or acknowledgement process with learning of outside pressure from non-Muslims and non-Arabs.

For individuals like Farah, Mina, and the rest of the Dearborn sample, views of America were constructed based on interaction with media and the 9/11 backlashes. Ali, Ahmad, Bassem, Zain and Qassem all mention this as the moment of realizing they were different. This is also the beginning of constructing a view of America and their own relationship to it.

> "Definitely, there was especially after 9/11 this stigma that we felt, and this sort of, by default we came together to talk about what it meant to be Muslim and why we were just as American as everybody else, and why no body had the right to discount our experience as Americans." (Ahmad, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

The American identity that emerges from this discourse is not based on interacting with other Americans, however. Instead, members of the Dearborn sample give responses to the question of American identity that overwhelmingly cite media portrayals and civic education.

References to media portrayals were really interpretations of the Media's coverage of Islam and Muslims as representative of the views of the average American. Ahmad describes coming to see other Americans' view of him through the lens of Islamophobic rhetoric:

> "I have a really hard time defining that, because I grew up in Dearborn where no one really questioned my Americanness and then I came here and no one really questioned my Americanness here because it's a relatively liberal college campus, but when I look at mainstream media and how the dichotomy that is made between those people, the other, the Muslim and

America and by extension Americans, that's when I feel like 'Okay maybe

they don't really feel like I'm American'. And reading about anti-Muslim

sentiments that seem to have some sort of platform in this country based on

what I read in the media, that's the only time that I feel like people are

questioning my Muslimness." (Ahmad, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Seeing America through the lens of stigma presents an image of America as

Islamophobic, exclusive and bigoted.

"Of this country? There's always been debates [sic]! With the whole Obama

debate about him being a Muslim you see it. 'He's not a Muslim!' this is John

McCain speaking after some lady in the audience said 'Obama is a Muslim!'

then John McCain says 'Oh, No! He's not a Muslim, he's a good family man.' So

is a Muslim not a good family man? There's also the stigma behind him, 'Oh

what if he's Muslim". There's this bad connotation of being Muslim in this

country. We had the whole congressional hearing on that, I think it was, King

that wanted to see why Shariah[25] law was seeping its way through. He wants

to get to the bottom of it. You have lawmakers stating that they want to ban

Shariah law. Or you have France that wants to ban the whole veil. There is all

of that there. In a sense, people are telling us this is not the way to live. They

want to ban the veil, they want to ban Shariah; they don't want us to live our

lives as Muslims." (Ali, 21, DeMI, Arab, FR)

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[25] The Muslim legal tradition

This image of America as essentially white, conservative and Islamophobic is held simultaneously with a belief in dissent and freedom of speech as fundamentally American enterprises.

"Well I think a lot of American ideals that were defined in the constitution when this country was founded cross over and overlap with Muslim ideals. Things like equality, things like just having freedoms and having a right to live with these freedoms. I feel like a lot of the things that I pride myself on as a Muslim, I also pride myself on as being an American. Islam encourages things like being able to live side by side with people of different faiths, and America, they call it a melting pot, I don't think it's a melting pot necessarily, but ideally, America is this place for people of different faiths to be able to live side by side, so I feel like there are many things about being a Muslim that coincide with being an American, and I feel like just because I grow up as a Muslim in a predominantly Muslim community doesn't make me less American, people may think oh well you may be used to being around people who practice Islam and Islam may not necessarily, in their opinion, be like, what's the word? It may not be able to mix in with what it means to be an American. But I disagree with that, as a Muslim and as an American, many of the things I define myself with come from both identities, not from being a Muslim or from being an American, in a sense." (Farah, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Many of the Dearborn residents saw themselves as taking America to task on the ideals of freedom and equality. When asked when he felt most American, Bassem mentioned attending political protests and participating in public life:

"Growing up, obviously growing up around Middle East conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon, which are a huge part of my life and my family. Going to rallies and going to protests is something we did several times a year for the numerous things going on over seas. Going to city hall, standing on the steps, holding an American flag and a Lebanese flag, chanting things, asking my government not to do certain things—yeah that's when I felt American." (Bassem, 21, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Following up as to why this made him feel most American elicited the following response:

"A lot of it stems from my knowledge of history, I really view America's history as a history of dissent, at least America's founding. The founders were American radicals really. The people who founded this country in some ways were elitist; these were things I realized later on, but at the time they were radicals. They questioned authority, they questioned divine sovereignty, the sovereignty of the king, things that had never been questioned for a long time, very radical." (Bassem, 21, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Dissent and political consciousness were keys to the American identities of all of the members of the Dearborn sample. However, the individuals who moved away from Dearborn tended to emphasize them more strongly. Six of the ten respondents from Dearborn are currently students in Ann Arbor. Each of these students mentions college as a turning point in their racial and religious identity formation.

Leaving Dearborn

Leaving Dearborn's cocoon of homogeneity left respondents surprised at the extent to which they were a minority.

> "When I got to college, I wasn't in as much of a mostly Muslim community. It was kind of a culture shock for me, even like living in a dorm where there weren't many Muslims." (Farah, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Like Farah, all of the respondents who reside in Ann Arbor mentioned some form of culture shock upon arriving at the University.

> [When did you start to have sustained interaction with non-Muslims?] "Really, I didn't completely dive into that culture until college, until I got to U of M Ann Arbor. The immediate phrase that comes to mind is culture shock […] it was just a shock, just-just a shock […] Small things, like realizing you have an accent? You know? That's something you don't realize until you come to a place like U of M. I think the biggest thing is realizing how vastly, immensely different you are from other people. I never had to realize how different I was because I had my differences but it was in the context of a different community. When I came here, I felt alien actually for the longest time. It really caused me to rekindle, or maybe for the first time establish a connection with my home—Dearborn, and definitely the Muslim thing, I never asserted my Muslimness. I never felt like I had to and I was never inclined to." (Bassem, 21, DeMI, Arab)

The culture shock Bassem describes here centers on recognizing what he perceives as the enormity of his difference, he illustrates how emerging from the homogeneity of Dearborn forces him to define identities that had previously gone unrecognized. However, more importantly, it highlights his sudden need to identify with people from similar situations.

Respondents sought shelter in recreating the homogeneity of Dearborn at first. Mina describes finding "the Dearborn crowd" in college:

"So freshmen year, last year, well first of all – you have to know that a lot of people from Dearborn got accepted into this University and are here, so I found that I was in my comfort zone for the majority of freshmen year. All my best friends from my high school, I knew people, so I never felt like I had to really venture out and meet new people, but I knew that's what was good for me." (Mina, 19, DeMI, Arab, FR)

With time, however, she starts to identify with people of different background and ideals. Despite branching away from the circles she describes here, Mina and her Dearborn peers are still constrained by their belief in other Americans' negative views of them.

"Yeah, and they're relating to America as sometimes a fantastic idea that is sometimes pretty removed from the reality that I know is America. When I think of America, in addition to opportunity and all of the things it offers its citizens, I think of its foreign policy, and its really dark roots: I think of slavery, I think of segregation, I think of modern day racism and discrimination so when I think of America, I don't think of this flowery, oh we

had the declaration of independence and all these things - sure there's some

awesome, awesome stuff to be learned from that, but it's not this flowery

picture that other people necessarily perceive." (Ahmad, 20, DeMI, Arab, FR)

Ahmad sees himself, inherently as a Muslim and an Arab, as a part of this negative

history. Thus, even when he branches beyond the Arab community on campus,

reaching out to other people of color, Ahmad and his cohort view their American

identity as fundamentally marginal:

"That's how I feel most people associate with being American is being

patriotic, but my idea of patriotism is through dissent, patriotism through

criticism and dissent, because if you care about something then you will

criticize it. So yea, definitely I identify with people who have alienated

themselves from American society. I identify them as great Americans, so for

example: I identify Malcolm X as a great American because of what he did. I

identify Wayne Morris, one of the senators who voted against the Vietnam

war: I identify him as a great American and some people in the labor

movement, Rosa Parks, actually mostly black people." (Bassem, 21, DeMI,

Arab, FR)

Identifying with other people of color is a central tenant of an American identity on

the margins. The respondents from Dearborn are emerging from a community

whose primary boundaries formed around race. As our discussion demonstrated

earlier, Muslim identity was simply embedded within this discourse. Ultimately, as

these definitions indicate, American identity was also embroiled in the racial

discourse.

Challenges

The research design presented several limitations to this study. The first was, as I alluded to earlier, reaching a representative sample of participants. The entry point is mostly Muslim organizations and communities, which means that my sample overrepresented individuals who care to engage with Muslim institutions. This implies a certain type of Muslim, which means my sample may not have captured the "unmosqued", but more likely captured individuals who are more conservative in terms of practice or belief, or at least Muslims who believe in emphasizing the congregational aspects of Islam as opposed to the private practices. From respondents, I did end up with significant variation on the definitions of Muslim identity as well as the self-proclaimed levels of engagement with Muslim institutions I think this helped balance each sample.

A third limitation of this study, and perhaps its biggest, is that it specifically does not include any individuals of black descent. The experience and relationship of black, African-American Muslims to the United States is fascinating, but it is far too unique to be grouped with an immigrant narrative. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African American communities began adopting "Muslim" movements as forms of resistance to Christian cultural and religious hegemony (Curtis 2002, Jackson 2005). These "proto-Islamic" movements had little doctrinal overlap with Sunni or Shiite Islam (Jackson 2005). Despite Islam in black America eventually moving to more mainstream theological views (Curtis 2002), the stigma associated with the original movements created tension with immigrant communities from the Muslim world that never fully disappeared (Jackson 2005).

Additionally the historical trajectories of the two groups have been vastly different in terms of both racial tension and class disparities. Knowing that I could not generalize about both groups, I chose to exclude African-American Muslims from the sample, focusing instead on the identities of immigrant Muslims. I did not purposely exclude any second-generation Muslims of African descent, however; none responded to the advertisement for the study.

The fourth challenge was the ability to extract information from the interviews. Identity is not a subject about which people are accustomed to articulate, therefore their answers did not fit into neat categories. It was difficult to remedy this without asking leading questions, or pressuring respondents. I combatted this issue by asking respondents for instances in which they felt a certain way as well as a history or chronological narrative of their identity. I feel this helped guide respondents through discussing these difficult topics.

Last, but not least, my social identities as an interviewer most likely played a role within the interviews. I wear the Muslim headscarf, which often leads people to assume that I am religiously conservative. Additionally, I have been a leader within the Muslim community on campus for the past 3 years. This means that members of the Dearborn sample who attended the University of Michigan could have associated me with strong Muslim identity or affiliation to Muslim communities. On the other hand, I also grew up in Columbia, Missouri where I was also active in Muslim institutions. This may have caused a similar effect. I tried to counteract the interviewer effect by emphasizing that the interview was a safe space before commencing questions.

At the same time, my social identities presented me as an "insider". In the face of negative stigma and the burden of representation, Muslim Americans often avoid narratives that present any conflict between Islam and the West. I believe that my position as insider allowed participants a degree of honesty that a non-Muslim interviewer may not have been able to garner.

Conclusions

The defining difference between the Columbia and Dearborn communities are their treatment of race. While Dearborn Muslims organized around race and embedded Islam into a discourse about it, the Columbia Muslim community separated Muslim and racial identity. The role of the mosque as a mediating institution changed based on the racial composition of that mosque, which was largely a function of size. In other words, because the Columbia Muslim community was small, they necessarily congregated on the basis of Islam. The Dearborn community, on the other hand, had enough numerical strength to expand; the resulting community cleavages centered on ethnic difference. These differences ultimately led to a different Muslim identity in each location.

American identity was also very different in each place and those differences are also based on size. Interacting with non-Muslims throughout childhood and in every day life helped Columbia Muslims construct a vision of America as poly-cultural. They saw themselves either as potential or recent inductee in America's multicultural project. Meanwhile, Dearborn respondents had no such interactions. They constructed a view of America as hostile and hypocritical monoculture. Facing the stigma and backlash that followed 9/11 helped exacerbate this view, further

enforcing their perceptions of exclusion. Having defined their Muslim identities not separately but within definitions of their ethnic and racial identities, they structured their relationship with broader American society as one of dissent, choosing to identify with other marginalized groups like other communities of color.

Not only do these results reveal the importance of the Muslim community as a mediating institution for identity and the role size plays in this process, but they also hint at the role of pluralism, diversity, and validation play in the creation of hybrid identities. In both visions of Muslim American identity, pluralism is key to the integration of American Muslims. Whether assumed -- as in the case of Columbia -- or demanded -- as in the case of Dearborn, a fundamentally poly-cultural conception of it must precede identification with American society. For Dearborn Muslims, although they did not see America as having succeeded in creating this inclusive space, they believe that the ideals and structure of the American social and political space advocates for progression in that direction. Columbians believe that this space is largely existent, save for a few exceptionally "ignorant" individuals. They tended to embrace the burden of representation in order to combat these perceptions. Leaving aside the moral implications of such an embrace, this view reveals certain optimism about the foundational ideals of American society. Columbia and Dearborn respondents seem to share solidarity with America's secular ideals. The divergence of the two viewpoints illustrates a positive effect of diversity. Whereby Columbian Muslims have been able to make their case to neighbors and peers on the local level, while also constructing positive views of their own society.

Still, there is much to explore in the way of Muslim American identity. By focusing on two case studies, this study leaves questions about other communities who may not be as far apart in size and composition as Columbia and Dearborn unanswered. Further research would need to be cognizant of several limitations: 1) The temporal ambiguity of the identity formation process. Inherent in this is the performativity that is necessary involved in discussing identity with members of a stigmatized group. That is to say participants in the study may feel the need to present views that conform to mainstream discourses on race and national affiliation; 2) Specifically in the context of Muslim Americans, the constant negotiation and re-negotiation of Muslim American identity in the context of an ever-volatile public discourse on Islamophobia; 3) The constant conflation of Arab and Muslim identities to the exclusion of other ethnic groups of Muslims in the United States; and 4) Most importantly, the need to transcend the binaries of claiming versus disassociation, which dominate the conversation with an air of pejorative assessment rather than scholarly observation.

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Table A – Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Country of Parents' Birth	Hometown	Household Income between:
Ahmad	Male	20	Arab	Lebanon	Dearborn	$20K-$40K
Bassem	Male	21	Arab	Lebanon	Dearborn	$40K-$60K
Ali	Male	21	Arab	Lebanon, Iraq	Dearborn	$20K-$40K
Qassem	Male	22	Arab	Lebanon	Dearborn	$60K-$80K
Zain	Male	22	Arab	Yemen	Dearborn	$40K-$60K
Ameerah**	Female	21	Arab	Iraq	Dearborn	$10K-$20K
Mina	Female	19	Arab	Lebanon	Dearborn	+$100K
Farah	Female	20	Arab	Lebanon, Syria	Dearborn	$40K-$60K
Sabrah**	Female	20	Arab	Yemen	Dearborn	$20K-$40K
Zahraa**	Female	22	Arab	Lebanon	Dearborn	$40K-$60K
Khalid	Male	20	South Asian	Bangladesh	Columbia	+$100K
Nassir	Male	20	South Asian	Bangladesh	Columbia	+$100K
Samir	Male	19	South Asian	Bangladesh	Columbia	$40K-$60K
Walid	Male	19	Arab	Jordan	Columbia	+$100K
Zayid	Male	21	Arab	Iraq	Columbia	$60K-$80K
Aisha**	Female	21	Arab	Iraq	Columbia	+$100K
Khadija**	Female	20	Arab	Tunisia	Columbia	$20K-$40K
Jamilah	Female	23	Hispanic - Arab	Venezuela, Libya	Columbia	$20K-$40K
Shireen	Female	22	South Asian	Bangladesh	Columbia	$20K-$40K
Abeer**	Female	20	Arab	Egypt, Palestine	Columbia	$40K-$60K

**Wears *hijab* (i.e. covers her head in accordance with Muslim tradition)

Table B – Immigration History

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Birthplace	[If Birthplace outside the US] Age atMigration
Ahmad	Male	20	Lebanon	5 years old
Bassem	Male	21	Dearborn, MI	N/A
Ali	Male	21	Dearborn, MI	N/A
Qassem	Male	22	Lebanon	2 years old
Zain	Male	22	Yemen	7 years old
Ameerah**	Female	21	Iraq	10 years old
Mina	Female	19	Dearborn, MI	N/A
Farah	Female	20	Dearborn, MI	N/A
Sabrah**	Female	20	Dearborn, MI	N/A
Zahraa**	Female	22	Jordan	1 years old
Khalid	Male	20	Ohio[26]	N/A
Nassir	Male	20	Bangladesh	3 years old
Samir	Male	19	Bangladesh	5 years old
Walid	Male	19	Columbia, MO	N/A
Zayid	Male	21	Columbia, MO	N/A
Aisha**	Female	21	Columbia, MO	N/A
Khadija**	Female	20	Tunisia	2 years old
Jamilah	Female	23	Columbia, MO	N/A
Shireen	Female	22	Columbia, MO	N/A
Abeer**	Female	20	Columbia, MO	N/A

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[26] Actual state changed to avoid identifying respondent

Appendix A – Recruitment

Part 1 – Email (to organizations in which I am known):

Salaam Everyone,

As many of you know, I am currently working on my honors thesis in Sociology and I'm conducting it on the relationship between the amount of Muslims in one's hometown and Muslim American identity formation. I am looking to conduct 1-1.5 hour interviews with college-age, second generation Muslims from a variety of backgrounds. If you would like to participate please email me at eta@umich.edu or give me a call at 573.639.0362. If you know anyone who would like to participate, please feel free to pass my information along.

All information collected from the interviews would be strictly confidential! Looking forward to speaking with you!

Jazakumallahkhair,

Eman Abdelhadi

Part 2 – Email (to organizations/lists of which I am not a member)

Salaam,

My name is Eman Abdelhadi, I'm a senior Honors student at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. For my Senior thesis, I am conducting a study on the relationship between the amount of Muslims in one's hometown and Muslim American identity formation. I am looking to conduct 1-1.5 hour interviews with college-age, second generation Muslims from a variety of backgrounds. If you would like to participate please email me at eta@umich.edu or give me a call at 573.639.0362. If you know anyone who would like to participate, please feel free to pass my information along.

All information collected from the interviews would be strictly confidential and participants will be given a Coldstone gift card as a token of my appreciation. Looking forward to speaking with you!

Jazakumallahkhair,

Eman Abdelhadi

Appendix B
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Muslimamerican: The Formation of American Identity Among American Muslims

Principal Investigator: Eman Abdelhadi, Department of Sociology, Univ of Michigan

Faculty Advisor: Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, University of Michigan

You are invited to participate in a research study about the perceptions of American identity among second generation American Muslims. The purpose of this study is to learn how American Muslims construct American identities and how they balance them with their Muslim identity.

INFORMATION

Approximately thirty students will be invited to be a part of this research study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview at the time and location of your choice. The questionnaire will ask you about your age, gender, race, and where you are from, as well as ask you to respond to a series of questions about your family's origins, the demographic and religious composition of your hometown, your personal religiosity and worship habits, your engagement with the Muslim community, your engagement with American society and culture, your identities, and your ideas about society's perceptions of you. The interview will last about an hour and a half, and will not exceed two hours.

I would like to record the interview to ensure that our conversation is recorded accurately, but you may still participate in the research even if you decide not to be taped. If you are comfortable with our conversation being recorded, I will record the conversation and later transcribe it. The recording will not be shared with anyone and will be deleted when I finish my project.

BENEFITS

Although you may not directly benefit from participating in this study, some people find that sharing their stories is a valuable experience. I hope that this study will contribute to the knowledge about how American Muslims fare in current day American society.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Answering questions or talking with others about identity, group dynamics and/or social perceptions may be challenging and uncomfortable at times. You may decline to answer any interview question and you can end your participation in this study at any time.

PARTICIPATION

In exchange for your participation in this research project, you will receive a $5 gift card to Espresso Royale.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I plan to use the responses from my interviews in my Honors Thesis, but I will not include any information that could potentially connect you to my research. I will not use your real name in the written copy of the interview or in the final thesis. To keep your information safe, the audiotape recordings will be deleted as soon as a word-for-word copy of the interview has been created and all data will be entered onto a password-protected computer. All email communication will be deleted once the interview is finished. My faculty advisors might request to look at the data that I am collecting, but otherwise I will be the only person who has access to your responses.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study before your data collection session is completed, your information will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONTACT

If you have questions about this research, including questions about the scheduling of your interview or any other concerns, you may contact the researcher, Eman Abdelhadi, a student in the Department of Sociology, Room 3001, 500 South State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, at 573-639-0362, and at eta@umich.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Elizabeth A. Armstrong (elarmstr@umich.edu).

CONSENT

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

_____
Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix C
Full Interview Guide

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Citizenship Status:

Where were your parents born?

Where in the United States did you spend the majority of your childhood? (What city?)

Where do you currently reside?

Please list the major Muslim organizations/institutions that you are aware are in your hometown (include mosques, schools, non-profits, etc.)

Appendix D
Full Interview Guide

1) **Biographical Information:** I'd like to start out by getting to know your story a little bit better…
   a. Please tell me a little bit about your life growing up?
      i. Where were your parents born?
      ii. When did they move to the United States?
      iii. Where were you born?
      iv. Where all have you lived?
   b. I'd like to ask you about your family structure…
      i. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
      ii. Who lives in your household?
      iii. Tell me
2) **Hometown information**. Next I'd like to know a little bit more about your hometown…
   a. Do you know of any estimates of the number of Muslims in your hometown?
   b. Are there any mosques in your hometown?
      i. How many are within driving distance from your house?
   c. How far away was the nearest mosque to your house?
   d. Are there any other Muslim institutions by where you live?
      i. Schools, businesses, non-profits, etc
   e. How would you describe the ethnic make up for your town?
      i. Diverse? Not Diverse?
3) **Levels of Involvement with Muslim Community.** I'd like to speak with you about your relationship with the Muslim community around you…
   a. How often did you attend the mosque growing up?
      i. Through elementary school? Middle school? High school? College?
   b. What types of mosque functions did you attend usually?
   c. Were you involved in any other Muslim organizations or activities?
      i. Which ones?
      ii. How often?
   d. What percentage of your close friends was Muslim?
   e. When did you interact with Muslims the most?
      i. Mosque? Social life? School? Work?
4) **Levels of Involvement with non-Muslim community.** I'd like to speak with you next on your relationship with non-Muslims…
   a. What percentage of your friends were non-Muslim growing up?
      i. Elementary school? Middle School? High School? College/now?
   b. How often did you watch TV growing up?
   c. What kind of Music did you listen to? (If any…)
   d. Where did you most often interact with non-Muslims?

          i. At school? Social functions? Your house? Their house?
    e. How did your relationship with non-Muslims change over time?

5) **American Identity.** Next I'd like to move to a conversation about your identities, let's first discuss American identity…
    a. Do you identify yourself as American? Why or why not?
    b. What do you think it means to be American?
    c. What entitles a person to an American identity?
    d. When/where do you identify most as American?
    e. When/where do you identify least as American?
    f. Did you always feel this way? How has your identity changed over the years?
          i. What did you think when you were in elementary school? When you were an adolescent? When you were in High School?
    g. Do you think your interaction with Muslims shaped your American identity in any way? In what ways?

6) **External Definitions**
    a. Do you think other people agree with your definitions of American identity?
    b. Do you think they see you the way you see yourself?
    c. Why or why not?

7) **Muslim Identity**
    a. How would you define Muslim identity?
    b. What does it mean to you?
    c. How do your Muslim and American identities interact?