

THE VOICED AND THE VOICELESS:
THE EFFECTS OF THEIR PORTRAYAL IN THE MEDIA ON THE
CONSCIOUSNESS OF MUSLIM YOUTH POST 9/11 IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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Abstract

In the era following 9/11, Islam has become a target of discrimination and bigotry, and it is often misconstrued in the media and vilified by news members and political leaders. The mass media often negatively portrays Muslims as ‘terrorists’ and ‘extremists’ and Muslims are grouped, without will, into this category of being ‘evil’ and ‘strange.’ This portrayal may lead to an internalization of the negative stereotypes prevalent in the media and an eroding of Muslim American youth’s identity. Although some research has been done on the effects that post-9/11 media have had on the identity of Muslim youth, little research has yet been done on whether the mass media has specifically affected the identity formation of Muslim youth in America and how Muslim American youth’s mass media navigation is influenced by their portrayal therein. This research has addressed this need through a qualitative study, with a focus on interviews conducted with Muslim high school students. The results from this study found that Muslim American youth are conscious of the negative stereotypes in the news media; however, the core of their identity is not greatly affected for they interact positively on a daily basis with social media. Muslim American youth identified that they are creating their unique stories. While the news media perpetuates othering and white supremacy, participants noticed that social media is a platform that they are able to find positive influences and interact

with like-minded individuals to strengthen their identity. Participants concluded that it is imperative for one to become active and positive participants in their society in order to combat negative news media portrayals. The results of this study have shown that there is a need for critical media literacy to exist in our schools in order to educate people on different religions and beliefs.

California State University, East Bay
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

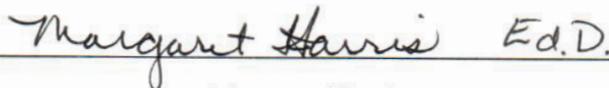
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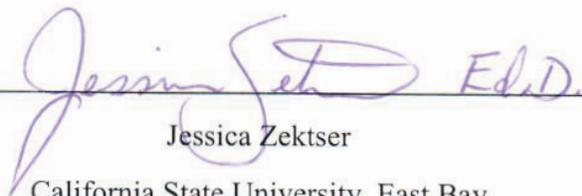
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”

(Malcolm X, 1963, as cited in Griffith, 2012)

Muna Yunus¹ is a young Muslim Jr. High student living in the Bay Area. In response to the comment by the researcher of this study that “Muslims are often stopped at airports and given harsher treatment,” Yunus replied, “We deserve this kind of treatment and should be treated this way. I mean, you see what they watch on TV and so I don’t blame them.” This stereotype internalization is an example of the effects that the mass media can have on the consciousness of Muslim youth living in America.

Problem Statement

In the era following 9/11, Muslims have become a target of discrimination. Islam is often misrepresented in the media and is criticized by news members and political leaders (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010). Islamophobia refers to the fear and prejudice towards Islam and Muslims and this results in hate crimes, discrimination, dehumanization, and misrepresentation of Muslims and those who are perceived to be Muslim, (i.e. Arabs; not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims

¹ Pseudonym used to protect the identity of the student.

are Arabs) (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010). “Islam has become a target of discrimination and bigotry and has often been misconstrued in the media, vilified by news pundits, religious leaders, and politicians, and is a subject of miseducation in schools” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010, p. ix). When it comes to the transmission of knowledge about Muslims, the media regularly portrays Arabs as “evil” and “barbarians” in need of the white male leader (Semmerling, 2006; Steinberg, 2010). An ideology is set up that reinforces the West as heroic individuals whose acts against Islam and Muslims are both positive and righteous (Iribarnegaray, 2010).

Being negatively stereotyped by the media often results in Muslims struggling to get and keep their jobs, friends, and lives (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; McQueeney, 2014). Further, Muslims are specifically surveyed and monitored by the United States’ national security program and are subject to “religious profiling, discriminatory acts, and undercover monitoring of Muslim American communities” (Shammas, 2015, p.1). Muslim Americans have had their basic rights assaulted and are constantly in fear of being arrested, detained, or questioned by authorities (Shammas, 2015).

Life has changed even more significantly for Muslim American youth who have had to carry the burden of being seen as a “potential terrorist” (Muedini, 2009). Cainkar (2002) asserted that it has been especially trying for Muslim youth to negotiate their identities after the 9/11 attacks. As there has been an increase of intense stereotyping within the last two decades and the dehumanization of Muslims in the U.S., Muslim youth are constantly underneath intense surveillance by the general public (Sirin & Fine, 2007). This intense surveillance stimulated by the mass media and the rise of Islamophobia has generally negatively affected Muslim youth identity (Saeed, 2007). Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between the mass media and Islamophobia and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America.

To better understand this relationship, this research will examine (a) the navigation and use of social media by Muslim youth, (b) the mass media impact on the consciousness of Muslim youth, and (c) how have (if any) Muslim youth resisted the stereotypes that are prevalent in the media.

Background

Consistently, the media inaccurately portrays Muslims and continues to create Islamophobic perceptions (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010). The social construction of Arabs as “terrorists” is historically rooted within the media; both films and broadcast news work to create the image of Arabs as “barbaric,” “cheaters,” and “the other race” (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; Semmerling, 2006; Steinberg, 2010). Historically, the United States saw an increase of Arab immigrants during the aftermaths of various wars that occurred in the Middle East (Husain & Howard, 2017). During this time, to reflect the current war-torn areas, television typically portrayed the entire Arab region as “barbarians” and in need of the white male leader (Steinberg, 2010). Unfortunately, the result is that much of the general population readily accepts the negative portrayal that is promoted in the media as “truth,” and results with large numbers of people despising the entire Arab race and Muslim religion (Steinberg, 2010). It seems inevitable, therefore, that this demonization has affected the identity formation of Muslim youth.

Growing up as a Muslim post 9/11, one was often perceived by the general public to be a threat to U.S national security (Sirin & Fine, 2007). The adolescent age is a critical stage in life, for it is the developmental stage of youth in which social and cultural identities are formed (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Thus, during this critical stage of life, these authors argue when “one’s social identity is fiercely contested by the dominant discourse...or the media, one of the first places we can witness psychological, social and

political fallout is in the lives of young people” (p. 151). And, therefore, the young lives of Muslim youth may be negatively affected on a vast scale. For example, according to California Assembly Bill No. 2845 (2016), more than half of Muslim students are being assaulted and this has affected their access to education. Further, many Muslim students are reporting discriminatory acts from their educators and administrative officials (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). Thus, there is a need for this issue to be further researched in order to aid a minority group of children that are often overlooked or worse, persecuted.

Research Purpose and Significance

According to different studies, the overall heightened watch over Muslims have resulted with many youth feeling awkward and uncomfortable with both their Muslim and their American identities (Cainkar, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2007). Oftentimes, they feel pressured that they must choose to be one or the other in order to succeed in our current American society. This portrayal may lead to an internalization and an eroding of their American identity (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Although the research literature has documented the extent of negative portrayals of Muslims in the media and has provided some insight on the situation of Muslim youth after 9/11, additional research was needed on how the mass media has impacted and possibly led to the internalization of a negative identity among Muslim youth and how Muslim youth navigate ever-present mass media knowing these portrayals are out there. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the mass media’s portrayals of Muslims, often framed in terms of Islamophobia, and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America. Furthermore, this study examined how Muslim youth navigate the multiple forms of media—from mass media to social media—that are ever-present in their lives, knowing these Islamophobic portrayals exist.

The research questions that guided the dissertation are as follows:

- How do Muslim youth describe the portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media?
- How do Muslim youth interact with the media?
- How do Muslim youth describe their own identities as Muslims and Americans, including ways in which Muslim youth have created an identity that challenges negative media perceptions?
- How does their media-use relate to their identity development as Muslim American youth?

The following sections delve into the topic of mass media effects on identity formation of Muslim youth. The first section has described the background of the problem and the purpose of the study. In the following chapter, this section will identify the factors that have contributed to the stated problem. This part will include the literature review and will discuss the conceptual frameworks used in this study. The following chapter will state the methods used for conducting the research. Following the chapter on methods, the results of the study will be detailed. The dissertation will conclude with a chapter on discussion and reflections of the data collected and proposes how the stated problem may be addressed in the future.

Key Terms

Hijab refers to the religious head-covering worn by Muslim women around the world. The hijab comes in various shapes, colors, and sizes and is worn in order to obey God's commandments of displaying modesty. The term "hijabi" refers to the individual who chooses to wear the hijab.

Islam refers to third Abrahamic religion. Islam is a way of life and is followed by people from all over the globe. The root word and meaning of "Islam" means peace.

Many individuals confuse tradition with religion and often assume that traditional practices are “Islamic” practices; this paper highlights the fact that traditional practices may not be religious.

Mass Media refers to the different forms of media that exists in our society. This includes, but is not limited to, TV, radio, movies, different news sources (News channels and magazines) and other internet sources. In our current society, one is bombarded with the aforementioned media sources nearly every day and it is important to recognize the variety of media sources and seek to understand the effect that it has on our identity.

Muslim is the term that will be used in the following paper to identify individuals who follow the religion of Islam. The ethnic background of the individual(s) is not considered for the term “Muslim,” which simply refers to those individuals who follow the religion of Islam. A common misconception is that all Muslims are Arabs and that all Arabs are Muslims; this is not the case. Islam is followed by communities and ethnicities from all around the world. Specifically, the paper will look at Muslims living in the United States.

The term *Muslim American* refers to those individuals who identify with following the religion of Islam and who also consider themselves to be American.

Social Media refers to the various ways that people connect and obtain their information and interact with each other through different media sources. This includes, but is not limited to, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or WhatsApp. Arguably, the youth of our society are constantly connecting and interacting with each other and with individuals from around the world through social media.

Youth refers to those individuals between the ages of 10-18. This term will be used interchangeably with the terms adolescence and teen(s).

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

It has become “normal” for the terms “terrorism,” “extremism,” or “radicalization” to be associated with Islam (Naseem, Arshad-Ayaz, Duckworth, & Savard, 2016). The social construction of Arabs as “terrorists” is historically rooted within the media, and both films and the news broadcast Muslims as ‘barbaric’ and ‘backwards’ (Semmerling, 2006). The mass population readily accepts the negative portrayal that is promoted in the media as ‘truth,’ which results with people demonizing the entire Arab race and Muslim religion (Steinberg, 2010). This normalized and prejudiced behavior is unfair to Muslims and has resulted in discrimination within the workforce and schools and identity issues within the youth (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017; Muedini, 2009).

This literature review will examine the relationship between the mass media and Islamophobia and attempt to understand the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America and identify the need for this research study. The first section will identify and explain the conceptual frameworks that will analyze the data gathered on the research problem. The theoretical frameworks used for this study are orientalism and identity theory. This section will provide rationale for the chosen frameworks and will justify how these frameworks are appropriate for this study. The following section will be a review of the empirical literature that contribute to the problem that the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media may have on the consciousness of Muslim youth. It is important to look at a problem from different angles, and thus identify the different

factors that contribute to it. The broad factors are a) the history of the minority religion of Islam in America; b) underlying political agenda within the media that has contributed to the spread of Islamophobia; and c) the conflicts of identity formation of Muslim youth post 9/11. The first factor will look at the early history of Islam in America and the reemergence of Arabs and Muslims in the mid-20th century. The second factor will look through the framework of Orientalism to the current political agenda. Additionally, this section will detail the emerging importance of social media. The last factor will not only look at identity formation post 9/11, but this section will also report recent research done on the topic of identity formation post 9/11. I conclude Chapter II with finishing statements and describe how the following dissertation proposal will uniquely contribute to the scholarly field.

Conceptual Framework

In order to effectively examine the impact of the mass media on Muslim youth identity, I will use orientalism and identity theories to analyze the study's data. Orientalism is applicable because it is a theory that argues that the West looks at Arabs and "countries of the Orient" through a distorted lens (Kerboua, 2016). This lens is used to serve the personal agenda of those in power. Similarly, the identity theory looks at the perception and the development of one's self based on interpersonal and social interactions. This theory is especially important for one of the main focuses of this research is look at how Muslim youth identity is affected. The purpose of this conceptual review is to look at orientalism and identity theory and see how they provide a framework and applicable lens to view the data gathered on the research problem. The first section of the conceptual review will define Orientalism theory. The second section will discuss

identity theory and how it pertains to Muslims. The following section will discuss how the two theories work together and provide a better picture to understand the research.

Orientalism Theory

Orientalism revolves around the belief that the knowledge of the other is neither objective nor unbiased (Kerboua, 2016; Meer, 2014). This frame sees Muslims as foreign to the West and places all societies that differ to the West to be lower and substandard (Düzgün 2014). Said (1974) argues that the West look at Arabs and “countries of the Orient through a lens that distorts the reality of those places and the people who live there” (Kerboua, 2016, p 9). Jamil (2017) cites Said’s work on Orientalism in which violence is a “natural” characteristic of Muslims and they are all inherently “barbaric” and “uncivilized.” In contrast, the West is “civilized” and “rational” and needs to master the Orient.

Orientalism has been used in various studies to look at how Muslims are perceived and discriminated in Western culture. Jamil (2017) uses the frame to support his argument that the “war on terror” was based on an underlying logic that the West had towards Islam and Muslims. In fact, the idea that violence is a part of an identity of Muslims, allows for the West to view them to be “terrorists” by nature. Many scholars have used the theory of Orientalism to support their research. Kerboua (2016) focuses on using three historical paradigms within the concept of Orientalism. First, the author looks at the historical contexts of different empires, then the author uses the lens in “twentieth century ‘American Orientalism’,” and lastly looks at a post 9/11 through a neo-Orientalism viewpoint. Using the lens of Orientalism allowed for Kerboa (2016) to “show that interest- and identity-based representations of the Other have always been part of the Western historical dynamics in its relations with the peoples of the Muslim world” (p. 27) and that this has led to the increase of Islamophobia within Western societies.

Whilst Kerboua (2016) uses the frame to look at the historical influence, Düzgün (2014) compares and contrasts by looking at Islam and Muslims through a neo-orientalist view versus an anthropological view. The author argues that viewing Muslims through a neo-orientalist view is detrimental to relations between the West and the Middle East whilst an anthropological approach will result in open-minded harmonious views towards other societies.

Several researchers have argued that white supremacy is one of the driving forces behind Orientalism (Christian et al., 2019; Smith, 2012). Smith (2012) stated that white supremacy is constituted by three logics; the first pillar is slavery, which supports capitalism; the second pillar is genocide, which supports colonialism, and the third pillar is orientalism, which supports war. Extending on the third pillar, Smith (2012) argued that the orientalism pillar identifies specific groups as both inferior and a threat to the United States, which allows America to justify their reasonings for being constantly at war. Christian et al. (2019) agreed and asserted that white supremacy and the facets that support this concept cannot be fully understood without investigating the other pillars of oppression. According to Smith (2012), it is important for all oppressed minority groups to recognize the controlling mechanism of white supremacy and band together in order to combat their agenda.

Orientalism is an appropriate frame to use for my study for this frame explains how and why a hostile propaganda exists towards Muslims. This framework allows readers to understand how problems that exist between ourselves and other Middle Eastern societies manifested many years ago and why Islamophobia exists today (Kerboua, 2016; Meer, 2014). Additionally, it helps to explain or describe the unexamined “common sense” of the dominant discourse in the US about Muslims and Muslim Americans. It is extremely important to ground data in accordance to a historical frame that explains the challenging situation facing many Muslims today. Whilst this

framework will applicably address the issue of the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, another framework is needed to look at the different factors that affect the formation of youth identity. The following section will look at identity theory and how it relates to Muslim youth.

Identity

When it comes to the topic of identity, most of us will readily agree that an individual does not have one identity, but, instead, multiple identities that create the self. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the questions of how this identity is constructed. Whereas some researchers are convinced that one's social identity will change in the real world while the "real self" remains unchanged, others maintain that different factors affect the process in which identity is constructed. Researcher Ali (2011) attested that identity is a process that is not 'static' but rather constantly constructed. "People both actively identify themselves and are identified by social other" (p. 358). In this paper I use Ali's definition and contend that identity is both constructed by the individual and is affected by the views of society. This is particularly true for Muslim youth who have internalized negative media stereotypes about their faith and who have had prejudice acts done against them.

Erikson (1968) was one of the first researchers to develop identity theory. Throughout the course of his work he defined identity and the development of self as the crucial point in one's life (primarily the adolescent age) in which the self is defined. During this critical point in time, one develops different "aspects of his or her self, based on how the individual perceives judgment from others" (Alhadi, 2016, p. 32). One's identity does not materialize overnight; instead, Erikson argues that there exist psychosocial stages of development that results with an individual constantly

characterizing and redefining him/herself based on personal interactions with oneself and others and much of this formation construction occurs unconsciously (Alhadi, 2016).

Identity formation of Muslim youth

The terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, affected how the general public perceived Muslim Americans. As such, Muslim youth often grapple with questions of alienation and identity (LoDuca, 2016; Muedini, 2009). According to researcher Ali (2011), a religious minority identity is one that “is both forged and forced by conditions that...bring together immigrant and American-born Muslims with their diverse cultural backgrounds and disparate understandings of Islam” (p. 355). The new and forced identity has resulted with many misunderstandings of Islam and Muslims. On a daily basis, many Muslims struggle for equal treatment in the job force and within schooling. Byng (2008) agreed and applied “religious minority identity” towards Muslim Americans and argued that religious minority is a recent construction and this religious identity is used to create social inequalities. Prior to 9/11, Islam and Muslims were perceived to be an “other” and were thought to be “backwards.” However, the identity of Muslims has been changed and currently Muslims are often thought to be “terrorists.” Thus, it is difficult for American Muslim youth to “find” themselves in this Western society for it often portrays Islam and Muslims as ‘an enemy’ or a ‘threat’ to America (Muedini, 2009). The results are American Muslims who live in fear and women take off their hijabs (or wear hats), men shave their beards or change their names (LoDuca, 2016).

Orientalism and Identity

The social construction of Arabs as “terrorists” is historically rooted within the media; both films and broadcast news work to create the image of Arabs as “barbaric,” “cheaters,” and “the other race” (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; Semmerling

2006). Ahmed and Matthes (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of studies from the year 2000 to the year 2015 in order to quantitatively discover the relationship of the media's negative portrayal of Muslims. The findings of their study showed that "media portrayals of Muslims to be strongly associated with terrorism" (p. 231). Additionally, the media discourse negatively effects the social identity of Muslim youth. Kellner and Share (2005) stated that "[t]here is expanding recognition that media representations help construct our images and understanding of the world" (p. 370). This identity construction has not helped Muslim youth as they have been raised in an era where they are seen as terrorists.

Although most Americans tend to believe that life has changed since 9/11, life has changed even more significantly for Muslim American youth who have had to carry the burden of being seen as a potential terrorist. Muslims have been exclusively surveyed by the United States' national security program and are subject to religious profiling and undercover monitoring of Muslim American communities (Shammas, 2015). Muslim Americans have had their basic rights assaulted and are constantly in fear of being arrested, detained, or questioned by authorities. Muslims are stereotyped by the media as being "a problem" and are classified as "the other" which thus results in having them struggle to get and keep their jobs, friends, and lives (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; McQueeney, 2014). In 2016, 20% of anti-Muslim bias incidents were due to employment issues—including harassment by other staff members, due promotions were ignored, or even being denied work (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2018). Following the 9/11 attacks, there has been an increase of hate crimes and reports of harassment and threats against Muslims (Ali, 2011; Sledge, 2013). According to the *Civil Rights Report* (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2018), anti-Muslim bias incidents have increased 17 percent from 2016 to 2017; whilst there was a 15 percent increase in hate crimes within the same time frame. Mosques have been vandalized and Muslims are constantly interrogated and profiled against at the airport,

in the workplace, and at school (Cainkar, 2002; LoDuca, 2016). On January 28, 2017, a mosque was destroyed after being set ablaze by anti-Muslim individuals; while on August 5, 2017, a mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota was bombed with an improvised explosive device (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2018).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, both Orientalism and Identity theoretical frameworks are needed to assess data. For Orientalism is known as the “historic” frame towards understanding the negative outlook that the West has towards the Middle East and Identity framework is needed to measure mass media effects on the formation of a youth’s self. Each theory is unique and will bring an appropriate lens to the study. Orientalism will ground the results of the study by explaining how the social construction is purposeful and promotes religious minority inequalities. Whilst the identity theory will provide a rationale as to why and how youth are affected by the society around them. One perspective is not enough to gain a thorough understanding of a problem that Muslim youth are facing today.

Empirical Research Review

Whilst the previous section identified the two frameworks that will be used to assess data of the research, the following section will be review of the empirical literature that contribute to the problem that the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media may have on the consciousness of Muslim youth. The factors are a) the history of the minority religion of Islam in America; b) underlying political agenda within the media that has contributed to the spread of Islamophobia; and c) the conflicts of identity formation of Muslim youth post 9/1. This literature review will examine the relationship between the mass media and Islamophobia and attempt to understand the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America and identify the need for the study.

The History of the Minority Religion of Islam in America.

In order to understand the current climate of anti-Muslim rhetoric and action, it is important to look at the existence of Islam in America. The following section will look at the history of Islam in America; it will detail the arrival of Muslims early in American history and how different events impacted the general public views of Arabs and Muslims.

Early History in the United States

Americans today tend to believe Arabs and Muslims are “new” immigrants to the United States; however, the history of Islam in America goes back to the enslavement of African Muslims and to the early groups of West African explorers preceding Columbus (Ali, 2011; Parramore, 2016; Rahman, 2016;). Several researchers estimate that 30 percent of enslaved Africans were Muslims and went to great lengths to observe their religion (Parramore, 2016). Although there were no Muslim settlements during the early years of the United States, the founding fathers were very familiar with Islam as a world religion and the Quran (holy book for Muslims) was a part of the personal library of former presidents Thomas Jefferson and John Adams (Husain & Howard, 2017; Parramore, 2016). According to Ibrahim (2008), Muslims were feared by explorers in general and it was the goal of many Whites to suppress and punish Muslims for their part in the Crusades. A majority of Muslims were brought to America as slaves and, as such, Muslims were racially discriminated by the violence of White workers. They were referred to as ‘slave’ (Husain & Howard, 2017) and were seen as ‘backwards’ and as ‘inhuman.’ Due to the horrendous acts enacted by White slave owners, Muslim slaves were forced to convert or were torn from their family members; thus the religion of Islam faded from public view and private practice within the United States.

The third Abrahamic religion called Islam

In order to understand the different nuances associated with the Islam, it is important for the reader to educate him/herself on the different set of beliefs and practices that Muslim youth identify with. Arguably, Muslim youth struggle with their Muslim identity because of the mixed messages that they receive about Islam—primarily positive from home and the Muslim community and perhaps negative from the media and the general public due, in part, to misconceptions about Islam. Islam is not only a set of beliefs but is a complete way of life (Sarwar, 2006). Islam is considered to be the third Abrahamic religion for it believes that the branches of Judaism and Christianity to have had divine revelations sent to them (Emerick, 2001; Sarwar, 2006). Muslims believe in One God (Allah) as The Creator and the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. Additionally, they believe that God sent down Messengers (e.g., Adam, Noah, Musa, and Jesus) and Holy Books (e.g., Psalms, Gospel, and the Bible) (Elgarguri, 2009). All people are seen as equal in the sight of God and Muslims are required to respect all mankind, regardless of race, gender, or color, among other characteristics. (Elgarguri, 2009).

There is often confusion or misunderstanding in the West about the key tenets of Islam. It is unfortunate but the general consensus among the media and American society is that women are oppressed in Islam (Emerick, 2001). These beliefs are incorrect for Islam looks at women as equal and are valued for their presence (Elgarguri, 2009). “Islam preserves women’s honor and dignity, and requires that she must be treated with respect and honor” (Elgarguri, 2009, p. 12). A number of societies around the world treat women according to their ancestral traditions and customs and do not follow Islamic teachings (Elgarguri, 2009; Emerick, 2001); it is important for one to differentiate between societal customs and Islamic beliefs. For example, many people view Saudi Arabia as acting purely from Islamic rulings with not allowing their women to drive; however, this is not entirely true. Indonesia, a country that follows Islamic rulings and has one of the

highest population of Muslims in the world (nearly 90%) was ruled by a Muslim women president (Karon, 2001). For even though Islam, as a religion, has positive tenants and beliefs about women, there are conflicting ways that different cultures embody these beliefs.

Another misunderstood concept in Islam is the term Jihad (Emerick, 2001). Contrary to societal belief, Jihad does not mean “holy war;” the definition of Jihad is “striving, struggling...for the betterment of one’s self and community at large” (Elgarguri, 2009, p. 12). The teachings of Islam sometimes do not match the ways that it is practiced or implemented by Muslims around the world. Islam rejects all forms of extremism or terrorism as Islam believes in protecting the lives, property, and freedom of all individuals (Elgarguri, 2009). The association that Islam is a religion of ‘terror’ has been historically misunderstood and many Muslims are working hard to dispel the myth (Emerick, 2001).

The Reemergence of Arabs and Muslims

The United States saw an increase of Arab immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the various wars that occurred in the Middle East (Husain & Howard, 2017). Around this time, Americans were introduced to Islam by inaccurate images in the media that associated Islam with the culture of the Arabs (Husain & Howard, 2017). The films displayed Arabs as innately violent, vicious, and sneaky individuals who live in backward cultures (Ibrahim, 2008). The women were portrayed as being oppressed while men were ignorant and who are in need of the “White” for liberation and success. Ibrahim (2008) asserted that the films were responsible for linking the culture of Arabs with Islam and for “othering” and dehumanizing the Arab race and Muslim religion and that as the Unites States became more involved in the Middle East and had a personal and monetary interest in the region, the portrayal of Muslims became worse. “As the U.S. developed increasing interests in the Middle East and became more involved in Muslim countries,

the portrayals of Muslims and Islam worsened” (Ibrahim, 2008, p. 136). Ibrahim further argued that the racialization of Muslims by the West has allowed for the people to support the eradication of the “terrorist” enemy.

During the administration of President Ronald Reagan, the United States continued to struggle for control of the oil supplies from the Middle East (Husain & Howard, 2017). Inevitably, Americans associated Islam with the dictatorial regimes of the Middle East and, conveniently after the fall of Communism, Islam was identified as the new enemy of civilization (Husain & Howard, 2017). Hence, it was easy for the media to wrongly associate the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11 as a practice of Islam. “The 9/11 terrorist attacks stigmatized Islam as a violent religion and Muslims as innately violent people” (Husain & Howard, 2017, p. 148). According to Ahmed and Matthes’ (2017) meta-analysis study, Muslims were posed “as a threat to universal ‘white’ values of democracy and freedom” (p. 231). Several researchers argued that the media constantly represented Islam as an extremist religion that needs to be rectified in order to bring about peace to the world (Ahmed & Matthes, 2018; Ibrahim, 2008; Iribarnegaray, 2010).

Political agenda within the media that has contributed to the spread of Islamophobia.

Through the framework of Orientalism

Many researchers argue that one needs to look at the social construction of Islam through the concept of Orientalism. Edward Said is a renowned scholar in the field of postcolonial research and literature. His work *Orientalism* (1979) examines the constructs of peoples of the Orient, their beliefs, and, most importantly, how these beliefs are constructed when viewed through the biased intellectual constructs of the West that shapes the notion of “otherness.” The construct of Orientalism serves the political agenda

of the Western powers; this is to fulfil imperial and colonial agendas (Kerboua, 2016). Islamic societies are seen as backwards and uncivilized and in need of the help from the West (Phillips, 2010). This has justified the invasion of the West into the Middle East. In fact, Islamophobia is a form of colonial discourse that represents the underlying feelings of backwardness and terrorism that are prevalent in American society (Phillips, 2010). The media emphasizes the stereotypical image of Muslims and frames news events and Muslims primarily as extreme radicals (Croucher et al., 2013). Whilst Islamic values, beliefs, and practices are placed in opposition to West philosophy (Iribarnegaray, 2010; Schaffer, 2016).

Current political agenda

Currently the politics within the United States show a hostile view towards Islam and Muslims (Wirtz, Pligt, & Doosje, 2016). Unfortunately, politicians, authors, and media commentators have used the negative image and widespread bigotry to their advantage (Iribarnegaray, 2010). The *Civil Rights Report* (2018) argued that US president Donald Trump rhetoric promoted bigotry in the public sphere and became a beacon of hope for anti-Muslim individuals (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2018). By playing on the misconception that they are people to be feared, politicians have gained support for their actions; whilst media commentators have gained a following. Merely a week after entering his inauguration, US President Donald Trump began his conscious efforts to ostracize Muslims by enacting travel bans toward immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries. This political action is unjust, unconstitutional and fueled by racism and Islamophobia (Stanbrook, 2017). A sad and troubling development is that the world has 'coined' the term of Islamophobia to describe the discriminatory acts and discourses that exist in our nation (Iribarnegaray, 2010).

According to Iribarnegaray (2010), Muslim communities are experiencing Islamophobia because of how the West has responded to global terrorism. In order

to have support from the people to invade in the Middle East, it was the job of the government to portray Muslims as radicals and all Muslim civilizations as depressed and in need of help from American civilizations (Iribarnegaray, 2010). As such, the mass media has been used in order to control and manipulate the emotions of American citizens (Iribarnegaray, 2010; Muedini, 2009).

Months prior to the election of our current President Donald Trump, organizations banded together to commit acts of violence and vandalism (O'Hara, 2017). The author of this paper currently lives in the Bay Area. Following Election Day in 2016, a mosque that she frequently attends to was one of the mosques that received a hateful letter that threatened Muslim genocide (see figure 1). In addition to addressing Muslims as “the children of Satan” and as “vile and filthy people,” the letter celebrated the election of Donald Trump and stated that he will “do to you Muslims what Hitler did to the Jews” (Branson-Potts, 2016).

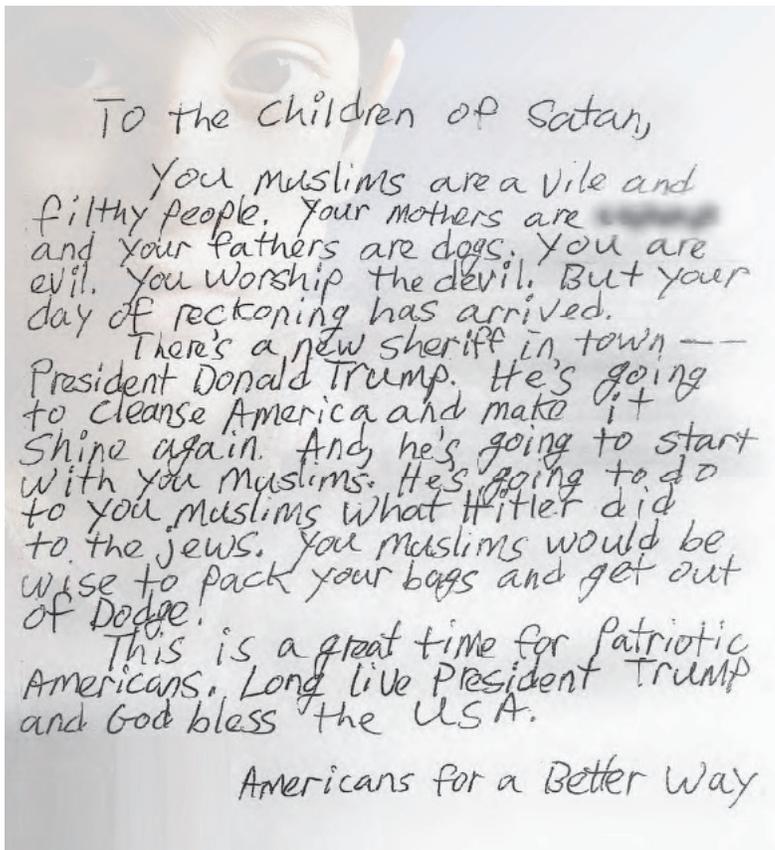


Figure 1: Letter to Mosque from the Civil Rights Report 2017 (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2017) 2

What is the result of being the recipient of hateful comments and discourse? One of the results of conducting this study will be to see the effects of the negative discourse that is prevalent in the mass media towards the consciousness and identity formation of Muslim youth. According to California Assembly Bill No. 2845, “Pupils who are Muslim...often face verbal, physical, or online harassment, all of which have significant effects on their academic achievement and mental health” (2016, p. 92). The legislature further declared:

² Permission received by CAIR to use figures and tables from Civil Rights Report 2017 in this dissertation.

Multiple studies demonstrate that pupils who face bullying suffer academically. Bullying is also linked to negative outcomes, including impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide. Research demonstrates that Muslim... pupils who face hate-based bias and bullying in school do not report these incidents to school staff, primarily because they believe that school staff are not trained to address these issues. (California Assembly Bill No. 2845, 2016, p. 93)

Education does not sufficiently provide our youth the skills to be critically conscious of the problematic portrayal of Muslims in the media and thus many individuals accept the portrayal in the media that unjustly propagates hate and stereotypes against different ethnic groups and minorities (Steinberg, 2010). As stated above, the health and well-being of Muslims are at stake to the negative propaganda that is prevalent in the media. Steinberg (2010) stated that the media is a form of education as it shapes the values, constructs subjectivity, and transmits knowledge of all forms unto the audience. Kellner and Share (2005) stated that “[t]here is expanding recognition that media representations help construct our images and understanding of the world” (p. 370).

The emerging importance of social media

It is important to note that area of mass media has drastically changed and enlarged within the last decade. Our society has changed as a whole and many individuals are turning to social media to connect, attain their news, and create an identity (Momoko, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2018; Pan et al., 2017). There is a lot of controversy as to whether social media is helpful or detrimental to youth. Several researchers argue that social media has brought people together (Momoko, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2018; Pan et al., 2017) while other researchers have demonstrated that social media has damaged the mental health of youth (Carter & Wilson, 2015; Shafer, 2017). Due to the fact that teens are connected online, a lot of pressure is placed on them to appear perfect, have friends

and respond to other posts; in fact, studies have shown a relationship between high use of social media and suicide risks and rates (Hurley, 2018; Shafer, 2017). Shafer (2017) argues that social media “exacerbates” feelings of anxiety, loneliness and worry within teens. Carter and Wilson (2015) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between the use of social media and cyberbullying. The results of their study found that cyberbullying impacts a youth’s physical and mental health and may lead to stress, trauma, depression and perhaps suicide.

The overall pattern within the research on social media on identity formation is mixed; although a number of researchers have argued that excessive use of social media has led to depression in youth, other have sought to prove the opposite. Pan et al. (2017) argued that social media provides many individuals around the world with a convenient medium that “bring[s] together individuals with similar interests and foster intimate relationships through sustained interactions” (p. 72). Momoko, Harrigan, and Soutar (2018) argued that social media has ‘increased pleasure’ and ‘decreased pain’ amongst youth. For the easily accessible medium has created a space that is meaningful and supportive of different beliefs and ways of life; one is able to find other individuals who are able to share one’s pain, interests, and communal relationships are built (Momoko, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2018). Muslims are able to create a shared identity and support one another through times of difficulty (Aeschbach, 2017). With social media allowing for friendships and communications to be built, it has become easier for an individual to become comfortable with their self-identity and to identify with their characteristics (Pan et al., 2017). Social media has given Muslims a shared platform to comfort one another in times of grief and happiness (Aeschbach, 2017). Shresthova (2016) highlighted the fact that young Muslim American youth have used the media to tell their stories and to create their identity in this society. It is important to include both opposing viewpoints on the topic of social media. Although youth in general are now turning to social media

for their source of news, many students are not familiar with independent media forms or using multiple perspectives to gain political awareness (McQueeney, 2014). It will be interesting to discover how Muslim youth have responded to social media and whether it has brought negatively affected their morale or whether it creates a space where Muslim youth are able to connect and thus contribute to the opposing viewpoints in this field.

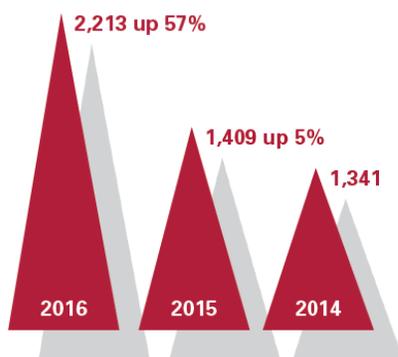
The conflicts of an American identity of Muslim youth

Identity formation of Muslim youth post 9/11

Post 9/11, life has changed significantly for Muslim American youth for they have to carry the burden of being seen as a threat and a potential terrorist to this country. Identity formation occurs through lived experiences; which occurs both through face-to-face and media experiences—which often overlap. Muslims have been exclusively surveyed by the United States’ national security program and are subject to profiling, discriminatory acts, and undercover monitoring of their Muslim American communities (Shammas, 2015). Muslim Americans have had their basic rights assaulted and are constantly in fear of being arrested, detained, or questioned by authorities. Whilst Muslim communities have their mosques vandalized, Muslim women have their scarves (hijabs) ripped off their heads, yelled at in public, and are subject to discriminatory remarks. Muslims are stereotyped by the media as being “a problem” and are classified as “the other” which thus results in having them struggle to get and keep their jobs, friends, and lives (Kincheloe, Steinberg & Stonebanks, 2010; McQueeney, 2014). Following the 9/11 attacks, there has been an increase of hate crimes and reports of harassment and threats against Muslims (Ali, 2011; Sledge, 2013). Mosques have been vandalized and Muslims are constantly interrogated and profiled against at the airport, in the workplace, and at school (Cainkar, 2002; LoDuca, 2016).

A major component to the increase of Islamophobia is the social construction of terrorism in the media and its association to Arabs and Muslims (McQueeney, 2014). According to a report done by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), (see figure 2 below) from 2014 to 2016, hate crimes targeting Muslims surged 584 percent; additionally, anti-Muslim bias incidents jumped 65 percent within these two years (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). The number of hate crimes against Muslims continues to rise and these numbers are verified by FBI data published in *The New York Times* (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017).

Total anti-Muslim bias incidents



Total anti-Muslim hate crimes

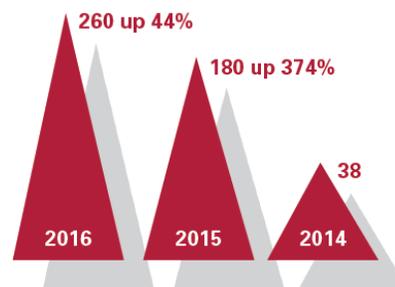


Figure 2: Total Anti-Muslim Bias Reports in the Civil Rights Report 2017 (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017) ³

In addition to the increase of hate crimes enacted towards Muslims, there has been an increase of bullying towards Muslim youth. According to California Assembly Bill No. 2845, “Recent reports indicate that more than half of Muslim...pupils in California report that they have faced verbal threats or insults, cyberbullying, or physical assaults” (2016, p. 93). Bullying is the most common form of harassment reported by Muslim youth (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). Additionally, the Civil Rights

³ Permission received by CAIR to use figures and tables from Civil Rights Report in this dissertation.

Report (2017) identified that many Muslim youth report discriminatory acts from their educators and administrative officials. These reports are alarming for “[a]s individuals with authority, their anti-Muslim bias and behavior not only sets an improper model for other students, but marginalizes Muslim students academically and deprives them of opportunities to develop the skills and self-assurance necessary for success” (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017, p. 24). It is the responsibility of teachers to create a safe space and give their students a nurturing environment that will allow Muslim youth to grow mentally and physically. However, this is not always the case.

The Civil Rights Report (2017) specified that in Fort Bend County, Texas, a Muslim seventh grader was called a terrorist by his teacher and encouraged the verbal abuse reaction comments by peers in the classroom (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). In another case, an Arizona teacher verbally abused a Muslim student by stating, ““I can’t wait until Trump is elected. He’s going to deport all you Muslims. Muslims shouldn’t be given visas...You’re going to be the next terrorist, I bet.” In North Carolina, a teacher routinely singled out a student by calling him “a bad Muslim boy” and forced him to carry a heavy backpack throughout the day, which inevitably caused him to develop bad back pain (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017).

Whilst many authors focused on the post 9/11 trauma, Rousseau et. al (2015) not only looked at the consequences of 9/11 but also looked at the effects that the war of terror had on minority youth. These researchers conducted a mixed method systemic review of the effects that 9/11 and the war of terror had on children and youth’s mental health. They systematically looked at existing literature and the results of their study found that the rate of the effects was incumbent on the amount of exposure that children had to life threats, familial involvement, and the community that the children lived in (Rousseau et al., 2015). Their study highlighted the social consequences of 9/11 and the war on terror (of the aftermaths/of the societal aftermaths) particularly impacted Arab

and Muslim communities. Rousseau et al. (2015) identified three major consequences that this minority group faced post 9/11. The first theme was an increased discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization. The second theme was the challenges that youth face with negotiating their identities. The last theme highlighted the coping strategies that individuals and communities used to thrive/live in this new socio-political context. These strategies included positive outreach and efforts to raise awareness of Muslims and strengthening familial relations in order to strengthen the feelings of agency and communication. It will be interesting to note whether Rousseau et al. (2015) findings will mirror the findings of the proposed dissertation study on creating an identity that challenges negative media perceptions. Influenced by their findings, I have included an interview question that asks about the importance of positive outreach and strengthening familial relations (see Appendix F). Rousseau et al. (2015) concluded their study with stating that a clear connection exists between the events of 9/11 and the war on terror and the mental health of children and adolescents. Specifically, it affected their “identity construction of minority youth and... shattered the sense of safety of children and youth... and transformed their vision of themselves” (p. 186). Thus, they concluded their study with citing the importance that society has for becoming aware of the impact that children may face, such as exclusion or bullying, and create a welcoming and equitable learning environment (Rousseau et al., 2015). The results of their systemic review demonstrated that a connection exists between post 9/11 mass media propaganda and their identity construction as Muslim American youth.

Recent research on Muslim Identity Formation after 9/11

Several studies have been done looking at the identity of Muslims. Primarily qualitative, the findings of many of these studies found that Muslim Americans struggle with their identity as Americans. An example of an exemplary piece is Muedini’s (2009) qualitative study of Muslim American college youth and researched about their feelings

and reflections five years after 9/11. He stated that a majority of Muslim America youth in his study believe that the media misrepresents Islam by focusing on dramatic images and airs more stories on war. “One student felt that the media portrays Muslims as ‘animals’” (Muedini, 2009, p. 51). Additionally, the Muslim youth interviewed believe that the media is primarily responsible for discriminatory acts and negative views towards Islam. “Just as Muslim extremists have distorted Islam, U.S. media had done just as much damage, if not more” (Muedini, 2009, p. 52). The Muslim students from this study tended to feel ‘isolated’ from the rest of the country. After 9/11, Muslim students felt as if they were portrayed as ‘the enemy’ or the ‘other’ and the resulting feelings were that they did not feel as if they belonged to the overall American community (Muedini, 2009). According to Erwin (2016), “Within our Muslim communities, morale is low, and fatigue and anxiety about our future in the United States is high” (Erwin, 2016, p. 38). Muedini (2009) further stated that the obvious targeting of Muslims is there to humiliate them and to rid them of their basic civil rights. The media coverage makes Muslims youth feel as if they are targeted and not welcome in our American society. Muslim youth argued that post 9/11 security laws and policies have helped to create an ‘atmosphere of fear’ and that the government takes advantage of the situation by legitimizing and justifying their actions of national security through the abuse of human and civil rights (Erwin, 2016; Muedini, 2009).

Whilst Muedini (2009) focused on college student responses, Sirin and Fine (2007) conducted a qualitative study that focused on the concept of “hyphenated selves” (p. 151). The authors delved into the theoretical analysis of students having to struggle between different identities and come to terms with the socio-political climate, longings, and tensions within American society. In their mixed methods approach they analyzed surveys, focus groups, and one-on interviews with their participants. They recruited young men and women from the New York metropolitan area and conducted surveys and

focus groups. Surveys were an opportunity to quantify their perceptions of acculturation and discrimination, while focus groups allowed participants the opportunity to describe their psychological and cultural identities. The results of their study found that American Muslims lead challenging lives for they are constantly struggling to negotiate their hyphenated selves of being American and Muslim (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Specifically, the results of their study showed that “social relationships and media representations fundamentally affect youth development” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 161). Although the results of their study showed a relationship between societal tensions in American society towards Muslims, their study did not look at the relationship between the mass media and identity youth formation.

Although both aforementioned studies focused on the Muslim identity, neither focused on the topic of the relationship between individual identity formation of Muslim youth and the social construction of Muslims, often in terms of terrorism, in the media. McQueeney (2014) delved deeply into the topic of the social construction of terrorism and its association with Muslims. The researcher had her interviewees go through a series of activities and responses in over the course of several weeks in order to discover whether the interviewees thought Muslims or Arabs were “inherently” terrorists. The results of the study were positive; for although the interviewees initially were not aware of the social construction of terrorism or its association with Muslims or Arabs in the media, with education on Critical Media Literacy, interviewees at the end of the sessions views on Muslims as inherently terrorists primarily change (McQueeney, 2014). The results of this study suggest that a link does exist between what is portrayed in the media and how Muslim youth may be affected by the negative associations with their religion. However, this study did not look at the voices of the Muslims and whether they, themselves, are affected.

A more recent study was conducted on Muslims and their use of social media. Pennington's (2018) qualitative study sought to discover Muslim's interaction in the social media space. According to her results, Muslims seek out specific media sources and spaces in order to create a space and "perform an identity that feels their own" (Pennington, 2018, p. 632). According to Pennington (2018), historically, identity was created by the interactions that one generally has with their direct physical environment. However, due to the change of time, a third space has been created in the digital age that provides an individual the space and "the opportunity to move between boundaries, definitions, selves—an opportunity to be openly mixed" (Pennington, 2018, p. 622).

While some research has been done on the topic of Muslim identity after 9/11, little research has been done on looking at the effect that the mass media has on the American identity formation and consciousness of Muslim youth in America after 9/11. Literature has shown that Muslims are currently the "scapegoat" of the decade. Due to the rise of Islamophobia, many Muslim youth are struggling to accept both their American and Muslim identities. For the mass media negatively portrays Muslims as 'terrorists' and 'extremists' and Muslims are grouped into a category of being 'evil' and 'strange.' This study proposes to fill the gap in literature by conducting research on Muslim youth interaction with the media and whether the mass media has led to the internalization of a negative Muslim American identity.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

It has become normal for the terms “terrorism,” “extremism,” or “radicalization” to be associated with Islam (Naseem et al., 2016). The social construction of Arabs as “terrorists” is historically rooted within the media and both films and the news broadcast Muslims as “barbaric” and “backwards.” The mass population readily accepts the negative portrayal that is promoted in the media as “truth” which results with people demoralizing the entire Arab race and Muslim religion (Steinberg, 2010). This normalized and prejudiced behavior is unfair to Muslims and has resulted with discrimination within the workforce and schools and identity issues within the youth (Tindongan, 2011). Many Muslim youth are struggling to negotiate their identities (Cainkar, 2002) and have internalized the oppressive portrayal displayed on the media.

Several researchers (Abdo, 2005; Ali, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007) have concluded from their qualitative research that there has been a positive outcome of the negative media portrayals of Muslims: their faith has strengthened and they have become more active and practicing Muslims. However, numerous research studies also have supported the claim that Muslims have internalized the negative stereotypical portrayal in the media (Byng, 2008; Husain & Howard, 2017; Phillips 2010; Rauf, 2016; Stanbrook, 2017). While some research has been done on the topic of Muslim identity after 9/11, little research has been done on looking at the effect that the mass media has on the identity formation and consciousness of Muslim youth in America after 9/11. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the mass media’s portrayals of Muslims,

often framed in terms of Islamophobia, and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America and how Muslim American youth's mass media navigation is influenced by their portrayal therein.

Research Question and Design

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between the mass media and Islamophobia and the effect that the consumption of media has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America as well as their use of media in general. This chapter will describe my research methodology. First, I will discuss the research questions and design that have guided the study. The following section will detail the context of the study. The third part of the methods section will describe the data collection of the study; this includes the participants, instruments and procedures. Following the section on data collection is data analysis. The fourth section will include my positionality in relation to the study. This chapter will conclude with the limitations of the study and the steps taken to ensure that my study was trustworthy.

The research questions that will guide the dissertation are as follows:

- How do Muslim youth describe the portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media?
- How do Muslim youth interact with the media?
 - What are the different ways that they relate to and interact with the content on the different media forms?
 - In what ways do they interact with social media, television, news radio, print Newspaper/magazines, online newspaper/magazines, or videos/vlogs/YouTube?

- How do Muslim youth describe their own identities as Muslims and Americans, including ways in which Muslim youth have created an identity that challenges negative media perceptions?
 - What strategies and/or practices have shaped their construction of identities that challenge negative media perceptions?
- How does their media-use relate to their identity development as Muslim American youth?
 - In what ways have the media positively influenced their identity as Americans? As Muslims?
 - In what ways have the media negatively influenced Muslim American youth identity development?

There is a need to identify the effects that the mass media has on the identity of Muslim youth and methods in which youth have challenged the stereotypes in the media. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to capture the voices and personal stories of Muslim youth. One of the greatest contributions to knowledge is the data produced from research that discovers the personal insights, perspectives, and experiences of those being studied (Merriam, 1998). Roulston (2010) argues that many social researchers prefer interviews over other methods for one is able to theorize and thoroughly investigate research problems. Qualitative interviews may be conducted in a variety of methods; these include individually or in groups, face-to-face or via online interactions (Roulston, 2010).

In the following study, I conducted one-on-one interviews (individually), focus groups (groups), and instructed my participants to keep diary logs of their thoughts and interactions with their media use in order to provide critical thought and discussion. Additionally, Roulston (2010) argues that the interview method promotes social

justice and equity, for it is the participants' voices and stories that produce the results and conclusions of the study that advocate for change. The interview method is most appropriate for my study because the goal of my study is to uncover the experiences and feelings of Muslim youth. Merriam (1998) argues that one of the first steps of your study is to take time and really look at your topic, audience, and the results of your research. As you go through the process of conducting and obtaining your data, your end goal will be clear and, thus, the data from the study will directly contribute to your research topic and questions. The desired end goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of media influences and pathways of resistance; thus, interviews and focus groups, as well as media use logs, will provide rich and meaningful data.

Context

The Bay Area is located in Northern California and is comprised of a diverse population of people from a variety of religions and ethnic backgrounds. Citing the Bay Area Census (2010), ethnic minorities make up nearly 40% of the population. Bazian and Senzai (2013) conducted a Bay Area Muslims Report and discovered that Bay Area Muslims make up 250,000 of the population. South Asians make up 30% of this population and nearly 50% of them have a household income of above \$100,000. Although 78% of South Asians have a higher education degree, Iranian Muslims rate of higher education is 72% and their household income of above \$100,000 is 38%. This breakdown is described in Table I (Bazian & Senzai, 2013).

	Ethnic Breakdown of Bay Area Muslims	Household Income Above \$100,000	Higher Education
South Asians	30%	49%	78%
Arabs	23%	26%	62%
Afghans	17%	10%	40%
African-Americans	9%	10%	50%

	Ethnic Breakdown of Bay Area Muslims	Household Income Above \$100,000	Higher Education
Asian/ Pacific Islanders	7%	36%	59%
White	6%	23%	66%
Iranians	2%	38%	72%

Table I: Bay Area Demographics

This study will specifically look at Muslim high school students born and raised in the Bay Area. Due to the diverse setting, the Bay Area will provide a unique context that should produce noteworthy results. Although one may question the legitimacy of the study since the small sample size limits the applicability of the interviewees to speak for the wide range of Muslim students born and raised in America, the interview method is important for the perspectives of students are necessary in order to uncover deep understanding of media influences and pathways of resistance. Additionally, the small sample size of the study is a strength that will produce meaningful and unique data; for I will be able to connect with my participants by building trust and interacting with them in the focus group sessions, one-on-one interviews, and the diary media logs.

Data Collection

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to capture the opinions and perceptions of Muslim youth. A combination of one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and diary media logs will provide different perspectives on the media's influence on Muslim American youth identity development and how they navigate and use media. Interviews have been used by social researchers to produce data concerning social problems (Roulston, 2010). Interviews allow the voices, concerns, and personal stories of the interviewees to emerge for interviews reflect what and how people feel about different issues that exist in our society. Whilst interviews provide a researcher the opportunity

to work one-one with their participants, focus groups provide the perfect setting for discussion between the different people that are connected to the study. Focus groups bring different people together to discuss a set of topics provided by the interviewer (Roulston, 2010). Focus groups are extremely useful with generating discussion and producing a variety of ideas and opinions from the participants, as well as some of the reasons for those ideas and opinions (Roulston, 2012). In this study, interviews and focus groups have given voice to the voices, concerns, and personal stories of the interviewed Muslim youth regarding how the mass media had affected their ethnic identity formation and how they navigate these representations through their media use (Roulston, 2010).

In the following section, I will describe the instruments, participant requirements and procedures taken to conduct the study. Firstly, participant criteria are identified, steps taken to recruit members will be described, and procedures that will be a part of the data collection process will be detailed.

Participants and Sampling

For this study, I interviewed 5 Muslim high school youth that are currently attending a high school in the city of Fremont, CA. Participants needed to identify that they are Muslim and follow the religion of Islam. Additionally, participants needed to identify that they are American citizens. Specifically, the participants' ages ranged between 14-18 years of age and needed to have been born in the United States. All participants that were chosen met the requirements of the study.

Whilst they need to have been born in the US, participants were first- or second-generation students with parents who identify and encourage their children to be proud of their ethnic background. Both female and male students were invited to be participants in this study to gain a better understanding of their interaction and their use of different forms of media. In order to gain a diverse understanding, interviewees were from a variety of ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is important to include a

variety of ethnicities (listed in the table above) in order to more completely represent the diversity of believers/followers of Islam. A common misconception is that all ‘Arabs’ are Muslim; I wish to address this stereotype by ensuring that the voices of some non-Arab ethnicities are included. Participants were chosen if they met the following criteria:

- Are between 14-18 years of age
- Self-identify as being a Muslim
- Self-identify as being an American
- Self-identify with their ethnic background
- Were born in the United States
- Were born and have been raised as a Muslim
- Have parents who the student says identify with being Muslim
- Have parents who the student says identify with their ethnic background

It is important that participants identified as being a Muslim and as being an American; for this research aims to uncover how they ‘see’ themselves in these dual identities in this society and their role in it.

For the purposes of the study, a purposive sampling strategy was used. According to Rea and Parker (2005), a purposive strategy will allow a researcher to identify and interview people who have key theoretical traits and provide me access to sufficient data for the study. High school students who participate in the field of study are the unit of analysis. Being a teacher to Junior High students, there are two parallel tracks that I took to recruit participants for the study. The first track was to contact previous students and their parents through email, WhatsApp, and/or text messages. The second track that I took was to recruit participants through a private Islamic high school and a Muslim high school support group that were both located in Fremont. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via flyers, recruitment letters, and presentations to the organization

and classrooms; in-person to parents and students who attended schools in the Fremont district. In the letters and emails, I gave a brief explanation of the study, myself, and assured the participants that all information will be kept confidential (see Appendix A through E for the initial recruitment materials). Additionally, I made a personal appeal and gave a mini-presentation at a private Muslim high school and a Muslim support group that are located in Fremont (see Appendix A through E for the initial recruitment materials). Several students who were currently attending this high school were my students when they were in middle school and thus were more comfortable and willing to be participants of the study (although I am no longer their teacher). Also, I personally knew the principal, several staff and board members of the school for their children were students at my worksite. Data collection procedures commenced when contacts were made, and volunteer participants were recruited through either of the two parallel tracks described above. Participants were recruited and were able to contact researcher through flyers or introductory letters (Appendix A and Appendix B). Both flyer and recruitment letters introduced my position, the purpose of the study, the criteria of the study, and contact information. All documents encouraged prospective participants to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Muslim youth who were interested were instructed to have their parents contact the researcher and agree to let me talk with their child about the study. Afterwards, the researcher asked potential participants general questions according to a questionnaire (Appendix C) during a telephone interview and/or online questionnaire to purposively identify interviewees that meet the criteria and who are also willing to participate in the focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and complete personal diary logs for approximately two months. I looked for students who identify with being both Muslim and American and who were willing to speak about their thoughts and concerns about Muslim identity and portrayal in the media. Once I identified participants who meet the requirements

of the study, I then gained parental consent and student assent by having parents sign read and sign their consent forms (see Appendix D) and have students read and sign their assent forms (see Appendix E). In-person interviews took place in quiet, safe, and comfortable spaces. These spaces included library rooms, local mosques, community centers, or classrooms. All spaces were convenient for the participants and quiet in order to conduct pleasant and profound interviews. I recommended different spaces and had the participants choose the spaces that they were most comfortable in.

Instruments

This study used focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and diary logs to collect data. In regards to the focus groups and interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was used (Roulston, 2010). This procedure allowed interviewees to open up on their views; yet it also ensured that all of the research questions were properly addressed through multiple follow-up questions that were deemed as appropriate (Roulston, 2010). In order to gain a deep understanding of the effects that the mass media has on the consciousness and identity of Muslim youth, careful thought was given towards the data collection protocols (see Appendix F and Appendix G). A similar research study using the data collection protocol was piloted the previous year (see Appendix H). Three high school participants took part in the pilot study. This voluntary research allowed for me to reflect on wording and types of interview questions. Based on reflections and feedback from participants, interview questions were modified and changed to improve results of the study. To help ensure that the data produced has content validity (i.e., that the answers will likely answer the research questions), interview questions were thoroughly examined by the author's professor and her peers. However, during the interview I modified the wording of the questions to help ease the flow of the focus group and interview sessions. The questions began with broadly asking the interviewee to identify the different types of media that they interacted with and had them reflect on how media-use affects their identity as Muslim Americans

(see Appendix F). As the interviews progressed, the questions began to focus on specific instances and feelings of the interviewee regarding Muslim identity.

Data collection protocol. Interviewees and individuals in the focus group sessions were asked the same questions according to the data collection protocol (Appendix F). In order to gain a rich and deep understanding of the research topic, I used all of the questions across my focus group and interview sessions. The data collection interview protocol includes the main types of questions including the follow-up questions. Jacob & Furgerson (2012) stated that “an interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions... [it is] a procedural guide for directing a new qualitative researcher through the interview process” (p. 2). Thus, after letting the research guide my questions, I used a script for the beginning and end of the interviews to guide and close the process. Jacob & Furgerson (2012) recommend starting with basic questions. After opening up the conversation with basic questions, I moved the conversation to more detailed questions. A recommended way of starting off the conversation is “tell me about...” Thus, I have started my questions extremely broadly and have also used the phrase “tell me about...” to encourage the participant(s) to open up about their experiences and feelings as a Muslim American (Appendix F). Lastly, Jacob & Fergerson (2012) encouraged an interviewer to list different probes or prompts under different questions to keep the interview on track and to help elicit data. I refrained from taking too many notes in order to make the interviewee(s) comfortable and to give him/her my full attention. One-on-one interviews may be conducted in person or over the telephone. I was able to schedule all interviews to take place in-person.

Interviews and focus group sessions were recorded and audio records were transcribed within the next 72 hours after interviews took place to ensure that data collected was accurate and complete. After transcribing was complete, all transcripts were compared with the audio recordings; any minor mistakes were corrected to ensure accuracy. Transcripts will then be coded to identify key themes and concepts.

Self-reflective media logs. Another major component of the data collection process were the diary media logs. These logs were write-ups that participants completed in order to reflect on their media use and identity formation. According to Adams et al. (2000), self-reflection is the process of active construction of one's identity. Additionally, "it is most readily stimulated when there is an opportunity for individuals to experience a "dialectic tension" between opposing choices and alternatives" (Adams et al., 2000). Thus, I provided the space in the form of media diary logs for participants to become aware of opposing viewpoints and go through the process of self-awareness and self-consciousness.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the above-mentioned research questions, I conducted three different forms of qualitative research gathering: focus groups, diary media logs, and one-on-one interviews. In the following paragraphs, data gathering procedures will be listed according to data types.

Data Type	Number of Each	Approximate Time Frame	In-Person vs. Online	Dates
Focus Groups	Two sessions: At the beginning of the procedure and at the end	Scheduled one hour session	In-person	First Session: End of December Second Session: Beginning of February
Diary Media Logs	6 Reflection Write-Ups	Scheduled over two weeks	Online	12/30-1/13 Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays
One-on-One Interviews	1 Interview	Scheduled one hour session	In-person	Beginning of January through the beginning of February

Table II: Data Gathering Procedures

Once consent forms were signed and agreed upon by both parents and students, I began the data collection process with the five participants of the study.

Focus Groups. I began and ended the data collection process with a focus group with all the participants. The first focus group session took place at the end of December. The one-hour session allowed students to delve into the topic of their interactions with the media and their identity as Muslim Americans. Although I lead the focus group through a semi-structured format using the focus group protocol (see Appendix F), I aimed not to give my opinions or voice my thoughts. Instead I encouraged students to converse and discuss their ideas with each other. At the end of the session, participants were instructed to keep a diary log for the next two weeks (see Appendix G) and note their interaction and reflections of media use (discussed in next section).

After approximately two months, I concluded the data collection procedures with a member check focus group. During this session, I conducted the member check session through the “Strong Line” method. Students were presented with select transcriptions of their interviews and were prompted to choose important sentences and discuss why they were important. Secondly, I presented the preliminary themes and findings that I discovered through the use of their interviews and diary logs. During this hour, an interactive discussion was led to allow the students a space to contradict and/or discuss the themes that emerged from the data. Students were encouraged to challenge my findings and were asked further questions about the results of the data.

Diary Media Logs. Throughout the two weeks that ran from the end of December to the middle of January, participants were instructed to keep a diary log that will note their interaction and reflection with their media use (see Appendix G). The dates of the media log reflections took place from December 30 through January 13. There was a broad theme for each week; the first week’s theme was “media” and the second week’s theme was “identity.” I created reflections, write-ups, and activities that directly related to each theme through Google Forms. Students had an assignment to complete on the Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays of each week. Listed in the table below is a

description of the topics and the reflections that were asked of them each week. Topics and reflection activities were based on previous studies done by scholars in the field (McQueeney, 2014; Muedini, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2015)

WEEK 1 Theme: Media		
Sunday 11/25	Wednesday 11/28	Friday 11/30
RQ # 1	RQ # 1	RQ # 2 & #3
<p><u>Quantitative Data:</u> Identify the different media sources that you have used this past week. What is your favorite media source? Why? Purpose of using the different media sources?</p>	<p><u>Quantitative Data:</u> Identify the different media sources that you have today. Identify how long you spent on each of the media sources. Identify how it affected your feelings? Happy? Sad? Empowered? Indifferent? Why? Identify how these emotions impact your overall well-being and identity as a Muslim?</p>	<p><u>Media Reflection:</u> Muslim Identity in Media Please describe the cartoon (color, visual, expression, message, etc.) Reflect on the political cartoon... Thoughts...What assumptions are there? Do you agree or disagree? (See Appendix G for cartoon)</p>
WEEK 2 Theme: Identity		
Sunday 12/2	Wednesday 12/5	Friday 12/7
RQ # 2 & #4	RQ # 3	RQ # 4
<p><u>Quantitative Data:</u> Identify the different media sources that you have today. Identify how long you spent on each of the media sources.</p> <p><u>Qualitative Data:</u> Think about your top (up to three) media source(s) that you identify with. Why is it your favorite? In what ways are you able to \ express yourself and your identity as a Muslim? How do you do so? What are the advantages of your favorite media source? How has the use of social media impacted your Muslim self-identity or self-esteem?</p>	<p>Please name three words that would describe how <i>you</i> see yourself?</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>Please name three words that would describe how <i>others</i> see you?</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>Do these terms overlap? Why? How do you tell your story OR present yourself as a Muslim American? If you could pick one type of mass media, which program or media form would best represent you as a Muslim American? Why?</p>	<p>Draw yourself in your surroundings. Get creative and express yourself through any medium! You may do so through paper and pencil, color crayons, paint, on your computer, or through a selfie via an app.</p> <p>Make sure that you draw both: yourself <i>and</i> the setting around you (this can be your school, or your home, or your city, etc.)</p>

Table III: Media Log Reflection Descriptions and Dates

To ensure that data gathered was useful and consistent, I created a template through Google Form and instructed them to complete the form, on the listed days per week. I sent them email reminders in between each assigned activity and reminded them that reflections should not take more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

One-on-One Interviews. In order to have a deep discussion with all participants, I scheduled one-on-one interviews with the 3-5 participants. I scheduled these interviews to take place after the first focus group session and after they have completed the diary media logs. The interviews took place throughout the month of January. During the hour-long interviews, I used the data collection protocol (see Appendix F & Appendix G) to facilitate a discussion around their diary logs and to delve into the topic of media use and identity. Having the diary logs completed prior to the interviews was crucial to be completed. I used the diary logs as a “conversation starter” and allowed the participants to verbally express their experience their media-use interaction. All interviews were conducted in person.

Methods of Analysis

In order to make sure that I accurately coded and discovered prevalent themes within the interviews, I conducted a multi-step coding process. Saldana (2013) encourages students new to qualitative data analysis to explore with codes, categories, and themes and work on different methods to analyze data and come to findings. After I completed each interview and after I reviewed each media log submission, I sat down and took note (memos) of several things that came to mind. Saldana (2013) defined memos as the process and “a place” to investigate one’s thinking about emergent data. These included questions, epiphanies, and reflections.

After transcribing the interviews, I gave each interview an “initial” read and allowed myself the opportunity to become familiar with the transcript. During the second

reading, I conducted a deductive coding process and attributed quotes and phrases to themes that were discussed in the literature (often termed as “a priori” codes). The themes from the literature thus far included Othering, Identity, or American History. During the third reading, I conducted an inductive coding by highlighting key phrases and words of the interviewees. The process included In-vivo codes to “use” the interviewees’ own words as much as possible (Saldana, 2013). I documented emergent patterns, relationships between codes, what I noticed about the participants’ phenomenon, process, among others, in memos entries during and after each analysis session (Saldana, 2013). For example, some emergent terms included “us versus them,” “historical parallels in our American History,” and “white supremacy.” During the subsequent readings, I documented emergent patterns, relationships between codes, and insights.

After making note of emerging codes, I came up with categories and initial themes that broadly described groups of the codes and the notes that had emerged from the data. In order to “merge” all of the different data pieces from the different interviews together, I used the “table-top” technique (Saldana, 2013, p. 205). Saldana (2013) advised, “If you are encountering difficulty with how your emergent or final sets of categories, themes, or concepts work together, try [a] tabletop technique” (p. 205). The explanation that follows is the table-top technique. In order to merge the codes and themes that came about from the different interviews, I wrote the codes and the emergent themes on note cards and was able to physically touch and group them according to common points. I took portions of different interviews and cut up the corresponding quotes to the codes/themes and grouped the quotes from different interviews under similar headings. Touching the data and spreading it out on the floor helped me see similarities between different headings and allowed for headings to be used or collapsed. Examples of themes that emerged from the data are critical media literacy, orientalism, or historical perspective. The ultimate goal is to have themes that answer the research

questions. Thus, I grappled with the data until I created categories and themes that are internally consistent, unique, and provide data that address the research questions.

In addition to the table-top technique, I was able to work with my chair during several one-on-one meetings where we discussed my research results. With my chair advisor, we wrote out emergent themes and important data points on a whiteboard and grouped them accordingly. We were able to grapple with the themes and shift data according to the research questions. I found this process to be extremely helpful for I had critical input from my chair whilst creating the overarching themes and sub-themes.

Strengths, Limitations, and Trustworthiness

The primary basis of data analysis will come from evaluating the data collected from the interviews. My position as the researcher of this study took specific steps to ensure validity and trustworthiness in my research. I partook in the commonly used strategy called data triangulation. Data triangulation is the process of collecting multiple forms of data to support my category and theme assertions in order to check the researcher's understandings of the topic (Roulston, 2013).

To ensure that conclusions are based on data, I listed out quotes in the main text and directly cite the data gathered from the focus groups, interviews, and diary media logs. Representative examples of the transcriptions of the different data collection sources will be available for readers to read and access based on their requests. Additionally, to avoid tampering of data of any sort, all interview recordings and transcriptions associated with this research (i.e. cell phone and computer files) were password protected and were only accessible by myself. Research reports identified subjects with pseudonyms only and assured that data is not traceable to individual subjects.

Lastly, I assured interviewees prior to beginning the interview, during the interview, and after the interview that they are free to stop whenever they want, may

refuse to answer any questions, or may request for any statements to be withheld. I used prepared, open-ended questions, and I limited my comments during the interviews. The student interviews consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix F) and lasted for about an hour. Interviews were all conducted in-person. I refrained from taking too many notes in order to give the interviewee all of my attention. The interviewees' identifying information were kept private and they were ensured that their responses were only used for the purposes of this study. Thus, careful steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy within the study.

Inevitably, all studies will have limitations. It is important for any research to admit to the limitations of the study in order to be honest about the impact of the study. Firstly, the sample size of the study does not allow for the interviewees to speak for the wide range of Muslim students born and raised in America. For the voices of 5 students can hardly speak for the thousands of students that live throughout America. However, I decided on the interview method (instead of a survey that may reach to 100+ people) because it is important to describe in depth the perspectives and the voices of the students to be heard and included in the study. Therefore, the intent of this study is to provide sufficient depth of description that readers whose contexts and experiences resonate with those of the participants can learn from what they read and improve their personal and professional contexts. These deep descriptions are a strength of the study. Having a small sample will allow for me to build trust with the participants and for insightful and rich data to emerge. For I conducted a variety of data collection procedures that allowed for each participant to reflect on their media practices on the influence that it has on their identity.

Secondly, students interviewed came from a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds; thus, there are not enough participants to identify whether certain trends are evident within a certain group. However, having a variety of ethnic and socio-economic

students is a strength for this study breaks against the stereotypes often described by the greater society; that all Muslims are Arabs (and vice versa). Trends and patterns will be identified that Muslim youth are currently facing, regardless of the ethnic and socio-economic background.

Lastly, it is important to note that those students who volunteer to speak about their experiences and their Muslim identity may be those students who are confident of their American Muslim identity. Students who may need to speak out about the impact that the media has on their identity may take a little longer to identify and convince to partake in the study. However due to the fact that this is a dissertation study, time is limited. Nevertheless, the results of the study may influence other researchers to repeat and/or extend in the future.

Positionality

The past, present and future makes up one's self-identity; the past explains the present and the present will determine the future. It was a long and hard journey of self-reflection and acceptance of who I am that has resulted with where I am today. I am a proud Hijabi Muslim woman who dreams of making a mark in the world and her parents and people proud. I am the second daughter in a family of six and was born and raised in the diverse Bay Area.

I come from a multi-ethnic background; specifically, Yemen, Mexico, and Italy. Growing up, it was very difficult for me to identify with my racial background. When I was growing up, I was coached to tell Arabs (specifically) that I was from Yemen. This was so because Arabs have the preconceived notion that you either are a "pureblood" or not an Arab at all. Both of my parents were looked down upon for having "mixed heritage." My mother always relates to us stories of how she and her sisters were ridiculed for having a Mexican mother. Similarly, my father, who is of Arab and Italian

heritage, remembers while growing up in the African country of Eritrea that he was too dark-skinned to be accepted by his Italian family and how he was too white to be accepted by citizens from his home country.

Personally, I grew up in a post 9/11 era. The attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 occurred when I was 10 years old and, as such, I was raised in a time when hostile discourse and animosity towards Muslims was prevalent in the media and society. Although I lived in South San Francisco, my parents drove me every day throughout my elementary and middle school years to Santa Clara in order to attend a private Muslim school. Thus, I was able to grow up confident and knowledgeable of my Muslim beliefs. Because I wore a hijab (headscarf) people would not refrain from showing their surprise when I spoke English well or when I claimed the United States as “my country” or California as “my state.” In fact, I struggled to claim America as my country because when I would try to, people would respond with “No, originally, where are you from?” Thus, I often grappled with my ethnic and American identity and felt as if I existed “in-between” worlds. As I have matured and became self-confident, I learned to accept and become proud of my multiple identities.

Currently, I work with Muslim youth at a private school in the Bay Area as the middle school math teacher. It is my goal to ensure that all of my students are proud of who they are, where they come from, and their religious beliefs. I want to be the voice of support and assurance and create an environment that will allow them to feel comfortable and confident of who they are; provide for them a space that will help them become proud of their multiple identities. Being a teacher in a Muslim school, I often find myself anxious and troubled by the voices of my students. I become very emotionally attached to their fears as Muslim students in America. And I often worry that they are “not protected;” especially under our current administration.

It is quite difficult to eliminate the ways in which my position as a Muslim woman will create bias or influence questions or interviewees. There are many strengths and challenges that my position, background, and beliefs will have on my study. The challenge will be to balance my personal knowledge and life experience as a Muslim American doing qualitative research with other Muslim Americans. As an insider, my position will enable me to see and understand aspects of Muslim American life; however, I will need to take special care to withhold my personal experiences and stories to be sure that I am seeing my participants' experiences and not imposing my own. However, in order to ensure validity, my interview protocol will include semi-closed questions in order to refrain from sharing and influencing my personal experience and biases with the interviewees. Through this study, I aim to learn the influence of the mass media on the formation of their identity. Through this process, I wish to identify methods, if any, that Muslim youth have resisted the stereotypes prevalent in the media.

Whilst the previous chapter has discussed the methods used to conduct this dissertation study, the following chapter will include the results of the different data collection methods. The data is presented according to emergent themes and sub-themes. Through a rigorous process of grouping and analyzing different forms of data, the following is a presentation of the results.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Although all the participants were uniquely different from one another, a number of common themes emerged from the data. The first theme revolved around how Muslim American youth do not feel distanced from using the media and actually create their unique stories to add to the diverse history of America. Participants generally noted that although they realize that they are different from their non-Muslim peers, this does not make them less American. In fact, they all spoke about how America is built up by different groups of people and their narrative is beautifying history. The second theme specifically looked at Muslim youth's media use and how they have moved away from "traditional" media towards "modern" media uses. Ironically, the participants spoke of how the media was historically used to label the Muslim population, however, it is now being used as a positive vehicle towards change. The third overarching theme were the future steps that these Muslim youth believed should be taken; most prominent of these was being active and positive community members. Participants stressed the importance of volunteering in one's community in order to address the negative Muslim stereotypes that are prevalent in the society. In this chapter, the first section will describe the students that participated in the study. The second section will respond to the research questions that guided the study by displaying data that support the themes that emerged from the analysis.

Participants of the Study

Through the combined process of recruiting for participants through presentations and flyers, and through contacting previous students and children of co-workers and friends, five participants were chosen for meeting the requirements and for their interest in participating in the study on the effects that the mass media has on their identity as Muslim Americans. Their pseudonyms are Asra, Shayma, Nadia, Rabia, and Amina. Four out of five participants were girls who were born and raised in the Bay Area.

The first participant is named Asra. Asra is a 12th year high school student who identifies with India as being her ethnic background. She has been attending public school in Fremont throughout her school years. As a senior in high school, she has been doing a combination of home-school classes and is taking college classes at the local community college. Asra recorded that she watches television and interacts with her cellphone and the internet. She did not identify as using the radio, or reading magazines or newspapers. She wrote that she spends several hours using the different media forms. She recognized that using the media affects her “positively and negatively.” She stated that “media sources make[s] me feel positive because they help me communicate with friends and find out about things that are going on in my community. But they also make me feel negative sometimes since I see my friends’ different lifestyles and feel like I can’t relate.”

The second participant is named Shayma. Shayma is also a senior in high school. She has attended private Islamic schools that are located throughout the Bay Area for all of her school years. Born and raised in Oakland, CA, Shayma identifies as being a Yemeni Muslim American and is currently attending a private Islamic high school in Fremont. Shayma uses her cellphone and the internet; however, she says that she does not spend more than one hour on a daily basis. She sees the media as motivational and

inspirational and animatedly stated that “no one can say that media has harmed me, but I would say that it has benefitted me instead.”

The third participant is named Nadia. Nadia is a 10th year high school student. She also identifies with being a Yemeni Muslim American and attends a private Islamic high school in Fremont. Attending Islamic schools since she was a child, Nadia is an alumni student of the researcher of this study. She identified that she watches TV, uses her cellphone, and interacts with the internet on a daily basis. Nadia says that she does not use the radio, or read magazines or newspapers. Nadia says that she spends several hours in a day on YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram. She sees social media as inspirational and motivational and uses the media to learn new things.

The fourth participant is named Rabia. Rabia is a 10th year high school student who was also an alumni student of the researcher of this study; however, she currently is attending a public high school located in Fremont. Born and raised in South San Francisco, she identifies India as being her ethnic background makeup. Prior to her high school years, Rabia had been attending Islamic private schools located in the Bay Area for her elementary and middle school years. Rabia recorded that she uses the internet on a daily basis for several hours. Out of the five participants, Rabia was the only participant who said that she listened to the radio. She stated that her dad plays the radio on the way to school and she is able to listen to it. She asserted that “the use of social media does not affect my identity as much because me using social media is not any different than a non-Muslim using social media.” She further stated that the use of social media is to “interact with people and try to make new friends.”

The fifth participant is named Amina. Identifying Afghanistan as her ethnic background, Amina has been attending local Bay Area public school for her elementary and middle school years. For her first year as a high schooler, this 9th grade student has been doing independent study through a charter school program offered in Union City.

Amina watches television, uses her cellphone, and interacts with the internet on a daily basis. She spends several hours a day using different media sources and identified that using the media does not affect her identity. Instead, she views the media as a source of inspiration and happiness.

Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the mass media's portrayals of Muslims, often framed in terms of Islamophobia, and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America. This study sought to examine how Muslim youth navigate the multiple forms of media—from mass media to social media—that are ever-present in their lives.

The research questions that guided the dissertation were as follows:

- How do Muslim youth describe the portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media?
- How do Muslim youth interact with the media?
- How do Muslim youth describe their own identities as Muslims and Americans, including ways in which Muslim youth have created an identity that challenges negative media perceptions?
- How does their media-use relate to their identity development as Muslim American youth?

All participants were Bay Area locals and lived within Alameda County. Thus, the researcher chose her worksite classroom to host the interviews and focus group sessions in order to provide a comfortable and quiet space for her participants.

As previously stated in Chapter 3, participants partook in the first focus group session. During this session, participants were asked questions according to the data collection protocol (see Appendix F). The purpose of the questions were to have

participants reflect on the effects that the mass media has on their identity as Muslim-Americans. At the end of the focus group session, participants were instructed that the next steps would be to partake in a two-week diary media log. The six reflection write-ups were scaffolded throughout two weeks and logs began with participants looking at their media use and their Muslim-American identity through a macroscopic perspective and the logs ended with the participants looking at the aforementioned topic with a microscopic perspective. Each of the logs were created through Google Forms and were shared according to the schedule shared with the participants. Between log diary dates, email reminders were sent to the participants to complete the reflections in a timely manner in order to prepare them for the upcoming media log. Following the completion of the diary media logs, the researcher scheduled individual interview sessions with each of the five participants. During, the individual interview session, the researcher and the participant were able to discuss the results of the diary media logs and reflect on different questions and responses. The study concluded with a “member check” focus group session. Each of the participants were presented with transcripts of their contributions towards the study; this included the focus group, diary media logs, and the individual interviews⁴. Students were instructed to look over their transcripts and highlight what they found to be important or inspirational, i.e. themes, and would like to be shared with the other students in the focus group. After students presented themes that they found to be important, the researcher presented three themes that she found emerged from the data.

⁴ Each participant was given transcripts that included only their statements and the researcher’s statement. Statements made by other participants (especially during the focus group session) were omitted from the transcripts that were provided to the participants during the member check focus group session in order to protect the privacy of each individual. It allowed for each student to share with the other participants information or statements that made her comfortable.

Students were encouraged to reflect and voice whether they agreed or disagreed with any or all of the statements. At the end of the member check session, participants were presented with a \$25 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their participation in the study.

Quantitative Results

Quantitative data was collected through the diary media logs. Participants were instructed to note their daily media usage; this included different media forms, time spent on each medium, and the purpose of each media source. These logs were noted through the course of two weeks. With different email and text reminders, participants completed logs in a timely manner. The following is a presentation of the different trends that emerged from the quantitative data.

All participants noted that they interacted daily with watching television, using their cellphones, and their internet (see figure 3). I looked at the total amount of hours that participants recorded over the course of two weeks. The following are percentages representing numbers that participants logged for the different amounts of time using the different mediums with television being 30%, cellphones at 32%, and the internet at 35%. The results showed that none of the participants identified with using magazines or newspapers at all in their daily lives. However, one participant acknowledged that sometimes her dad plays the radio on the way to her school; which accounts for approximately 3% of media consumption.

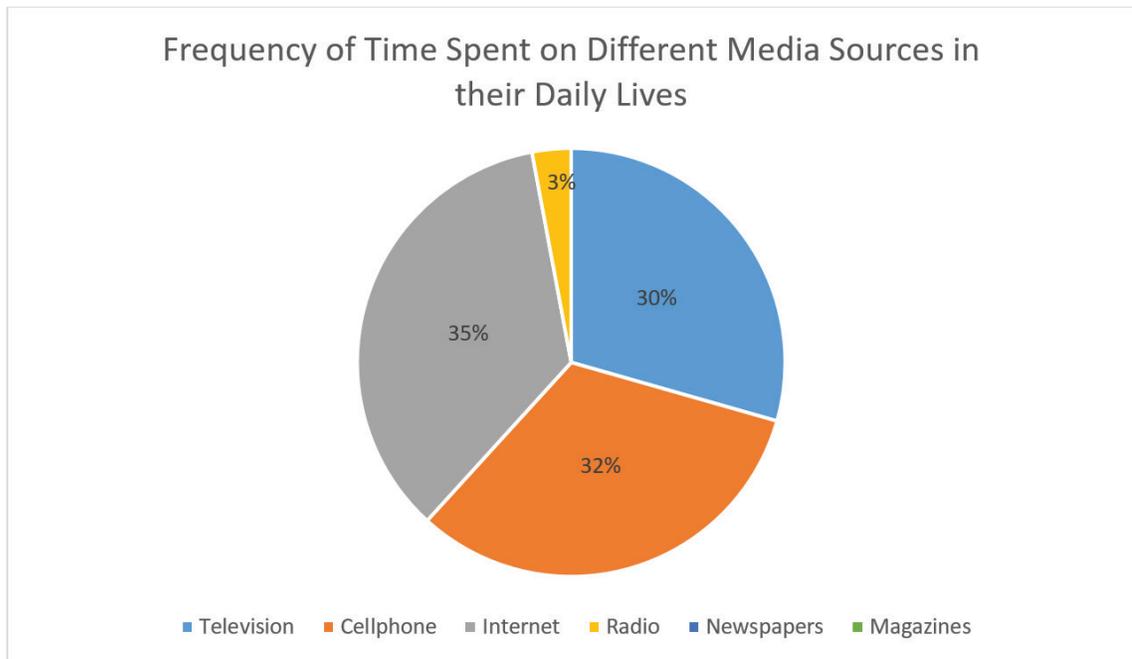


Figure 3: Frequency of the Time Spent on Different Media Sources in their Daily Lives

All participants were aware that they used the different media sources in their lives, and general patterns were noted between times spent on each medium (see figure 4). All participants documented the cellphone as being the most frequented medium with individuals logging that they spent about an hour to two hours daily using their cellphones. Additionally, they wrote that they were on the internet for several hours a day; participants logging in that they used the internet for hours daily. Participants also documented that they frequently watched television for several hours a day. The purpose of each medium's use will be discussed in the following paragraph.

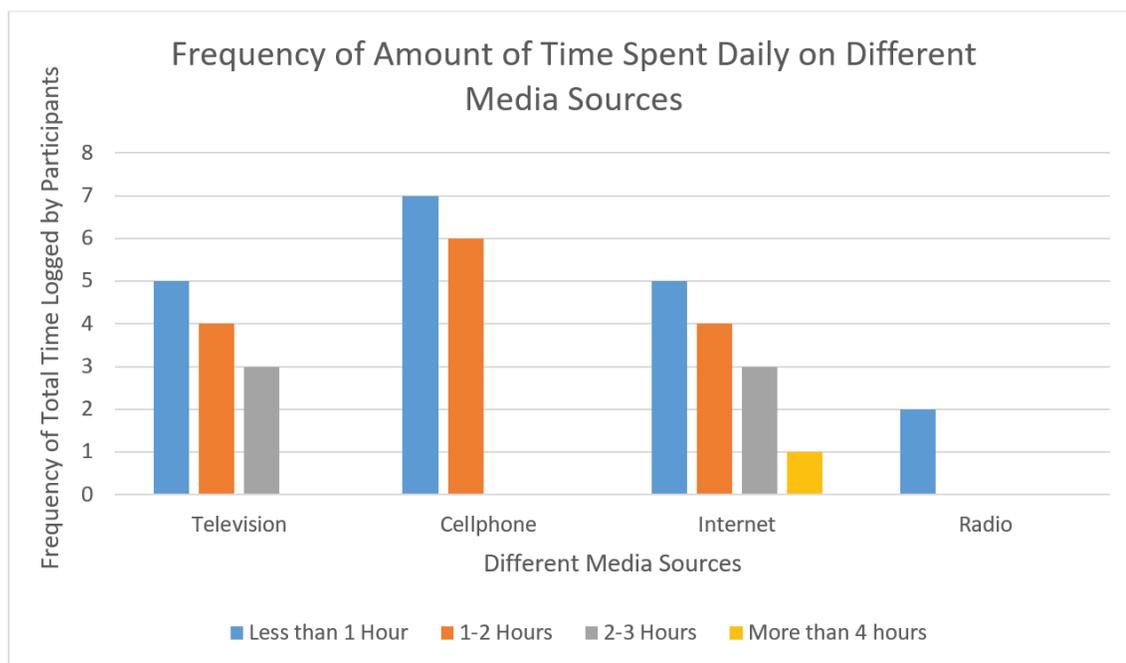


Figure 4: Frequency of Time Spent Daily on Different Media Sources

Participants noted their use of the different media sources and documented the purpose behind the use of each media source (see figure 5). The primary purpose of watching television was for entertainment purposes. One participant recognized that she used the television in order to gain general knowledge. However, none of the participants recorded the television as being educational or a knowledgeable source to go to gain insight about fashion or sports. On the other hand, all of the participants stated that they used their cellphones in order to achieve all purposes. Whether it was general knowledge, or for education, or for entertainment, participants recorded their cellphones as being the primary media source that they use. Additionally, participants generally noted that they used the internet to gain general knowledge and for educational purposes. Whilst the participants were primarily divided for the amount of time spent or for the purpose of each media source, participants' records on the emotions that are produced during the consumption of media were primarily consistent and similar to one another.

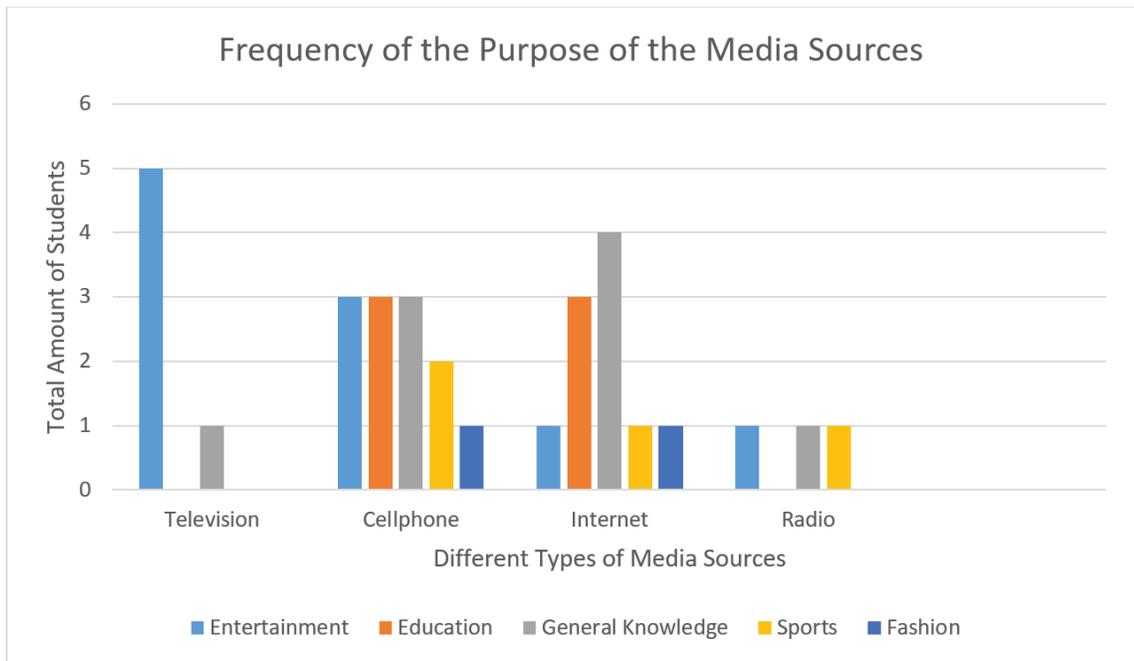


Figure 5: Frequency of the Purpose of the Media Sources

Interestingly enough, all participants documented that positive emotions are produced during the consumption of media (see figure 6). The trend in the emotions include with 80% of the participants feeling inspired and 60% of the participants identify that they feel happy or motivated when using social media. Different participants identified distinct feelings that were different from the other participants that included feeling a boost of self-esteem, laughter, or feeling left out.

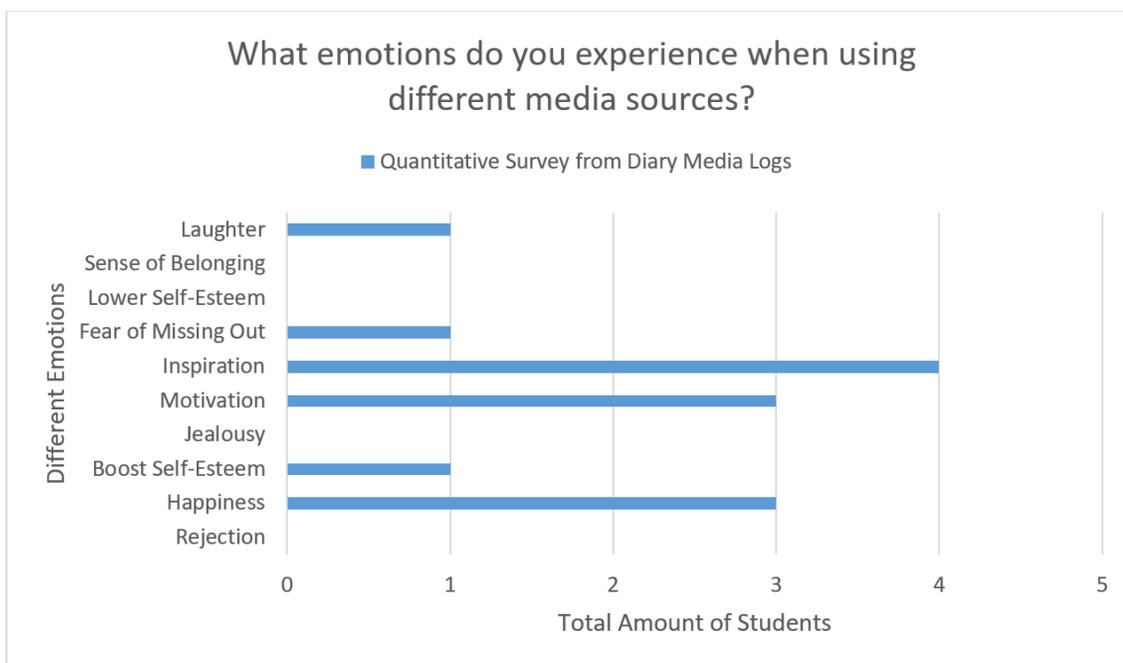


Figure 6: Emotions During the Consumption of Media

The quantitative data is useful to note the similarities and differences between participants in regards to their media use. It was important to note that participants did not identify as using the “traditional” methods of magazines and newspapers as their primary media sources. Additionally, they primarily did not consume television in order to gain knowledge, but watched for entertainment purposes. The time spent on the cellphones far outweighed the time spent on other mediums and participants recorded that they used their cellphones for a variety of purposes. The following section are the themes that emerged from the qualitative data that was collected from the participants.

Qualitative Results

Using the analytical or qualitative processes described in Chapter 3, the following themes emerged. The process of identifying themes and patterns and organizing data to discover the relationship between codes was a difficult and tremulous task. Through

the efforts of consulting and working with dissertation chair and classmates, different themes were identified and clustered together under over-arching themes and other sub-themes emerged.

Participants stressed the fact that the mass media portrays negative stereotypes of Muslims. This includes labeling Muslims as inherently “terrorists” or backwards. However, the effects that these labels have on their day-to-day life was somewhat ‘superficial.’ For fundamentally, their identity as Muslim American youth was very positive; and their acceptance of both identities was not only apparent but was a natural phenomenon that one can grow into and one can be a part of multiple identities. As they view the news media, they struggle to accept the fact that many individuals are largely ignorant of different views and beliefs. However, in contrast, they viewed social media in a positive light and as a means to positively strengthen one’s identity. Especially the students who wore a hijab on a daily basis, social media was a platform that allowed for them to see like-minded individuals that express themselves through the hijab. Additionally, the diverse and accepting Bay Area environment helped them become comfortable in who they are and provided them a safe space. However, it is important to note that participants were aware of negative views towards Muslims and that many news platforms were strategic with their portrayals. Uneducated individuals who worked under the realm of Orientalism, thought that Muslims were all terrorists and worked to ensure that the public believed their personal agenda. In order to combat these portrayals, participants believed that volunteering and becoming active community members was a way to combat these stereotypes. For this was a method to positively portray their beliefs and practices. The following section explains each of the themes that emerged from the data with subsequent quotes from the focus group sessions, diary media logs, and the individual interviews.

The Muslim-American narrative: creating a unique story within the folds of this diverse country

Participants identified that interacting with the media did not greatly affect their identity as Muslims. In fact, they stated that America is built upon by people of different ethnicities and faiths, and questioned how their narrative was different from everyone else. Additionally, they felt safe following their religion for America advocates for religious freedom and practice.

“It’s like saying, I like hamburgers, but I like to get my nails done, too.”

Participants were primarily divided on the concept of being both ‘Muslim’ and ‘American.’ In response to the focus group question, “Can one be both Muslim and American given the negative portrayals that are prevalent in the media,” Asra stated how she used to struggle with identifying with the concept of both terms.

I used to think a lot about how can I be Muslim and American at the same time when a lot of American policies seem kind of against Muslims? But then, I think because I’ve grown up in this Muslim community, I haven’t really felt like ... Looking at all of these other Muslim Americans that grew up here, I kind of felt like I can do that too. After a while, I just felt like, I can be content with both those things.

Although Asra stated that she used to struggle with identifying with being both a Muslim and an American, Nadia took offense to the question.

Being American and your religion doesn’t have ... It has nothing to do with each other! It’s like saying, I like hamburgers, but I like to get my nails done too. You know because I like hamburgers, it just doesn’t make sense, you know what I

mean?... They're very two different things. I can live under a law, like it doesn't make sense to me.

Nadia was so upset by the question that her last statement was an exclamation that "It makes me so frustrated!" She was very upset that she stated that she lost her train of thoughts and with a violent shake of her head said, "I was going to say something, but I forgot what I was going to say."

Amina identified as being both a Muslim and an American; however, she realizes that the greater society struggles to see her as both. She emphatically stated, "I'm Muslim-American. [But] they can't take that answer. They still want to know more about you, like who's your mom, who's your dad, and you're like, why would you want to ask me that kind of question it's kind of creepy sometimes..."

Shayma said that within the last year, she has seen a change in her perception of being a Muslim and an American and her acceptance that she can be both. She stated how she used to struggle with practicing her religious beliefs and still "fit in" with societal expectations of how women are supposed to look like. However, as she grew more confident in her skin and in her identity as a Muslim, she realized that "this is my identity" and that she was proud of who she was, what she stood for, and her place in society.

I feel like if you came to me a few years ago, or even a few months ago, I'd be like [different]... cause I feel like I was more affected by it. If I see, for example, a woman half naked online, you get the feeling like, oh, you're supposed to be that way too. Cause I'm a woman, I'm American, I'm living amongst these other women. Even if you see just outside. When you go outside ... and it doesn't only apply to me ... but the more I grew and the more I realized, no, this is my identity... who I am and people shouldn't really be judging me about how naked I

am and how beautiful I am. Instead, I'd rather have a trait inside of me that people judge me based off of.

After hearing how other students responded to the question, Nadia reiterated herself, and apologetically said that this concept was "something new to me...hearing that we don't belong." For she fully considered herself "as a person who belongs." She went on to say that if one were to question her legibility on being an American, then every ethnic group except Native Americans would not be able to claim America as their own.

Personally, I feel like I belong. If we think about it like that, then nobody really belongs. The only people who actually belong here are the rightful owners such as the Native Americans, which are now in, you know, camps that they don't deserve to be in. They're the founders, they're the ones who started this land. There the ones who were here before everyone else, until the Europeans decided to make a little trip.

Asra agreed with Nadia's statement and said that if Muslims do not belong in America, then no other group besides Native Americans should be here. She stressed the importance that America was built by immigrants and that the rightful people who belong in the United States were Native Americans.

I think Muslims... if we don't belong, then no one really belongs except the Native Americans, because America is such a diverse place, and the people who came here, the settlers were themselves immigrants, so we can't really say that anyone who migrates here doesn't belong here.

Nadia admitted that this experience of being questioned on her Muslim American identity was very new and the question was offensive to her. She admitted that this eye-opening experience was what she needed for she had led a sheltered life.

It's just like, I don't really notice some of the things that you're pointing out.

It's been brought to my attention, but I can't really say that I've experienced anything, like someone telling me that I'm not a real American, because we're all in this thing, and we're all in the same classroom. We're all just doing us being American, just I mean, I don't know. Some things are just, I haven't experienced yet, because I've kind of been sheltered.

Amina, on the other hand, stated that she went to public school for most of her life and that people are, in fact, respectful towards her religious belief. She stated that the labels that peers give in school do not include religion and that she had not been treated differently because of her religion.

I went to a public school for most of my life, and actually I haven't really been bullied about my religion. I'm surprised. People are nice and mature about it, they don't really talk about it. They just leave it aside. They don't really label people now as, oh you're the Muslim people, you're the Christian people. You just group them now as popular kids, as those kids, not like as religion-wise. But honestly, they don't really treat them differently anymore.

Asra agreed with the concept that she had the right to claim as being an "American" as any other youth. She compared herself to other teenagers and said how she does "a lot of things that other young Americans do." She stated that her Muslim identity made her different from other Americans, but it didn't make her "less American." She concluded by stating that she was telling her own unique story as a Muslim American youth.

I do a lot of things that other young Americans do. I go to school, I speak English, I live in America, etc. Apart from these things, I wear the hijab in public and learn Qur'an. I think these represent both the American and Muslim aspects of my identity. I know that my Muslim identity makes me different from a lot of other Americans, but that doesn't make me "less American." I think that by being myself, being a practicing Muslim while living in America, I am telling my story.

Taken together, participants saw themselves as being both Muslim and American. They felt comfortable with practicing their own faith and with wearing embracing both of their identities. They stated that this country "belongs to everyone" and that it was built up of people of different ethnicities and who practice different faiths.

The "Welcoming Country:" America belongs to everyone

All of the participants fully concurred with the concept that America belongs to every ethnicity and religion. Amina stated that America is known for being a diverse country to those of different ethnicities and who practice other beliefs. She stated that she was saddened by how this welcoming nature was changing under the current administration.

Honestly, America hasn't really been made by just one sort of people. It's pretty much made by all cultures and religions. That's what America is pretty much known for, everyone being welcome here, but I guess not anymore, because they're just trying to ... I think Trump is trying to find a way to make everyone leave, like Muslims, and Mexicans and everyone, so they're only one type of people, like whites in America. He just wants the white people to stay in America, but I disagree with him.

Nadia agreed with the concept that America is built up of different ethnicities and she assuredly stated, "You can't really say you don't want immigrants because you're an

immigrant yourself, you immigrated here yourself.” Nadia went on to say that America was a land that belonged to “a lot of people. A mix of a lot of diversity, so it just doesn’t make sense for us not to be accepted.” Amina agreed with Nadia and stated that the fact that America is made up of multiple races and religious practices, it is important for all individuals to be aware of this fact and accept people for who they are. She stressed how current decisions made by the political administration is wrong and is not what America stands for.

America hasn’t been made up by just one type of race... [and] is pretty much made up of all cultures and religions and we should all just accept it as a whole. We should just all respect each other’s religions and beliefs. Like now that Trump is president, he’s trying to make everyone leave the country, like Mexicans and Latinas and everything. And I feel like that’s wrong because America was originally made by all immigrants and all cultures and religions.

Rabia agreed with the unique demographic makeup of the United States and stated how America was different from other countries because of its welcoming nature. “They’re known as welcoming people, like I feel like America’s also known as like a welcoming, like really freedom, kind of country.” She also agreed with Amina’s statements and said that she feels that things are changing and there has been a lot of negativity from the American government. “But I don’t feel like they’re doing that anymore. It feels like it’s not accepting anymore. Especially for a Muslim community, they’re not accepting at all, they don’t want any more Muslims at all.”

Amina stated that every person who lives in America is free to practice his/her beliefs. She angrily reminded the group that America is a land that was built on the ideals of freedom and practice; there is no alternative besides acceptance.

We all have our religions. Why can't they just respect that? It's so annoying, honestly, it gets me so mad talking about this. I feel like everyone deserves their freedom. They say America's like, you're allowed to have freedom and stuff. I believe that they should have the freedom to believe whatever they want, and practice it wherever they want, because they have the right to. That's my opinion.

All participants agreed that any individual should be given the right to practice his/her beliefs in a government that preaches that these rights are given. They all primarily agreed that America does provide the unique space to practice religious freedom and that this has allowed for diversity and different beliefs to prosper. Additionally, America was built upon my different races and that it is important for all individuals to be respectful of this fact.

Hijab: The Beauty Marker of Being Different

Participants were divided on their opinions towards wearing the hijab. All participants agreed that the hijab is a marker, but at times it can be negative, while other times it is a beautiful feature that is embraced. Asra stated that when she wears the hijab, assumption are being formed, whether they're good or bad and "they form opinions about Muslims just by, especially Muslim women, because they wear the hijab even if they're not doing anything, even if it's unintentional, they're making judgements." Rabia agreed with Asra's statement and stated that wearing the hijab is a marker that one can't escape and it is important to watch how one acts for judgments are being made. She affirmed that "when you wear the hijab and then you go outside, people see you and know that you're Muslim, so whatever you do kind of depends on. Like they're going to start depending their judgements on that. They're not going to look at everybody else." Nadia stated that the hijab carried a negative connotation with it and that when one saw the hijab, they

were attributed with being a terrorist. “Basically, people see this [hijab] in me as like a terrorist, and the way we’re portrayed is based on the actions of wrongdoers.”

The participants noted that there was a difference between being a Muslim women and a Muslim man. And the primary difference was the hijab. Shayma indicated that Muslim women struggle more in society than men because they do not have to wear the hijab as a marker. She stated, “I mean for Muslim men it’s more easier because they’re not immediately identifiable as Muslim. For us, we got it written all over us that we’re Muslim once the person sees us.” Amina agreed with the fact that women are vulnerable to negative feedback from other people because of the hijab. She specified that “As a Muslim, if you’re wearing a scarf, usually people’s attention go straight to the scarf. Especially as a female, as a woman. They go straight to the scarf. They’re like, “Okay. They’re Muslim.” No doubt about it” and assumptions are made.

Shayma realized that the media negatively portrays the hijab as being oppressing and constraining and she laments that it is viewed in such a fashion. She says that she works so hard to find beautiful hijabs and match them to her outfits and, in the end, she knows that it is seen as oppressive.

I have all these traits. I have so much to give to society, but people see me as [oppressed]. I’m trying to wear these different colors to match my hijab with my outfit. People are like, oh the hijab represents your oppression. You’re oppressed. People are forcing you to wear this. Really, I’m just out here trying to match my stuff and look nice. But yeah, people see me different ways.

Shayma recognized that there exists a different story that is portrayed in the media that many people will readily believe. Shayma is very much aware of being a Muslim and there is a bit of pressure to not be seen in a stereotypically negative way.

Whilst several girls saw the hijab as a negative marker, Shayma viewed the hijab as being the tool to express and embrace her differences and that she is not afraid of showing how her story differs from the general “oppressed Muslim women” stories that are prevalent in the media. She declared that “the hijab has allowed me to be different in who I am, and that’s something that I take into like, that I treasure, instead of, because people tell us all that we’re oppressed because we wear this, but instead we need to look at it through a more positive light.” She further explained that with all of the negative criticism that is given towards the hijab, this has led her to “realize the beauty in being different.” She stated how easy it is for one to fall into the trap of accumulating the thoughts and ideals portrayed by the media in seeing the hijab as a negative factor. Thus she realized those assumptions that were put upon her by the media and used the media to benefit her beliefs by viewing the hijab differently.

I am Muslim and wear the hijab, the Islamic hair covering that signifies my faith. My family and I have always been a target for hate, Media portrays us as individuals of war and rampage, an obvious generalization. However, this negativity that Muslims all across the world are forced to face, has made me realize the beauty in being different. I would never wish to be someone I am not, just to please the online community, aka other individuals I don’t even know. So one can say that the media has harmed me, but I would say that it has benefitted me instead. Never will I allow another person’s perceptions of me mitigate my will to prosper.

Rabia also viewed the media as a vehicle for change. She stated how she uses the media to her advantage. She purposely will post a picture of herself wearing a hijab in order to inspire other girls to not be ashamed of the Muslim identity. She voiced how she follows in the footsteps of other hijabi bloggers in order to confidently practice her religion.

I can post a picture with my hijab on and that can inspire other girls to not be ashamed of their Muslim identity. I feel like social media is that platform that can help girls to be encouraged to be keep their Muslim identity. There are many hijabi bloggers nowadays that choose to practice Islam as well as entertain others. This inspires me and helps me stay true to my Muslim identity.

Participants agreed that they positively saw an increase of Muslim women who “looked like them” and Hijabis were being seen in the government, in ads, in social media, on TV, etc. Rabia said that she likes to follow “Hijabi bloggers and stuff like that because I feel like I can relate to them.” She further explained how she is so proud to see that Muslim beauty bloggers were releasing their own hijab lines and their own makeup lines. Rabia expressed how the present day was different from the past and that, in 2019, diversity is being embraced. She stated that “Because in 2019, it’s all about diversity. It’s all about embracing people for who they are. I’ve noticed so many Hijabis, like do you know Halima Aden? She’s like a model and she’s Hijabi.”

Shayma agreed and stated that everyone had access to social media. And the fact that hijabis were being able to share their story, doing sports, being in politics and not allowing their beliefs to stop them.

I feel like everybody, it’s not only non Hijabis are using social media. Because if it was only non Hijabis, then I’d be like there’s nobody like me using social media, right? There’s nobody like me out there. I see now there’s so many Hijabis and Muslims out there doing so many different things, they’re not letting the hijab stop them. They’re doing sports, they’re doing so many different things, so that’s why I don’t feel like it’s affecting my identity as much.

However, although they all realized that there was an increase of Hijabi-wearing Muslim women, participants were conscious of the fact that positive feedback was not only limited but existed in a bubble that was consciously created.

Participants were confident in their dual identities of being both Muslim and American. They emphatically stated that America is a diverse country that promoted religious freedom and practice. While the previous section sought to look at whether interaction with the media affected their identity, the following section will discuss how the mass media has changed from being a negative influence towards being a helpful mechanism in promoting understanding between the masses and Muslims.

The mass media: historically a negative anchor, presently a positive vehicle to promote change

The second core aspect of the study was the effect that the media has on our youth today. It is important to note that there is a large variety of different media forms that exist in our society today. This theme is evident in two general areas: through the perspective of consciousness of bias in media and how students are using the media to take an active stance against stereotypical accusations.

Othering on the Muslim Community: “Always Been a Target for Hate”

Most of the participants have had negative experiences that they attributed in part to the media. Although they were all high school students in different schools, programs, and grades the Bay Area, all five of the interviewees discussed how at times they felt atypical and or different from mainstream society. The concept of othering resides on the belief that majority groups view minority groups as an “other” and ostracizes and distances them from the mainstream groups. In regards to this belief of an “us” versus “them” mentality, Shayma, a high school senior student discussed how she has “always been a target for hate.” She stated that “whether it means being stared at almost

everywhere we step foot, or being verbally assaulted by strangers. My community is continuously being undermined.” Shayma recognizes that Muslims are targeted during this current time period, however, she also stresses how other minority groups are also being targeted as well. Being the “othered” group of the era has her comment on the obvious differences when portrayed in the media and is the reason that Muslims are portrayed differently in the media. Amina agreed with Shayma and stated that Islam and Muslims in general are blamed and held responsible for terrorist attacks that are portrayed in the media. She further stated that “the Muslim side of the story” is never given which gets her very frustrated and upset.

They usually like to blame it on the Muslims most of the time. They don't like to tell the Muslim side of the story...Especially in news media, they always try to... like the terrorist attacks and stuff, they always like to blame ... they don't really like to hear the other side of the story. Most of the time, they always like to blame the Muslim people, which really annoys me.

Nadia agreed with what Amina stated and expressed how Muslims are portrayed as “barbaric” and as “terrorists.” She angrily stressed that white people and Muslim people are not treated the same within the media.

Like Amina said, they portray Muslim as people who are barbaric and terrorists and all this stuff. For example, if there was a white kid who shot up a school, he would be considered a person with mental illness, or insane, whatever. Incapable of going into court and being a part of it, because he's mentally ill...But they automatically assume, like Muslim men are like ... There's really no such thing as mental illness for them, it's just only for their kind. It makes me feel mad and angry. I just, I don't appreciate that.

Amina agreed with Nadia and expressed how it upsets her that all Muslims are portrayed as evil people based on the actions of one or two individuals. She admitted that every religion and group has good and bad people, however, a whole of individuals should not be responsible for carrying all of the burden.

Whenever something happens on the news, for example, like a gun shooting or a terrorist attack, people always blame it on the Muslims, like they always do. But they always show that all the Muslims are bad. Every individual has good and bad. For example, Muslims have good and bad. I don't want to say they're perfect people. They're human, they do bad things, they do good things. Like Americans, there is good and bad...But they always like to portray us like evil people, like, oh the evil religion, or they're evil people. Just because someone does something doesn't say that we're all bad people. We are good people too, just like how some white people have good and bad, they're criminals, murderers. There's some of that in our religion too. They like to just base it off one person, out of so for example, like I said, if one person does something bad they like to portray everyone as a bad person, which really upsets me.

Nadia agreed with Amina's statements and said that there are "obviously people that are going to be bad and that are Muslim, but they don't define who we are."

Amina stated that because of this stereotype, there are people who are scared to identify as being Muslim because they fear being labeled as crazy. "Some people nowadays they're so scared to even say they're Muslim now because of what's going on. So if they ever say, "Oh, I'm Muslim" then they would just turn to look at them and think like, "Okay, you're kinda crazy"."

Asra agreed with Amina's statement and shared how Muslims grow up in fear of being jailed for different beliefs or for protesting for something that they believe is right.

She stated how all of her friends and family in the Muslim community warned her to downplay her religious beliefs in order to not get in trouble with the government.

Growing up in the Muslim community people have usually told me to be very careful about what I post because they're like, "You never know who's watching. The FBI and everything, they're also watching, so you need to be careful about how much you express your religiosity or whatever.

Although all of the students were aware of the complex nature of being both Muslim and American, all participants were proud of being both Muslim and American. Amina went on to say that one should be proud of their ethnic background of one's religious beliefs. She attributed her happiness and confidence in her identity due to the support that she has around her. "I believe that if I'm someone, I should be happy that I am. I'm really happy I'm Muslim, and I grew up in a Muslim community, and I have great people around me. And I just feel like it's important to really be proud of who you are."

Shayma identifies proudly with being an American and a Muslim. Being born and raised in California, Shayma considers herself as "full American." She stated how America is her home and how frustrating it is to be told by people that she doesn't belong.

American is literally the only thing I know. But people still come to you and say, no, go back to your country. This is my country. I know no other place. Where would I go? Yeah, people are always telling you, no, this isn't your country. Even if you were born here, your parents came here and you just happened to be born. But yeah, I still consider it to be my country.

Shayma went on to say how ironic it is because Americans will question her claim to this country, while Arabs will not accept her as being full Yemeni. She explains that it's a struggle to be a part of both worlds.

Even here when people ask you, oh, where are you from? I say I'm from Oakland. They're like, no, where are you from, *from?* ... I'm from Oakland, *Oakland* [with a laugh] ... Yeah but people always ask me that. The funny thing is, especially when I went to Yemen in 2015 or 14 it was ... people in Yemen they'd ask me, oh, where are you from? I'd be like oh, I'm American. And then people here, when people ask me where I'm from I'll say oh, I'm Yemen. You got to fit into both worlds.

Nadia also identified with being a Yemeni-American. She said that recently she has been feeling frustrated and specifically targeted. "Yemen being one of the countries that are part of Trump's ban makes me feel frustrated" and upset for Yemen and the other countries who are banned are all under distress and need help. She stated, "How can you find people that are going through so much in their lives a threat? They just need help. Like, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Syria. They're all in distress. Who's going to go to America and ... They're harmless, they're completely harmless people." She concluded with saying how "messed up" the system was nowadays.

Rabia agreed with Nadia's word and stated how American beliefs and values were changing. She reflected that "Yeah, it makes me sad that this country, if it is about freedom and the land of the free and the land of opportunity, you know it's not really if you're stripping someone from being who they are and following what they believe in."

A concept that was somewhat inherent within the study is the theme of Orientalism. As stated in the literature section above, this theme examines the constructs of peoples of the Orient, their beliefs, and, most importantly, how these beliefs are

constructed when viewed through the biased intellectual constructs of the West that shapes the notion of “otherness” (Said, 1979). This theme evident in two general areas: through the social perspective of “us” versus “them” mentality, also known as othering, and through a historical perspective of white supremacy.

After being presented with a political cartoon (Appendix G), Shayma stated that the media “shines a negative light” on all Muslims. Additionally, the media labels minorities as being “criminals” or “rapists” or “terrorists.” She sarcastically ended her statement with saying how, due to the portrayals in the media and the “Muslim Ban,” she is an alien in her country.

I strongly agree that the idea presented in this cartoon is one that is being seen in today's society. Media shines a negative light on Muslims all across the globe. Like they have done to this man, they do to the many millions of us. This man seems to be fearing for his life, whereas media makes it look like others should fear for their lives because of him. Society and media tends to label specific groups as “criminals” “rapists” “lowlifes”, and unfortunately Muslims fall under “terrorists”. According to what has been dubbed as the “Muslim Ban”, I am an alien in my own country, America the great. The only country I have ever known is one that I don't belong in now.

Asra agreed with Shayma's statements and attributed the negative portrayal due to the “its bias and lack of understanding.” She stated that this is the reason why the media “often portrays Muslims in a bad light when the reality is the opposite.” She went on to state how “the Western media usually shows one side of the story about Muslims” and often ignores any other issues related to Muslims (war, famine, religious persecution, etc.); instead she feels “that the media often focuses its attention on the terrorism-related problems in the Muslim community” in order to paint a description of the entire Muslim

community as being subordinate to others. However, Asra did conclude her statements with reflecting that there are certain media sources that are not biased and work towards supporting minority groups.

There are certain Western news websites and sources that, in my opinion, try to give a different perspective about our (Muslims') state of affairs. They do include diverse perspectives and they are sometimes supportive of the Muslim community. Although the majority of media sources do portray Muslims inaccurately, I would say that they're not all bad.

Although Asra was of the opinion that there are certain Western news and websites that are supportive of minorities, the other participants primarily believed that all minorities were negatively portrayed in the media.

The news media was seen as a platform that spreads negative stereotypes and portrays Muslims as “terrorists” and as “backwards” individuals. This perception has resulted with society seeing them as “not American” and with them having to constantly defend their identity. The following section will look at how news media perpetuates different stereotypes and supports white supremacy.

White supremacy: advantageous towards the few; damaging to the many

In regards to the notion of white supremacy, Shayma and Rabia stressed how white supremacy is prevalent in the media and the reason that many marginalized minorities are struggling in the United States today and how any individual who is not “white” or “male” is subject to humiliation. Shayma stated how for each minority group, the media attributes negative connotations with that group in order to show the public that each group is inherently inferior to the white race. She argued that “not even just Muslims, right, like African-American communities, Latino communities, they're

all being labeled.” She stressed that Muslims are inherently “terrorists,” and African Americans are all “thugs” or “criminals,” whilst Mexicans are generally “rapists.”

Throughout the news, even Trump ... people always talking about anything that has to do with Muslim, is always a terror attack. Like 100% it’s a terrorist attack. If it’s an African American dude or woman, it’s always thugs or they’re criminals, or the low lives. Mexicans are rapists. But whenever it’s a white man, it’s always, he’s ill, he’s not in his right mind... I just find that so strange. They’ve got a label for each race and every identity, every religion... [It’s] so disappointing.

Rabia agreed with Shayma and stated that the media strategically portrays each story according to one’s race. She argued that white individuals are given extra privileges over other marginalized groups. She concluded with how angry and frustrating it is when Muslims are shown to be inherently “violent” her for this is not the case.

Yeah, I’m going to have to agree...about the news, how the[y] portray each race. I think if there’s a criminal and he’s Caucasian, or he’s white, they don’t really portray him as a terrorist. They would show him as just a regular criminal. Or if it was like, maybe an African-American, they’d portray him as differently, and as being a Muslim, or then a white person...Everybody’s portrayed differently. Nobody’s considered ... If you do something wrong, you’re not considered just a criminal. It depends on your race. That’s what I feel like is on the media. When they show Muslims as terrorists, versus a white person as just a criminal, it kind of makes me feel annoyed and mad. That’s not right. Just because ... They make Muslims seem like violent people, when we’re not really violent.

Amina agreed with Shayma and Rabia and stated that white supremacy is evident in the media. She commented how “if you see a white person and they do a crime, they’re

not labeled as terrorists, they're just mentally unstable, right?" She went on to say how apparent labeling is and that people need to become aware of the bias that exists in the media. She argued that "I feel people need to open their eyes and just look at the media, there's so much bias out there." Amina stated that the bias in the media is unfair to Muslims.

Amina further claimed that the media strategically portrays news stories in order "to find a way to blame the Muslims, in any kind of situation. Even if it's the smallest stuff..." Rabia agreed with Amina and stated that when acts of terror, destruction, and confusion occur, Muslims are firstly suspected. She remembered a recent attack incident that occurred in New York and "at first people were kind of suspecting Muslim people, they were like, oh yeah there might have been some terrorism involved." However, when the full story came out, "it wasn't actually a Muslim it was some white guy" and the news then did not cover it as extensively as they had done. Amina agreed with Rabia's statement and argued that when a Caucasian individual makes bad decisions, his race is not portrayed in the media; whilst if a Muslim person does the same actions, his race and religion is questioned.

When someone like a Caucasian, or a white person, does one thing bad, it just goes around for at least one day and gets, they move on with their lives... But if a Muslim person does something, they leave it on for, they just keep talking about it on and on and on. They want to make it a bigger...

Shayma furthered the discussion on white supremacy and argued that this bias that exists in the media is done in order to keep minorities oppressed and advancing in society. She stated that she has been doing research on the media portrays each race as inferior in order to justify actions made by politicians and large corporations to keep the minority populations "poor."

I just wrote an English paper talking about how they keep the minorities, like the poor people, they want to keep them poor and out of the politics. Because if you go and you look at the poor places in Oakland and places like that, like every single block there's a different liquor store. There's all these different places. But they don't put like actual health foods or feed people what's good for them, because they want to keep the poor people poor and then they put in rich communities like a Whole Foods or a Sprouts, but they don't do that in more poor communities.

This inequity of portrayal in the media is largely apparent in the news media. The participants of the study were acutely aware of the bias that exists towards marginalized groups in the news media.

News Media: the mechanism used towards labeling and the othering of Muslims

For these high school students, News Media is associated with “older individuals” or what “adults” interact it. All of the participants stated that they themselves do not watch news media on their own; if they do happen to watch anything, it is because their parents happen to be watching it. Asra stated that her dad “watches the news every day. He's very regular about that, so I usually end up watching the news with him.” Rabia agreed and stated that “My mom and dad both watch TV regularly. At my house, it's a lot of CNN, and then ABC's definitely local news too...” She further went on to say that her parents also would get their news from Al-Jazeera from their news apps on their phones. Nadia stated that she gets her political and general news from social media. “I watch this show called The Daily Show, and it's kind of like, basically keeps me up with what's happening in the political side of the world and all this stuff. I kind of just keep up with

that, and get ideas from maybe Pinterest or Instagram or contact my friends on Snapchat, or through iMessage.”

In addition to associating news media with what adults would watch, news media had a negative connotation associated with it. Nadia stated that she feels “depressed” and “like trash” when she watches the news. She argued that the goal of the different news sources is to make minorities feel oppressed and to gain attention from the society at large. She prefers to get her news from social media because she is able to quickly change different news stories from sad reports to uplifting narratives.

I feel like watching the news is very depressing... It [social media] won't show you one topic that make you feel like trash the whole day. You know about it, you'll learn about it in that second and then as soon as you get the next video, you'll think about it for a minute and reflect for a second, but it won't be something you'll constantly be hearing like the news. I feel like the news is so depressing, you know? I feel like their goal is to make people depressed. Especially because they'll change it up to the way they'll gain more attention, I feel like that's all the news does- just wants attention...

Shayma agreed with Nadia's statement and said that social media does not stress on the associating negative acts with different races. She further stated that news media is more damaging because it reaches a larger audience for “the news media goes and touches every single person.” Amina agreed with both Nadia and Shayma's claims of the discrepancy that is evident in the news and asserted that all Muslims are labeled by the actions of a few. She stated that when a Caucasian individual does “something bad,” the entire race is not labeled as “bad people” and the news media does not emphasize the story as much. She argued that the status of labeling Muslims is not new and that this has been going on towards the Muslim community for a while.

But in the Muslim community, it's not, because this kind of stuff has been going around for a long time. And I just feel like whenever a white or a Caucasian person does something bad, they just throw it off. They're like, "It's okay." And they don't really think of it as much as Muslims were to do, to make it a bigger deal if Muslims do it. because they're like, "Oh, it's terrorists. You're bad people." They're like this and that. But if white people or Caucasian people do something like that, it will just be like, "Oh, they did that." But then the next day they will just forget about it.

She concluded that the labeling that is done towards Muslims from the news media sources "gets very annoying" and should be addressed by different political figures and the greater society at large. Shayma agreed that the labeling that is portrayed in the news media does affect her. For she does have strangers in grocery stores or in shops mutter offensively towards herself and her family. However, she says that she tries to not let the negative propaganda affect her.

I mean still, here and there, I get affected...I'm not like a robot. I still get affected and I have to think over it and it still does make me think about it. But yeah, I always try to take the positive out of the negative. Even one time, me and my aunt, we were walking down from a cake shop and this lady, she turns around, she's like—she didn't look like she was in her right mind—but she turns around to the man next to her and she was like, "Oh, It's one of them ISIS people..." It is so—to think about it—it's so strange. Why would you even say that? I don't know.

Although all of the participants agreed that the news media labeled minorities and specifically negatively portrayed all Muslims as being inherently "terrorists," they had different views towards social media. Whilst the news media was viewed as a medium

that supported white supremacy, social media was seen as a mechanism that gave individuals a voice and a safe space to grow in.

Social Media: “the vehicle of change” towards “Having a voice”

A theme that emerged from the data was the different perspectives that the youth brought in regards to the term “media.” In response to the question of, “what are your favorite media sources,” unanimously they all spoke about social media. They preferred social media; Rabia stated that it was “easier to interact with friends and meet new people.” Nadia viewed social media as “inspiring” and stated that she was able to see the news and gain access to “what’s going on in the states and internationally.” They would only “talk” about news media when I purposely asked them about news media.

All of the participants viewed social media as an “inspiration” and as a mechanism to express one’s individuality. In reference to social media, Shayma said with a smile, “I took something positive out of something negative.” Nadia agreed and shared how social media inspires her and how she loves it for it is a safe space that she is able to express herself and her religious beliefs. She stated that the use of social media has boosted her confidence in her “own skin” and has given her the outlet to express her opinions.

It’s always inspired me and it amazed me how there is an outlet for people to share their views and ideas positively and negatively. Like I said, it’s an outlet to let people hear and see your opinion and what you stand for so I do feel like I could express myself and not let it hurt my confidence because I am comfortable in my own skin, I actually feel like because I have only been on the media since I’ve gotten older I got my confidence built because I was not exposed to it as much as normal kids.

Rabia agreed with Nadia's statements on social media and expressed how social media has helped "the whole world" become connected and has given people the mechanism to express themselves. She stated that the universal platform has led to people with like-minded interests to be able to connect with another.

I feel like it inspires people. I feel like it helps people come, express themselves better, towards the whole world. Obviously, without social media I probably wouldn't know so many people, right? I probably would know only the people in, that I physically know, right? I feel social media connects you more to people you've never met...

This platform of connection allows for communication between people. Whether it's connecting people who have never met before, or whether it is connecting people with opposing views, Nadia shared how she is able to be on social media and watch how opposing views interact. She stated that she loves YouTube for people are able to express their individual ideas and beliefs.

I feel like YouTube is a place for people to put their ideas on there, and then you could see what people are thinking about, like, I was watching an interview with a liberal and a conservative and it's weird hearing two different people talk that's something that they disagree on, but they're still having a conversation and you get to know both views of different people.

Amina stated how social media has helped her with taking pride in her identity as a Muslim American. She shared how it is hard for one to be proud "who they are," and that using social media consciously will make one proud of one's identity.

Because you could take pride on who you are as a person, and I think it's really important. Nowadays especially, because people are trying to fit in so much...

that they just forget who they are. At the end of the day, they'll do all this stuff, and then at the end of the day they just forget who they are. They don't know their roots as a Muslim. I think that's really important to just really be proud of who you are and just have a really good surrounding of people with you.

Nadia agreed with Amina's statement that it makes one proud of one's heritage and identity and exclaimed how using social media makes her feel "like I can do whatever I want." She shared how social media gives Muslims a platform in having a voice and thus accurately representing the Muslim community. Nadia feels empowered by social media and says that, by using social media, she feels inspired and connected to her family back home.

As there's more Muslims having a voice and coming out and representing the Muslim community I feel like—oh—especially Yemeni people, whenever I see Yemeni people doing stuff that is impacting the community and giving Islam a better name I feel like I can do whatever I want. I could do whatever I believe is right, even if it means endangering my life, because these people are endangering their lives so they could educate the people around them, so they could get their message through, so yeah I feel like it inspires me and I could connect with them because they understand how it is to be a Muslim in the U.S.

Although other participants shared how social media has positively affected their identity, Rabia was adamant that the use of social media does not affect her identity. She stated that her use of social media did not make her different from her "non-Muslim" friends; she said that her using social media did not make her any different from any other American youth who uses social media for inspiration and motivation.

The use of social media does not affect my identity as much because me using social media is not any different than a non- Muslim using social media. We both use Social Media to interact with people and try to make new friends.

Whilst all of the participants noted that social media is a platform that inspires and motivates people, they were all conscious of the dangers that social media may have on different people. Whereas Rabia was concerned with issues of safety by using social media, Asra was mindful of how using social media produces both positive and negative emotions within her. She shared that interacting with the media is positive for it provides a platform that she is able to communicate with her friends; however, she is aware of the differences between her life and her non-Muslim friend's lives and thus, sometimes, she feels different.

Media affects me positively and negatively. Media sources make me feel positive because they help me communicate with friends and find out about things that are going on in my community. But they also make me feel negative sometimes since I see my friends' different lifestyles and feel like I can't relate.

Rabia was also aware of the different emotions that are produced when she uses different forms of media. She admitted that she uses social media for it "filters all of the bad out and just brings out the good." She affirmed that the safe space that this created as she uses social media produces positive emotions within her. Amina also acknowledged that she uses social media to purposely create positive emotions and to be encompassed in a safe environment free of "hate."

Because sometimes, before when I started doing Instagram, there was a lot of hate going on at the time. I'm not sure when this was, but it was a lot of negative stuff,

and I wanted to block all of that, because I didn't want it to go on my explore page or anywhere that I wanted to see.

Amina then went on to say that because she feared associating with negative media sources, she blocked off the negative feed with following social media accounts that were positive, "Muslim accounts that help out others," and accounts that strived to "make a positive effect on the world." She concluded with stating how social media has accordingly positively affected her identity as a Muslim. She shared "that social media has affected me in a positive outcome," and has educated her on different opinions, politics, and helps supports her beliefs and opinions on different areas of her life. Asra agreed with the statement that people are able to become better educated about different beliefs through social media, and she maintained that the Muslims community has actually used social media in order to spread the true beliefs of Islam.

There are some people who in social media do good things in the community, and in regards to Muslims, I think there are some people who are trying to spread Islam through social media because they know that a lot of people are using that now, it's like a lot of people are finding their information from there.

The participants agreed that many individuals are now using social media to connect with people from around the world. Additionally, it would be helpful to use the social media as a vehicle to make and spread change. They stated that it is important for one to become active members in their community in order to combat the negative stereotypes that are prevalent in the news media.

Muslim youth believe that one needs to be active and positive participants in their community in order to combat the negative portrayals in the media.

Becoming Active Participants

All participants agreed that it is important for one to actively participate in one's community. This includes volunteering and being a source of positive inspiration for those around them. Shayma admitted that if she wasn't Muslim, and her only access to understanding Muslims was through the news media, she'd also be inclined to believe that all Muslims are terrorists. Thus she concluded that is why it is important for Muslims to put themselves "out there" or accurately portray their community.

If I weren't a Muslim and that's all I've seen and I never met a Muslim person before, that's what I'd believe. Right? Because you've never seen anything other than what you were told. Muslims were negative people. They're terrorists. All they wanna do is bomb you... I'd probably think that that was true if I wasn't ... [if] I never actually took the time to speak to a person, an actual Muslim. I feel like that's important for us as Muslim people to also put ourselves out there and to actually portray as ourselves as the true characters that we are in order for other people to see what we are.

Amina agreed with Shayma and stated that it is important to positively affect a person's life. She shared that she felt that the "first impression is very important" and that if you do a good act for one individual, it is "worth millions of people. At least you've done an effect on one person in their life. That still matters a lot than rather not having an effect on anyone. I feel like that's really important." While Amina stated that having a good impression was important, Asra specified that doing volunteer work was most important.

Asra identified that doing volunteer work is not only the acts of a good community member, however it is also a part of being a Muslim. She shared a story of

how, her first time volunteering, people did not know that she was Muslim. She further went on to state that if Muslims were to do community work, people would get “to know them better” and would know that Muslims are a part of the community as well.

I think it’s really important, because, first of all, doing volunteer, community work is a part of our religion. You’re supposed to be involved in your community. Then, I think it just broadens people’s perspective. They see that Muslims that are also involved in the community. I remember one time I volunteered at, I think with Lowry [Masjid] we went to a homeless shelter and we were serving food... I wasn’t wearing the hijab at that time. The person who I was serving, he asked me, “Are you from the church?” Because that was their immediate thought. They didn’t really ever even thought that people who were Muslim might come and serve them. That’s when I kind of realized that Muslims should probably be doing more of this, so that people get to know them better.

Rabia agreed with Asra and stated that volunteering is a part of being a Muslim. She also declared that volunteering will allow Muslims to “claim” as being American and will show that Muslims are a part of the community.

I agree with what Asra said about the volunteer work, because like she said, it’s also in our religion to do volunteer work and to do stuff in the community. Then, also, it not only makes Muslims look good, but it affects the coming generation, because they’ll have a better life. They won’t go through maybe getting bullied, and so people see how good we are. I think it’s really important, especially as Americans too, we should also take a part, if we claim ourselves to be American, then we should also take a part in [society].

All of the participants stated that volunteering educates people in the community about being “Muslim.” Asra acknowledged that many people’s ideas and beliefs about Islam change for the better when one volunteers. For the public is able to “understand what Muslims are like and what Islam is about” and thus positively impact the Muslim community.

[What I think] that’s important, is the importance of volunteer work in Muslims. So I remember talking about how some Muslims went into the community and started talking to other people about Islam and their beliefs, and that really changed a lot of people’s opinions. So I think that’s really important for us, so that the public gets to know us and understand what Muslims are like and what Islam is about.

Due to the fact that many people do not meet Muslims on a daily basis, their perceptions of Muslims and Islam is given by the media. Thus, volunteering is a way to share a Muslim’s values and beliefs.

Shayma asserted that, as a Muslim female who wears a hijab, it is her responsibility to represent the Muslim community in the best manner. For she has “Islam written all over” her and she stated that if she does “something bad,” then she is responsible for the negative perceptions that are placed on the Muslim community.

As a Muslim female it is my responsibility to represent the Muslim community at large through a positive light. Because whatever I do, even if I’m just walking at the grocery store, people are going to look at me like, oh, I have Islam written all over me because of the hijab that I wear. So if do something harmful or something bad, then the entire Muslim community is blamed for [it].

Shayma emphasized that being a positive example will result with people being able “to relate to you.” She stated that “I guess they’re kinda uncomfortable once they see you and then once you get to actually show people what you are ... you’re a human just like them” they will become comfortable and will change their negative perceptions and beliefs that they may have of you.

Amina also stated she takes part with the food drives that the local masjids hosts. She stated that the Muslim community is slowly becoming more aware of the importance of volunteer work and are actively going out to volunteer in their community.

Irvington [Masjid] does it. They’ll have, on Saturdays, the food, the food drives, right? Where they go and they’re like, it’s very important to let the community know, this is what we need to do. It’s becoming, I think, our community’s become a little more aware, oh, we actually have to go and volunteer, or go and, you know what I’m saying? I feel like that’s a recent thing that our community’s kind of like, oh yeah, we need to start doing that.

Asra agreed with Shayma’s statements that volunteering will result with the community viewing Muslims as “humans.” She claimed that the media portrays her as a “terrorist” and a “bomber,” and it is her duty to volunteer to combat those stereotypes.

I also agree, we were talking about we needed to do volunteer work, and I agree with that because we have to put ourselves out there in order to actually, because coming through media, [it’s] ‘oh we’re bad,’ and we’re terrorists, [or] we’re the next bombers or whatever, but we have to go and prove ourselves that we’re actually worth more than what they make it look like. We’re humans like them and we can do all these great things just like them.

Although volunteer work is more of recent phenomenon with the Muslim community, there has been an increase of Muslim adults and youth becoming aware of the importance of volunteering and are becoming more proactive in their greater community.

Nadia stated “that there’s more Muslim that are active in companies, industries, politics, and just everything generally- now that we’re more involved.” Amina said that she is one of those individuals who makes sure that she is active and involved; especially for fighting for what she believes is right. Amina stated “I like to be involved in it and just try to create something out if it. Have the youth voices get noticed and stuff. Yeah, I try to help out in a way. I don’t like to just stay quiet...” Adding on to Amina’s statements, Nadia stated that she is also active in fighting for what is right. She shared that it is especially important for the youth to become active in working towards social justice in order to start the change so that adults would follow.

I agree with her about the creating like protest and doing activities and stuff, like I feel like for younger generations it’s important because nowadays people, teens, are just sitting in their room and going on their phone, rather than trying to spread a word out. I feel like when you’re younger and you’re open to more things, you could bring people more, and you could start protesting, and people, adults, will start also joining in.”

Although Shayma agreed that Muslims are becoming more active, she recognized that this always room for positive change. She stated that although it’s “great” to see growth in the community, “but, there’s always space for change; we could always improve more” and see more representatives from Muslim women and men.

Unique Bay Area Space

All of the participants recognized that the Bay Area has created a unique space that not only promotes different beliefs and practices, but encourages one to strengthen

one's ethnic and religious identity. Nadia stated she feels "privileged" because of the diversity that the Bay Area provides.

I feel like we are privileged because there's diversity here, you know what I mean? There are other states that are going through a lot of things like racism, being judged...things that we don't really experience. I feel like it is a privilege here. Our communities are really strong.

Asra agreed with Nadia's statement and said that the Bay Area welcoming environment has created "a safe space for people like us." She further stated that she feels comfortable wearing a hijab because of the diverse nature of the Bay Area and has never "felt threatened" or felt that physical harm would come to her.

I was just going to say that I see so many Hijabis around here and around the Bay area, so many people from different cultures, and I think that's really created a safe space for people like us. I don't think I've ever felt like, in my school, I've never felt threatened that someone would come and physically harm me.

Rabia concurred that "the bay area is really diverse" and thus "people are really accepting;" however, she declared that "states in the southern part of the US like Louisiana and stuff" are communities that uphold the ideals "of white supremacy."

Shayma agreed with Rabia's statement and shared how her family who lives in Kentucky are unable to practice their religion freely. "If your neighbors even found out you were Muslim, they'd actually come and try to burn your property down. Just for your religion." She further stated that due to the numerous death threats that her family in Kentucky receives, they choose not let people know that they are Muslim nor do they wear the hijab in public. "They definitely do get threats, and they can't even [practice their religion]... [They don't] wear hijabs because of that reason. If you're getting death threats every

day... I mean I guess in that situation you'd have to identify more with your white side because that's what most people would accept you for." Shayma then went on to state how different and how "privileged" it is for a Muslim to live in the Bay Area and to be able to practice one's religion without fearing physical or mental harm.

That's why we're so privileged in the Bay area, we have all these different groups of ethnicities. So we don't really think about people who are stuck with only people who are Islamophobic and they can't really practice their own religion. So even though we do have it bad, there's definitely people who have it much worse than us.

Acknowledging that the Bay Area is diverse, all participants recognized that their community not only is accepting to their beliefs, but will actively take a stance to protect their rights.

Amina shared how she saw a great number of people from her local community come out and support her during the presidential elections of 2016. She stated that people stood up "for what is right" and are actively using different resources to be heard.

Now people are starting to stand up for what is right, and they start protesting... [About] a year ago, when Trump was getting into the president and stuff, people started going on sides of the roads, and be like, we love our Muslim community, or I have a neighbor that's Muslim... But yeah, I feel like they're starting to stand up for what is right and not really stay quiet now, because there's so many resources you could have your voice be heard, and social media, real speeches or protesting. There's so many things you can do now.

Amina went on to say how significant it was for her to get support from the general community. She recalled that it "taught me something very big that day. It shows that

everyone there, they support Muslims.” She stressed how important it is for people to take the first step in fighting for justice and “even if someone else is not doing, just do it yourself and there might be a ton of other people that are too shy to do it on their own.” Asra has also recognized the different changes in society towards her status as a Muslim. She stated that although “it’s gotten much better”, and there is still a large number of people who are “just trying to influence negative stereotypes.” She repeated herself asserting, “It’s better in some ways, but in some ways it’s not.”

Rabia acknowledged that although there are negative stereotypes in the media, the Muslim community has thrived as well. She stated that “we’re in a better place” and that the general public are more “understanding.”

I just wanted to add throughout all this hate, I feel like our Muslim community has grown and thrived, and I haven’t seen more Muslim like recognition of some people now. I feel like people now are understanding more. I mean the hate is still there, all the portrayal of Muslims is still not shown as the best. I feel like we still have gotten somewhere. We’re better than where we were before. We’re in a better place. Obviously it’s not perfect, but we’ve improved a little bit. We have to acknowledge that.

Recognizing that Muslims are in a better place than post 9/11 was a belief shared by all. This acceptance also led to different problem-solving solutions towards educating the masses.

The importance of educating the masses: “Because most of the time, when people are racist, they are really not educated...”

Although students were aware of existing bias in the media, students generally agreed that times have changed; and the situation and portrayal of Muslims after 9/11 greatly differs from today. Nadia stated that “the media gives good and bad views on

Muslims.” However, she acknowledged that “I feel like that’s how the media is with everything. It sees the good and the bad, but mostly it shows, like mostly focuses on the bad.” She further stated one does not see “the good part of it” and that “ignorance is something that’s taken over... I feel like that’s why people think Islam is violent and crazy and there’s just ‘radicalists’ everywhere and bombing.”

Asra agreed, however, she asserted that the biases exists because of miseducation. However, as knowledge has become readily available this is slowly changing.

I feel that the people who run the media, they’re not very well informed about Muslims, and that’s why they end up making statements that make us look bad. Yeah. I think they do portray us in a way that doesn’t really represent us, but I think it is getting better, because there are more Muslims in the media.

Nadia agreed with Asra’s statement and identified that “in the past few years, I’ve felt that media sources haven’t done a really good job of portraying Muslims, but slowly over the years I feel like it’s slowly gotten better, because there’s more cultural diversity in the media.”

Amina conceded that changes in the media have been made and established that these biases and educating the masses needs to start with kids early in their school years. In addition to academic learning, it is important that the values of empathy and respect for different beliefs and ways of life be taught in school by experts on the topic.

I think that a lot of preconceptions that people have start from early on. In that case, I guess in school, kids should be taught ... I think they should be taught to respect each other and to learn about each other instead of just having, just going based off of what other people say. If they have questions of other people’s faith, they should ask them directly instead of asking other people who might not know about that. I think, more interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims would

be good, at a younger age...[Then] students have a good brief understanding of everything, so they just don't have it based on, oh what the news gives you... an actual person talks about it.

Rabia also stated that many assumptions that the media makes is due to miseducation. She asserted that “people and especially the media need to understand, research, get their facts right and be open-minded about things like this so that there aren't any misunderstandings about a certain group of people. This will help in having less tension between people and the media.”

Nadia agreed with both Amina and Rabia and stated that general assumptions and misconceptions that are made towards Muslims are primarily created through the media. These assumptions include being “terrorists” or that “women are submissive;” and may be corrected through educating the masses on the true beliefs of Islam or having good character.

We need to change our mentality and stop generalizing based off of the actions of one person from a community. People assume many things about Islam and Muslims... like we are terrorists and that we hate America and women are submissive and oppressed by their spouse. I feel like a resolution would be to teach those who are ignorant or just live your life like the prophet did.

Amina agreed and repeated how miseducation is the cause of biases in society. She stressed that this phenomenon may be appropriately addressed if education were to happen early on in schools.

I think it's really important for them to have education for Islam and other religions at a young age, because I think it's important, because they are really naïve at that age. I feel like if they know about it, then they wouldn't really, they

don't have the good education about it... Because most of the time, when people are racist, they are really not educated.

Nadia stated that she does her best with educating people about her true beliefs and way of life. She acknowledged that the media negatively portrays Muslims and so it is up to her to change that. She shared that "I always try my best to educate people of the peace my religion brings. Media portrays it from a negative light, so it is my job as a Muslim female to portray it from a positive light by the way I speak and carry myself.

All of the participants acknowledged that education is the way to the future. Realizing that they are privileged with living in the Bay Area, there is still work to be done with educating the masses on Islam's beliefs.

SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to research the relationship between media use and the identity formation of Muslim youth post 9/11. The research for this dissertation was conducted through focus groups, diary media logs, and individual interviews. A number of themes emerged from the data. The first theme showed how Muslim American youth are primarily not affected by the stereotypes prevalent in the media and use modern mediums to share their unique stories of being an American. Participants generally noted that although they realize that they are different from their peers, this does not make them less American. In fact, they saw America as a country that was diverse and was built up by different groups of people. The second theme specifically looked at Muslim youth's media use and how they have moved away from "traditional" media towards "modern" media uses. Whilst, the news media was seen as medium that perpetuated negative stereotypes, social media was the vehicle that was used to promote change. The third

overarching theme stressed the importance of volunteering and showed what were the future steps that Muslim youth believed should be taken in order to address the negative stereotypes that are prevalent in the society. The following chapter will discuss the results of the data and how these findings can help the youth and the generations to come live in an equitable and supportive society.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study were eye-opening, and they have produced important contributions to the field of research regarding mass media impacts on Muslim youth identity post 9/11. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the mass media depictions of Muslims and the identity formation of Muslim youth in America. Due to the overall heightened watch over Muslims and their portrayal in the news media (Sirin & Fine, 2007), it was important to note how Muslims youth responded in their personal identity portrayals and in their media use. Thus, this study also sought to examine how Muslim youth perceived the news media representations of Muslims, perceived their own identities as Muslims and Americans, and how they navigated the different forms of media knowing that these Islamophobic portrayals exist. As stated above this study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do Muslim youth describe the portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media?
- How do Muslim youth interact with the media?
- How do Muslim youth describe their own identities as Muslims and Americans, including ways in which Muslim youth have created an identity that challenges negative media perceptions?
- How does their media-use relate to their identity development as Muslim American youth?

From my analysis of the interview data, a number of themes emerged from the data. All of the participants identified that the mass media negatively portrays Muslims and is somewhat responsible for the rise of Islamophobia within our country; for Muslims are portrayed as being problematic and being a threat to this country. However, although the effects that the mass media had on the identity of the participants were apparent, surprisingly, these effects did not reach to the fundamental core of the participants. Participants were confident and affirmative with their status and identity as Muslim Americans. They viewed themselves as “American” and animatedly believed that all individuals, regardless of their faith and ethnic background, belonged to America and had the right to practice their religious beliefs. Participants were aware of the biases and the negative stereotypes that existed in the news media. They identified that the news media strategically portrayed marginalized groups as being inferior to white individuals. In order to combat the negative stereotypes, they stated that it was important for them, as Muslim American youth, to volunteer and become active participants in their community. They admitted that they were privileged to be living and growing up in the Bay Area for it was a space that encouraged diverse practices and beliefs. However, in order to educate individuals who are biased, they believed that it is important to volunteer and show their true beliefs.

It should be noted that the context of society’s relationship with the media has primarily changed. Whilst historically one could only view and interact with media that was strategically created for the masses, nowadays, there does exist other forms of media that one is able to create and interact with. They primarily viewed social media as a mechanism to strengthen their identity. For they were able to connect and be encouraged by like-minded individuals. The context has changed from being passive viewers and consumers towards making a conscious change in not accepting the dominate views and going towards places of their choice. Thus, in essence, their identity as Muslim American

youth was fundamentally positive and they were primarily certain of their standing as being both Muslim and American.

The following sections discuss the findings obtained from the study and how each relates to the current research literature on the aforementioned topic. The first section will look at the results of the study in relation to the empirical literature and recent studies that are related to the topic. The second section will look at identity theory, one of the conceptual frameworks that guided the process of the research. The third section will discuss the themes as they relate to the theories and how, in turn, they relate to the overarching research questions. The paper concludes with implication on how schools may use the data in order to ensure that an equitable space has been created for all of their students.

In Relation to the Recent Research Literature on Muslim Identity Formation Post 9/11

The data that was produced from this study were primarily different from previous studies conducted on similar topics. Studies have primarily shown that the mass media has negatively affected the identity of Muslims (Cainkar, 2002; Muedini, 2009; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; McQueeney, 2014). Cainkar (2002) and Muedini (2009) asserted that post 9/11, it is especially hard for Muslim youth to negotiate their identities as a Muslim and as an American. Rousseau et al. (2015) conducted a mixed method systemic review of the effects that 9/11 had on the mental health of Muslim youth. Their study founded that Muslim communities struggle with increased discrimination and with negotiating their identities. However, the results of this dissertation study did not necessarily support their results. Participants attested that interacting with the media did not significantly affect their identity as Muslims for they firmly believed that America was built upon my people of different ethnicities and faiths;

they questioned how their narrative was different than everyone else's. Asra stated that she had the right to being an "American" like any other individual and that her Muslim identity made her different from other Americans, but it didn't make her "less American." Participants were pro-active and stated that they did not allow their interactions with the media to affect their identity. For example, they described how they ignored and did not watch mainstream news sources. The results of this study matched the results found in Pennington's (2018) qualitative study on mass media use. The result of her study stated that Muslims seek out social media sites in order to create a space that supports their dual identity. Likewise, participants in this study purposely sought out positive affirming social media sites. As a result, they were thus able to navigate their multiple identities within the media through their choices. For example, Shayma directly linked her media use to her identity, concluding that she has grown as an individual and is now very confident in her own skin and in her identity as a Muslim. Whilst several participants noted that their journey towards confidence in their religious identity, all participants agreed that they all were American, and they were proud of they are and their place in society.

According to several studies, the social construction of Arabs as "terrorists" is historically rooted within the media; both films and broadcast news work to create the image of Arabs as "barbaric," "cheaters," and "the other race" (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010; Semmerling 2006). Whilst the participants stated that the media did not affect their identity as Muslims, they were all in agreement that the news media does misrepresent Islam and negatively stereotypes Muslims. They expressed how Muslims are targeted during this current time period. Nadia stated that the media portrays "Muslims as people who are barbaric and terrorists." McQueeney (2014) conducted a study on the social construction of terrorism in the media. The results of this study showed that the participants did not internalize the biases that are attributed towards Muslims as being "inherently" terrorists. Unlike McQueeney's (2014) study, participants

were conscious of the fact that the news media is biased towards minority groups. However, this awareness did not result with them internalizing these perceptions. Shayma recognized that she has “always been a target for hate;” however, she also stressed that other minority groups are being targeted as well. Rabia agreed with Shayma and stated that the media strategically portrays each story according to one’s race.

Erwin (2016) study revealed that the youth felt that the post 9/11 security laws and policies made them feel targeted. The participants of this study did not specifically share these sentiments. While they did note that the current political government was not ‘pro-Muslim’ this did not affect their morale or their views on their place in society. For participants were aware that many marginalized minorities are struggling due to white supremacist views that are evident in the media and in certain political realms. Shayma stated that each minority group has a label and the media attributes negative connotations in order to show to the public how each race is inferior to the white race. Whilst the news media was recognized as being a biased platform, participants stated that “older individuals” or “adults” interact with it; and that social media was the preferred platform of the youth and of the future generations.

A common theme in the topic of identity is the concept of multiple “selves” that are a result of multiple interactions with different individuals (Alhadi, 2016; Erickson, 1968). Sirin and Fine (2007) delved into the topic of hyphenated selves and found how Muslim youth struggle to negotiate their hyphenated selves of being American and Muslim. Specifically, the results of their study showed that “social relationships and media representations fundamentally affect youth development” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 161). Ironically, their study implied that the media representations negatively affect their identity formation. However, the results of this dissertation proved to be somewhat the opposite. Whilst the use of the media affected their youth development, it primarily did so in a positive manner. Thus, in some manner, their study coincided with

this dissertation study for the social relationships created through social media affected youth development...yet in a positive way. The results of this study were somewhat similar to the results of Pennington's (2018) study. According to her results, Muslims seek out specific media sources and spaces in order to create a safe space and create a positive identity of their own. It should be noted that Sirin and Fine's (2007) study was conducted and completed over ten years ago; prior to the boom of social media that has monopolized our society. Based on the results of the study, the findings show that social media has provided a platform in which participants were able to react differently and positively concerning their identity. For they were able to make a conscious choice towards interacting with individuals with similar views and beliefs. The times have changed; and this is reflected in the youth and their use of the media. Thus, inevitably, the results are different from previous studies to reflect this change as well. Additionally, participants were able to challenge traditional negative stereotypes portrayed by the media and create an alternate story in a different space. In the upcoming section, the affect that social media has on our youth today shall be discussed.

Through the Lens of Identity Framework

In order to effectively examine the relationship between the effect that the mass media has on the identity of Muslim post 9/11, I chose orientalism and identity theories to guide the data. Orientalism was applicable for the theory argued that the West looks at Arabs and "countries of the Orient" through a distorted lens (Kerboua, 2016); whilst identity theory was relevant for this theory looks at the perception and the development of one's self based on interpersonal and social interactions. The following section will look at identity theory in relation to the data; while orientalism will be discussed at the end of this section.

The components of identity emerged throughout the entire study. Whilst several participants admitted that the journey towards their dual identity was, at times, questionable, other participants scoffed at the notion that their Muslim American identity would be questioned. According to Nadia, “Being American and your religion doesn’t have...[anything] to do with each other!” On the other hand, Shayma stated that she has lately emerged and has become confident of being both Muslim and American. She admitted that she used to struggle with embracing her Muslim identity and still “fit in” with societal expectations. Asra also stated that she used to question how she could “be Muslim and American at the same time when a lot of American policies seem kind of against Muslims.” However, as she grew up and saw other Muslim American youth embrace their dual identities, she realized that she “can be content with both of those things [identities].” This concept was an important factor towards affecting participants’ positive hyphenated identities; for participants grew up having constantly seeing, both face-to-face and on social media, other Muslims creating and sharing their own stories.

Other students also stated that they were all American for they were born and raised in this country. Nadia stated that “We’re all just doing us being American” and that she has never been questioned of her right towards American. Asra shared how she does “a lot of things that other young Americans do” and that by being herself, she is able to practice being a Muslim and tell her story as an American. For America represents people of different ethnicities and who practice different faiths. Amina asserted that this fact is “what America is pretty much known for.” Although all of the participants were in agreement to the fact that the current political administration has not been entirely supportive of Muslims in America. They all firmly believed and attested to the fact that America is a land that was built upon the ideals of freedom and that many individuals are working hard towards ensuring that this freedom is protected.

This freedom includes freedom to practice one's religion and wear the hijab in public. Muslims wear the hijab in order to fulfill their religious requirements. All of the participants agreed that the hijab is a marker that is sometimes negative, and at other times it is a beautiful feature that is embraced. It was difficult for several participants to accept the fact that they are being judged at all times for wearing the hijab. Asra stated that when she wears the hijab, assumptions are being formed, whether they're good or bad and "they form opinions about Muslims just by, especially Muslim women, because they wear the hijab even if they're not doing anything, even if it's unintentional, they're making judgements." Rabia and Shayma agreed and said that they are extra conscious on how they act in public because they are representing the entire Muslim woman community. Shayma stated how Muslim women struggle more than men for "we got it written all over us that we're Muslim once the person sees us." And the result is that they are vulnerable to hate and negative feedback from people in society. Nadia stated that she feels vulnerable when she wears a hijab for people view the hijab as a tool used by a "terrorist" and that wearing the hijab is perpetuating "the actions of wrongdoers." Although she saw the hijab as a negative marker, Shayma and Rabia viewed the hijab as a tool that expresses her freedom to practice her religion. Shayma especially loves to wear a hijab to show how her story is different from the general "oppressed Muslim women" stories that are prevalent in the media. She declared that "the hijab has allowed me to be different in who I am, and that's something that I take into like, that I treasure, instead of, because people tell us all that we're oppressed because we wear this, but instead we need to look at it through a more positive light." Rabia shared how she has used social media as a platform that showcases herself wearing the hijab in order to inspire other girls to not be ashamed of their Muslim identity. Many participants stated that they use social media in order to create a space that allows them to be confident with their identity and connect with like-minded individuals.

Emerging social media has led to a different environment

According to numerous studies (Ahmad & Matthes, 2017; LoDuca, 2016; Muedini, 2009; Semmerling, 2006; Shammass, 2015), Muslim youth are struggling to “find” themselves in this Western society for it often portrays Islam and Muslims as ‘an enemy’ or a ‘threat’ to America. Ahmed and Matthes (2017) meta-analysis of studies from the year 2000 to the year 2015 in order to quantitatively discover the relationship of the media’s negative portrayal of Muslims found that “media portrayals of Muslims to be strongly associated with terrorism” (p. 231). Although background research implies that participants would feel negatively affected by the media and alienated from their American identity, this was not completely the case for the participants in this study.

As previously discussed in the background research, I noted that the area of mass media has drastically changed within the last decade. This fact was reflected within the results of the study. For a distinct differentiation between the use of social media and news media became very apparent throughout the data collection process. For almost all of the participants primarily do not interact with “traditional” mass media forms; instead, participants use social media on a daily basis for several hours a day. Whilst news media is seen as a medium that perpetuates negative stereotypes, social media was a means towards empowerment. All of the participants viewed social media as an “inspiration” and as a mechanism to express one’s individuality especially as Muslim American youth.

Social Media is a platform that Muslim youth are able to control. Participants acknowledged that they are ignoring traditional media and if they do happen to watch anything, it is because their parents happen to be watching it. It was interesting to note that participants ignored traditional news media and associated interacting with it as what an “older” person would do. Social media provided a mechanism that promoted communication between people and a medium to express themselves. For they are able to

see successful hijabi women and other Muslims being active participants. Amina shared how social media has not only helped her with taking pride with her identity as a Muslim, but that she goes to social media in order to create positive emotions within a safe space and within an environment free of “hate.” Rabia admitted that she uses social media for it “filters all of the bad out and just brings out the good” and produces positive emotions within her.

In addition to the safe space and the positive emotions produced, participants stated that they feel empowered and inspired when they see and read stories on a daily basis of Muslim individuals who are making “a positive effect on the world.” Nadia states that by using social media, she feels inspired, connected, and motivated to make change. She shared that “I feel like I can do whatever I want. I could do whatever I believe is right, even if it means endangering my life” because other people are being active and are sharing their success stories through social media.

News Media

Since the terrorist attack on 9/11, Muslims have become a target of discrimination and bigotry, and are negatively stereotyped within the media (Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Stonebanks, 2010). Students interviewed stated that they felt that Muslims are portrayed as “barbaric” and as “terrorists.” At times, students feel ostracized and defensive. The findings of the study found that the participants constantly worry of other people’s reaction to publicized events, wearing a hijab, or being Muslim.

Participants were all in agreement that Muslims are all portrayed as evil and that Islam and Muslims are blamed and held responsible for terrorist attacks. Amina stated that because of this stereotype, there are people who are scared to identify as being Muslim because they fear of being labeled “crazy.” Nadia stated she is emotionally affected by what is shown on the media. At times, she feels “depressed” and “like

trash” when she watches the news. She argued that the goal of the media is to make the minorities feel oppressed; whilst other participants argued that the goals of the media is to keep white supremacy alive.

Although students stated that Muslims are portrayed differently, they all emphatically stated that they were American. In fact, one student went on to explain how America “belongs to everyone.” Thus, this implies that although, at times, Muslim youth struggle with the fact that they are the current ‘scapegoats’ of the era, they feel loyal to this country and call it home. In fact, the students stated that they are aware of the many different groups and media sources that support Muslims. One interviewee assured me that the times and perceptions of Muslims have changed since 9/11. Students are now taking an active stance and work around the stereotypes laced within our society. All participants are positive about the future, feel American, and do not blame the media nor look negatively or allow it to really influence their identity choices.

Specifically, in regards to the effects that the news media has on the Muslim youth who participated in the study, the findings of the study found that they were very much aware of the stereotypes that are prevalent in the media. These participants do not watch the news or gain information from news sources on TV; instead, they primarily get their news from Instagram, Facebook, or Snapchat. Thus, they are able to tap into a wide variety of mediums that are full of open-minded and unbiased individuals. Additionally, they are able to have agency and seek out positive affirming social media sites. However, they are aware that the news media reaches a big audience and thus it is important to combat those narratives through becoming active community members.

Importance of being active community members

The final thought of the participants was that although there exists a lot of negative propaganda in the news media, a great support group exists for Muslims. And

although times may be rough and the current administration is against Muslims, America is a land of diverse and open-minded individuals. Especially living in the Bay Area, participants were aware that they were privileged to be living in a diverse community that welcomed and thrived on different cultures and religions. Although, post 9/11, there has been an increase of hate crimes and reports of harassment against Muslims (Ali, 2011; Sledge, 2013), participants stated that they saw their community as one that not only accepted their beliefs, but protected their rights as well. In order to show their support and to portray their religion, participants stressed the importance of volunteer work and being a source of positive inspiration for those around them.

All of the interviewees believed that there is a need for Muslims to be active members of their community. They implied that students and adults alike must take an active stance against negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media that are associated with the Muslim community. Due to the fact that many people do not meet Muslims on a daily basis, their perceptions of Muslims and Islam is given by the media. Thus, volunteering is a way to share a Muslim's values and beliefs. Shayma admitted that if she wasn't Muslim, and her only access to understanding Muslims was through the news media, she'd also be inclined to believe that all Muslims are terrorists. She asserted that if an individual does not have any other interaction besides what is displayed in the media, then their beliefs will be that "Muslims were negative people."

Thus, it is important for Muslims to put themselves "out there" and accurately portray their community. Asra stated that "you're supposed to be involved in your community," and that if Muslims were to do community work, people would get "to know them better" and would know that Muslims are a part of the community as well. Shayma believes that being a positive example will result with people to see you as being "human just like them." Rabia believes that America "belongs to everyone" and thus it is the responsibility of all citizens to be active participants in their community. Students are

now taking an active stance and work around the stereotypes laced within our society. All participants are positive about the future, feel American, and do not blame the media nor look negatively or allow it to really influence their identity choices.

Orientalism: the “often” used theoretical framework

As stated in the literature section above, the second theoretical framework that guided the progress of this study was orientalism. This theme examines the constructs of peoples of the Orient, their beliefs, and, most importantly, how these beliefs are constructed when viewed through the biased intellectual constructs of the West that shapes the notion of “otherness” (Said, 1979). Although this framework was readily referred to in many previous studies done on similar topics, the results of this study found that this framework was not as relevant as I had thought that it would be. For Muslim youth nowadays are now creating their own stories and interacting with like-minded people on different platforms. The world has become extremely globalized and people are becoming more aware of different beliefs and practices. However, it is important to state that the concept of “othering,” a theme essential to the framework Orientalism, emerged within the data.

The concept of othering resides on the belief that majority groups view minority groups as an “other” and ostracizes and distances them from the mainstream groups. In regards to the belief of an “us” versus “them” mentality, Shayma, a high school senior student discussed how she has “always been a target for hate.” She stated that “whether it means being stared at almost everywhere we step foot or being verbally assaulted by strangers. My community is continuously being undermined.” Shayma recognizes that Muslims are targeted during this current time period, however, she also stresses how other minority groups are also being targeted as well.

Being the “othered” group of the era has her comment on the obvious differences when portrayed in the media and is the reason that Muslims are portrayed differently in the media. Amina stated that she gets “angry” and very “annoyed” when she sees the obvious biases and this negative portrayal should be addressed by different political figures and the greater society at large. Shayma also said that she is affected, however, she works hard to not let the negative propaganda get to her. For she often does have people in grocery stores or in public spaces mutter offensive words and comments towards herself and towards her family.

Participants were in agreement that minority groups were negatively portrayed in the media. Shayma and Rabia asserted that this negative portrayal was due to white supremacy that is evident within our country and is the reason that many marginalized minorities are struggling in the United States today. Shayma stated how for each minority group, the media attributes negative connotations with that group in order to show the public that each group is inherently inferior to the white race. She argued that “not even just Muslims, right, like African-American communities, Latino communities, they’re all being labeled.” She stressed that Muslims are inherently “terrorists,” and African Americans are all “thugs” or “criminals,” whilst Mexicans are “rapists.” Rabia agreed with Shayma’s statements and stated that these portrayals were strategic in order to give white individuals extra privileges over other marginalized groups. Orientalism is evident in many different areas, however, moving forward, this framework may be limiting in future research done on the topic of mass media. This privileged was evident in how the media portrays their news stories. Amina argued that when a Caucasian makes bad decisions, his race is not portrayed in the media; whilst if a Muslim person does the same actions, his race and religion is questioned.

Participants were very much aware of the biases that exist in the media towards Muslims and minority groups. However, they stated that it is important for society to

be conscious of the biases that do exist and become critical of content that the news sources portray. Critical media literacy refers to the notion of the importance realizing the different biases that are evident and being able to weed out facts from opinion. This theme is evident in two general areas: through the perspective of consciousness of bias in media and how students have resolved to taking an active stance against stereotypical accusations.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to research on the relationship between mass media portrayals and the effect that it has on the identity of Muslims post 9/11. Ironically, the media has historically and currently been used as a weapon to portray Muslims in a negative way. However, the media, at least social media, can now also be a means of empowering the individuals that it sought to oppress. Although the participants are aware of the biases that are apparent in the news media, this may not be the case for a majority of students within our American society. The following section details the implications that emerged from the data of this study. The first section will detail a practice related to the positive influence of social media use. The second section will describe how schools can create a learning environment in order to bring awareness and reduce stereotypes of oppressed minoritized groups. The section will conclude with describing the importance of teaching critical media literacy to students. It is critical for students and for our American society to become critical of what is portrayed in the news media. It is important for teachers and individuals who have power within the education system to become aware of this phenomenon.

Social media practices within our schools

It is undeniable that school practices, pedagogical techniques, and teaching theories transform according to the changes, needs, and views of society. Levin and

Young (2000) stated that practices within schools change to suit the views and the needs of the people within society. According to this study, social media is greatly influencing the youth of today. Many students are using social media to connect with other people and create an alternate identity of their own. Therefore, it is important for schools to recognize the hold of social media on our students and ensure that the use of social media is appropriately taught to students. For allowing a student to choose the mediums, spaces, and individuals to interact with results in giving students a choice in their identity and education.

Currently, we live in a society that both openly and implicitly perpetuates racism. Directly and indirectly U.S. social structures and the policies that enable them promote unequal opportunities between those in power and people of color. Thus, in order to succeed and provide an equal opportunity for education in a structure that clearly wasn't designed for low/middle income people of color, schools and the society as a whole need to come together and create solutions. A plausible solution would be giving students, especially students from minoritized communities, the opportunity to create their own spaces and positive identities through the use of social media. Amina shared how using social media helped her become confident in her identity as a Muslim American. Nadia agreed with Amina's statement that it makes one proud of one's heritage and identity and exclaimed how using social media makes her feels "like I can do whatever I want." She shared how social media gives Muslims a platform in having a voice and thus accurately representing the Muslim community. Nadia feels empowered by social media and says that, by using social media, she feels inspired and connected. Schools have the power to make change. What is needed is for stakeholders to get together in order to alter the current learning environment to help schools achieve their educational goals and provide students with the skills that they need in order to succeed in life.

Create a learning environment to bring awareness and reduce stereotypes towards oppressed minority groups

Life is forever changing; whether we are referring to the change of demographics or socio-economic status, it is reflected in society. Therefore, it is incumbent that schools reflect and change as well to suit the needs of society. Our current school system does not support nor encourage the voices of oppressed minority groups. Instead, knowledge taught in classrooms are controlled by the curriculum set by the school board, or by government officials or by people in power. There is always a hidden agenda while creating a curriculum and deciding what pieces of knowledge should be taught to children. For “knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations” (McLaren, 2003, p. 63). Thus, it is important for school to reflect on what they teach their students and create a learning environment that encourages the voices of all students.

The results of this study showed that a method towards ensuring that all students’ voices are heard is through recognizing social media and the opportunities that it gives. Schools should show how multiple stories and experiences are lived throughout America. The result will be minority students who develop a positive identity and confidence of who they are. Amina stated that educating the masses needs to start with kids early in their school years, for “I think that a lot of preconceptions that people have start from early on.” In addition to academic learning, it is important that the values of empathy and respect for different beliefs and ways of life be taught in school by experts on the topic. Amina asserted that students need to interact with one another at an early age in order to gain respect between people of different cultures and beliefs.

[Students need to] be taught to respect each other and to learn about each other instead of just having, just going based off of what other people say. If they have

questions of other people's faith, they should ask them directly instead of asking other people who might not know about that. I think, more interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims would be good, at a younger age.

Hence, having schools embrace social media as a pedagogical tool for both developing positive individual identities while building bridges across groups will advance the work of public education. By having students actively engage in their education through positive uses of social media, students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds can interact and grow with one another. Raising youth in a welcoming school system will result with creating compassionately minded leaders who will make a change in their community.

The importance of critical media literacy

It is important for those within the education system to become aware of the struggle that Muslim students are facing and provide a platform to ensure that they are heard and supported. Critical media literacy needs to be taught to students in our American education system. In order to create a just world, education needs to be focused on reflection and this reflection must be solved through the humanization of people, regardless of their class, race, or ethnic background (Freire, 2005).

Participants identified that they see miseducation as a cause of biases in society. In order to combat stereotypes and biased representations within the media, a multi-cultural approach towards critical media literacy needs to be attained. To merely attain literacy in critically analyzing media is not enough; to become aware and emphatic towards other cultures and beliefs is needed to create a just and equitable society. I argue that racism may be combated if the "voiceless" are given a chance to "voice" their story. Amina stated that educating the masses needs to start with kids early in their school years and "if they have questions of other people's faith, they should ask them directly" and not rely

on the statements made by individuals who are uneducated on their topics. Rabia also asserted that many assumptions that the media makes is due to miseducation. She asserted that “people and especially the media need to understand, research, get their facts right and be open-minded about things like this so that there aren’t any misunderstandings about a certain group of people. This will help in having less tension between people and the media.” For the “lack of personal contact with Muslims and limited knowledge of Islam reinforce a negative media-inspired image among fellow Americans” (Ali, 2011, p. 372). Croucher et al. (2013) stated that the *type* and level of education that an individual acquires can limit prejudice acts and feelings towards others. All of the participants agreed that a better representation is needed towards Muslims and that their opinions should be asked. Nadia resolutely stated that “I feel like a resolution would be to teach those who are ignorant” or live your life making ethically good choices.

Critical media literacy is needed in order for students and adults alike to question who and how is the information being presented. It is very easy for one to become passive to what is being shown on TV, and to take what is being shown as “truth.” However, to have a society in which the people question the material that is being presented to them will produce independent and critically minded individuals who will fight against the injustices around them. To develop “critical media literacy involves the politics of representation in which the form and content of media messages are interrogated in order to question ideology, bias, and the connotations explicit and implicit in the representation” (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Participants were high school students and it would be interesting to note whether the same results would emerge through a study conducted on middle school age students. Additionally, three out of five participants identified that they attended private Islamic Schools for most of their life. A private Islamic school setting creates an environment that promotes the preservation of a Muslim American identity. It may be argued that

this setting has helped a majority of the participants become confident in their place in this society.

CONCLUSION

It is the ultimate goal of the researcher to research on methods of resistance enacted by Muslim youth. The results of the study showed that Muslim youth are able to differentiate between different biases in the media and are positive about the status of Muslims in the future. For although the results demonstrated a positive outlook towards the future, research on *what* steps Muslim youth take and *how* they define being active participants in their community is currently missing. It is imperative that the voice of the youth be heard and told throughout different mediums. When the story is told from the voices of the youth, they become empowered and active community members who take an active stance in their lives.

It was extremely important for me to conduct and complete this research on the affects that the mass media has on the identity of Muslim youth post 9/11. For I was 10 years old when 9/11 occurred and grew up in an era where Muslims received a lot of negative attention in the mass media. I was extremely astounded with the results of the research for I personally believed, and was supported by the background literature, that youth would be negatively affected by what is portrayed in the mass media. I was not aware of the impact that social media has on youth and the different ways that they used social media in order to positively make change.

Social media gave the participants some autonomy and control of how they interact with the world and allows them to be who they are. Arguably, this may help stop the anger and frustration of when the media or other aspects of the community force them to react or be afraid of the negative portrayals that they do not believe in or accept.

For participants' experiences were not always positive, however, at the fundamental level, their identity of being Muslim American youth were not shaken. The fact that they embrace multiple identities was not only natural, but expected. Yet, they were conscious that Muslims are targeted in the mainstream news media and are the current scapegoats of the era. For all of the participants readily admitted to the fact that the news media negatively portrays Muslims and this results with, at times, feeling targeted and different from their peers. However, they acknowledged that although they were targeted, other marginalized groups were negatively portrayed in the media; this was due to ignorance of others and not due to a deficit in themselves.

Using the Orientalism framework as a tool towards understanding these youths' identity developments was somewhat limiting. Orientalism is a good theoretical tool for understanding stereotypes and mainstream media presentations of Muslim-Americans but it appears that times may be changing and it has become less useful for understanding how Muslim-American youth perceive themselves and react to these presentations. For the participants did not seem to internalize this Orientalist presentation but had both a conscious and unconscious understanding of what is being done by the media and the stereotypes that are portrayed therein. In addition to a conscious awareness, participants took specific steps to combat these stereotypes.

Participants found different ways, primarily through ignoring mainstream media and focusing on positive social media platform to preserve their Muslim-American identities. Social media gives them the chance to counteract the negative portrayal in the news media and simultaneously become a part of a larger audience and also thrive in their unique group of being Muslim Americans. In order to combat the negative views that are targeted at them, they took different steps to show to the public their true beliefs and practices; this included doing public volunteer work and becoming active community members. They self-proclaimed that they were able to confidently practice their religion

and wear a hijab due to the diverse and welcoming community of the Bay Area. Thus, they felt that it was their duty to “give back” to their community in order to show what their true beliefs are. For being a Muslim American youth meant that one should actively promote good and educate others on what their beliefs and practices are. However, in addition to the youth taking an active stance towards educating the masses, schools need to work towards providing an equitable space by providing critical consciousness within our education.

There is a need for critical consciousness within our education. “We must create a curriculum that enables students to read the media, not to eliminate, but to read” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 96). When we teach students and parents alike the skills of critical literacy and how to “read” through the news, conversations will arise that will discuss the injustices of the actions of those that do wrong, and not attribute it to their nationality or religion (Steinberg, 2010). For it should be noted that the participants were aware of the different biases that exist in our society towards Muslims and marginalized groups, however, this is not necessarily the case for all youth in America. Youth should be given the opportunity to share their experiences and beliefs. It is imperative that the voice of the oppressed be heard and told throughout different mediums. When the story is told from the voices of the oppressed, they become empowered and will attain a voice for themselves.

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FLYER



In appreciation of your time and sharing your experience, you will receive a \$20 gift card!

Are you a Muslim American teenager?

Would you like to participate in a study of how Muslim American teenagers' identities are affected by the media?

Are you interested in discovering whether a relationship exists between the mass media and Islamophobia?

Are you between the ages of 14 years and 18 years and born in the United States?

Do you identify as both Muslim AND American?

All information will be kept entirely confidential.

As a study participant, you would complete one individual interview, attend two focus group sessions, and complete a diary log of media use.

Each interview and focus group sessions will take up to an hour and will be set up at a convenient place and time of your choosing.

And the diary logs will each take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

If you answered yes to these questions, please ask your parents to contact the researcher at

zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu
415-666-6478

If you or anyone you know is interested in participating, or if you have questions, please contact:

Zainab Baaghil at 415-666-6478 or zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu

I am a Muslim American doctoral student in the field of Educational Leadership at California State University, East Bay.

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [NAME],

My name is Zainab Baaghil and I am currently obtaining my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from California State University, East Bay. I am writing to ask for your help with finding participants for a study about the effects of the portrayal in the media on the consciousness and identity formation of Muslim youth post 9/11 in the United States.

I am looking for Muslim American teenagers who are willing to be interviewed on the aforementioned topic. Participants will meet for a one-on-one interview that should take up to 60 minutes, take part in two focus groups administered by myself, and complete a diary log for two weeks on reflections of media use. The names and identities of those being interviewed will be anonymous.

To participate, your child must:

- Have been born as a Muslim and in the US
- Be between the ages of 14 years and 18 years
- Identify with being a Muslim AND American
- Willing to take part in one individual interview, two focus groups, and complete a diary log for two weeks

If you are interested, please contact me at the email or phone number below. If you know anyone else who may also be interested in taking part in this study, please share

the details and my contact information with them. I am also attaching a flyer to this message—please feel free to distribute it.

If you have any questions, please contact me at zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu, or at 415-666-6478. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact my research advisor, Dr. Eric Haas at eric.haas@csueastbay.edu or California State University, East Bay's Institutional Review Board at irb@csueastbay.edu . Both have approved this study.

Thank you for helping me with my research study.

Best,

Zainab Baaghil, M.A.

Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

California State University, East Bay

Phone: 415-666-6478

Email: zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu

APPENDIX C
GENERAL SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Assalamu Alaikum (Peace and blessings be upon you).⁵ First, I'd like to thank you reaching out and contacting me today. Just as a reminder, the goal of my study is to look at Muslim youth's interaction with the mass media and whether mass media portrayal has specifically affected the identity formation of Muslim youth in America. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the effects that the mass media has on the identity of Muslim youth and the methods in which youth have navigated and resisted. I have several questions if I may ask?

- Do you identify with being a Muslim?
- Are you between the ages of 14 and 18 years?
- Do you identify with being an American?
- Were you born in the United States?
- Were you born and raised as a Muslim?
- Do you identify with your ethnic background?
- Do you have parents who identify with being Muslim?
- Do you have parents who identify with their ethnic background?
- Would you be willing to keep a diary log and note your media use and interaction?
- Would you be willing for me to interview you?

⁵ This is an expected and customary form of greetings between Muslims around the world.

- As part of the study, one is going to attend two group sessions, known as “focus group sessions, one individual interview, and complete 6 diary media logs over the courses of two weeks that should take no longer than 10 minutes each to complete. Would you be able to commit to this?
 - Please give me your parent’s email address so that I would be able to gain their consent.

APPENDIX D
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE

My name is Zainab Baaghil. I am a graduate student at California State University in the midst of obtaining a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. As partial requirement for receiving my degree, I am conducting a research study that examines the relationship between the mass media's portrayals of Muslims, often framed in terms of Islamophobia, and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America. I am inviting your child to partake in this study because he/she has identified with being a Muslim American and is interested in examining the relationship between mass media effects on identity formation of Muslim youth, post 9/11, in America.

PROCEDURES

If you agree for your child to participate in the research study, the following will occur:

- Your child will be asked to partake in two focus group sessions with 2-4 other Muslim youth living in Fremont,
- Complete 6 diary media logs over the course of two weeks that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete
- Participate in a one-on-one interview that may last up to an hour.
- Interviews and focus group sessions will be audio-recorded in order to ease the situation for the researcher and typed up.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, the researcher will not use your name or any other identifying information in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will destroy all audiotapes of your interview, will remove all identifying information from the transcripts, and will keep the data in a locked cabinet or office.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

If you agree to participate in this study, your child will receive a \$20.00 gift card and assistance for transportation costs, should they need it, to meet at the designated location for the focus group and semi-structured interviews. Other anticipated benefits may include contributions to an under-researched area, including providing insight into ways that schools can improve classroom and other spaces to fight against internalized oppression.

COSTS

There will be no costs for your child's participation in this research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

My child's participation in this study is voluntary. My child may refuse to answer any questions and I may take my child out of the study at any time without prejudice or consequence. Please rest assured that if you want to leave at any time, there will not be any negative consequences.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact:

Zainab Baaghil, M.A. (Researcher)

zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu

415-666-6478

Dr. Eric Haas, Ph.D. (Research Advisor and Chair)

eric.haas@csueastbay.edu

California State University East Bay's (CSUEB) Institutional Review Board

irb@csueastbay.edu

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

This study has been reviewed and approved for use by the California State University, East Bay's Institutional Review Board (CSUEB IRB). If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as your child as a participant in this interview, you may report your concerns or complaints via email to irb@csueastbay.edu

CONSENT

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to have your child participate in this research study. You may withdraw your child's participation at any point without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your or your child's present or future status at California State University East Bay.

Parent Signature

Date

Parent Name (Please Print)

Full Name of Child

Signature of Researcher

Name of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX E
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

PURPOSE

My name is Zainab Baaghil. I am a graduate student at California State University in the midst of obtaining a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. As partial requirement for receiving my degree, I am conducting a research study that examines the relationship between the mass media's portrayals of Muslims, often framed in terms of Islamophobia, and the effect that it has on identity formation of Muslim youth in America.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the research study, the following will occur:

- Partake in two focus group sessions with 2-4 other Muslim youth living in Fremont,
- Complete 6 diary media logs over the course of two weeks that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete
- Partake in a one-on-one interview that may last up to an hour.
- Interviews and focus group sessions will be audio-recorded in order to ease the situation for the researcher and typed up.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, the researcher will not use your name or any other identifying information in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will destroy all audiotapes of your

interview, will remove all identifying information from the transcripts, and will keep the data in a locked cabinet or office.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a \$20.00 gift card and assistance for transportation, if you need it, to meet at the designated location for the focus group and semi-structured interviews. Participating will also help others better understand what it's like for Muslim teenagers to grow up in the United States.

COSTS

There will be no costs for participating in this research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You may choose not to answer any questions and choose not to participate at any time. Please rest assured that if you want to leave at any time, there will not be any negative consequences.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact:

Zainab Baaghil, M.A. (Researcher)

zbaaghil@horizon.csueastbay.edu

415-666-6478

Dr. Eric Haas, Ph.D. (Research Advisor and Chair)

eric.haas@csueastbay.edu

California State University East Bay's (CSUEB) Institutional Review Board

irb@csueastbay.edu

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SIGNATURE

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I understand the purpose and the procedures of the research as stated above, and agree to participate.

Student Signature

Date

Student Name (Please Print)

Signature of Researcher

Name of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX F
DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL

Focus Group and Interview Protocol⁶

Script prior to interview:

Assalamu Alaikum (Peace and blessings be upon you).⁷ First, I'd like to thank you all for joining me today. As we talked about before, the goal of my study is to look at Muslim youth's interaction with the mass media and whether mass media portrayal has specifically affected the identity formation of Muslim youth in America. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the effects that the mass media has on the identity of Muslim youth and the methods in which youth have navigated and resisted. I appreciate you all sharing your story, opinions, and experiences.

On the assent form you completed, you agreed that it will be ok to record our conversation. Are you still ok with recording?

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if, at any time, you wish for me to stop recording.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will not record our session and will only take notes.

⁶ I plan on using all of the questions across my focus group and interview sessions. Here are on the main types of questions including the follow-ups.

⁷ This is an expected and customary form of greetings between Muslims around the world.

As a reminder, this interview is totally voluntary, will not affect you or your grade in any way. If, at any time, you wish to stop participating in the interview, please let me know, and we will stop.

Before we begin, do you have any questions before we start?

1. Tell me about what you all do on social media? **[RQ #1 & #4]**
 - a. How much time do you typically spend in a day on any form of media?
 - b. Which sites do you like to go on?
 - c. Do you sometimes look for Muslim specific sites? how you interact with the media.
2. How do you feel as you read or watch different media sources? **[RQ #1 & #2]**
 - a. How often to you come across Muslims as being the main topic in the meida?
3. Has there ever been a time when you felt at odds with being a “Muslim” and being an “American”? **[RQ #3 & #4]**
 - a. [Extra security]
 - b. [Trump Admin]
 - c. [Musllim Ban]
 - d. [Public Spaces]
4. In your opinion, how does the media portray Muslims? **[RQ #2]**
 - a. [Can you name any general patterns?]
5. Can you describe an experience where you were watching, reading, or interacting with a media source that was portraying Muslims? **[RQ #1 & #4]**
 - a. [What was the media?]
 - b. [What did it feel like?]
 - c. [What did it make you think about yourself?]

6. What change over time have you seen in the mass media? **[RQ #2]**
7. Would you argue that these changes constrain or support your status as a Muslim?
[RQ #3 & #4]
8. Do you feel that Muslims can belong to this country? **[RQ #4]**
9. Do you believe that Muslims can practice all of the facets of their faith and still be a devout American? **[RQ #3 & #4]**
10. What is your opinion on positive outreach in the greater community?
 - a. [Efforts to raise awareness...]
 - b. [Familial ties...]
11. How do you envision the portrayal of Muslims in the future? **[RQ #3]**

This concludes our interview! I'd like to thank you again for participating...Thank you so much!

APPENDIX G
DIARY MEDIA LOGS

6 Reflection Write-ups: Throughout the end of November through the beginning of December

Time Frame: 10-15 minutes

On-line

Approximate Dates: November 25 through December 7 (Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays)

Week 1 Theme: Media

Sunday, November 25

RQ # 1

Media Reflection: List the different media sources that you have used this past week. How did it affect your feelings? Do you feel happy? Sad? Empowered? Indifferent?

Wednesday, November 28

RQ # 1

- 1) Describe how you are feeling with three words.
- 2) What types of media did you interact with today? How long? How did using them make you feel?

Friday, November 30

RQ # 2 & # 3

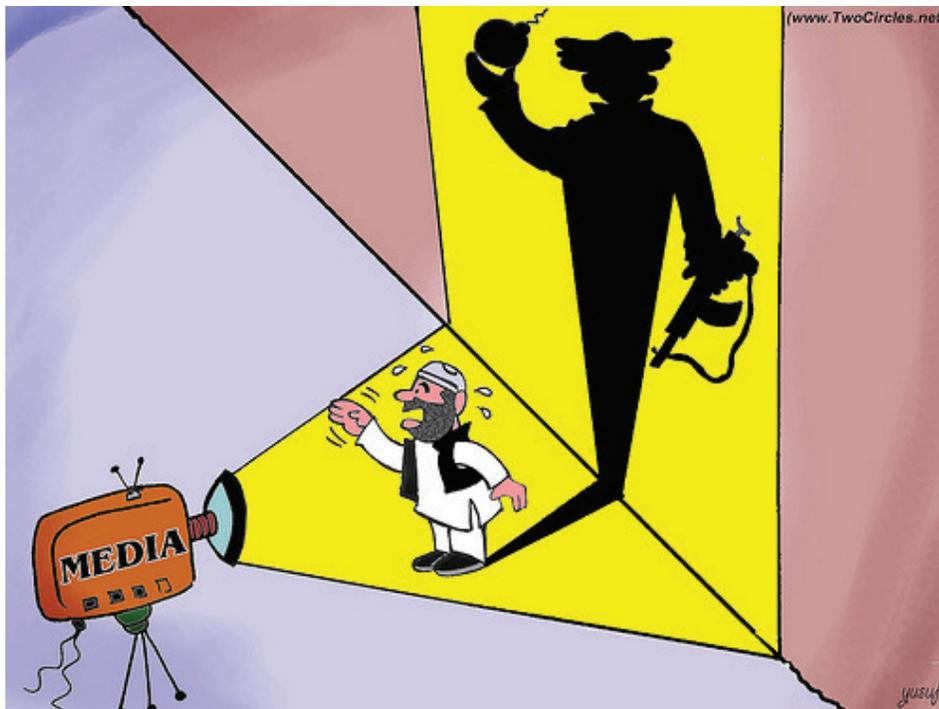
- 1) Think about your top (up to three) media source(s) that you identify with. Why is it your favorite?
- 2) In what ways are you able to \ express yourself and your identity as a Muslim?
How do you do so?
- 3) What are the advantages of your favorite media source?

Week 2 Theme: Identity

Sunday, December 2

RQ # 2 & #4

Media Reflection: Media and Muslims Pic



- 1) Please describe the cartoon (color, visual, expression, message, etc.)
- 2) Reflect on the political cartoon... Thoughts...What assumptions are there? Do you agree or disagree?

Wednesday, December 5

RQ # 3

- 1) Can you think of three words that would describe how *you* see yourself?
- 2) Can you think of three words that would describe how *others* see yourself?
- 3) Do these terms overlap? Why?
- 4) How do you accurately tell your story OR present yourself as a Muslim American?
- 5) If you could pick one type of mass media, which program or media form would best represent you? (YouTube, TV show, Instagram, Snapchat) Why?

Friday, December 7

RQ # 4

Draw yourself in your surroundings. Get creative and express yourself through any medium! You may do so through paper and pencil, color crayons, paint, on your computer, or through a selfie via an app.

Make sure that you draw both: yourself *and* the setting around you (this can be your school, or your home, or your city, etc.)

APPENDIX H
DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL FROM PILOT
STUDY CONDUCTED PREVIOUS YEAR

Purpose of the interview:

I am interested in researching whether there is a link between the portrayal in the media and our American Muslim identity. The following interview is designed to gain high school Muslim youth's insight regarding the effects that the mass media has on their identity.

1. What kinds of media do you tend to watch? Where do you get your news?
2. What are your thoughts/feelings as you watch the news media? read articles? hear broadcasts?
3. Has there ever been a time when you felt at odds with being a "Muslim" and being an "American?" [If yes, what triggered these feelings?]
4. What is your opinion of how the media portrays Muslims?
5. Describe an experience where you were watching or reading media that was portraying Muslims. What was the media and what did it feel like? What did it make you think about yourself?
6. What change over time have you seen in the mass media, and how did these changes constrain or support your status as a Muslim?
7. Do you feel that you belong to this country?
8. Imagined you lived in a different country, how do you think the media would portray Muslims there?

9. How do you envision the portrayal of Muslims in the future?

This concludes our interview. Thank you so much!