

SECOND-GENERATION PALESTINIAN AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES:
EMERGING AND CONFLICTING IDENTITIES

by

Julie A. Mendoza
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_____ Chair

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Education and Human
Development

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Second-Generation Palestinian American School Experiences: Emerging and Conflicting
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Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Julie A. Mendoza
Master of Arts
Wheaton College Graduate School, 2002
Bachelor of Arts
Grace College, 2001

Director: Ilham Nasser, Professor
College of Education and Human Development

Fall Semester 2015
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



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Dedication

This is dedicated to my precious Amado, and also to our son, Seth Amado. You make my heart sing for joy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends who supported me with each step of this journey—my husband, Amado; our son, Seth; my parents, Jack and Judy; and my sister, Jacqui. I am grateful for my friends in the program who provided moments of fun and laughter during classes and study sessions. I am thankful for my chairperson, Dr. Nasser, who believed in this study from the beginning and cultivated it from start to finish. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Nasser, Dr. Shaklee, and Dr. Samaras. Thank you for walking with me through each portfolio review, proposal defense, and dissertation defense, and for rejoicing with me as I got married and had a baby along the way. I am thankful for the teachers and children that I met in Palestine who poured their lives into mine. I praise God from whom these blessings flow.

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List of Abbreviations

English to Speakers of Other Languages.....	ESOL
The International Baccalaureate.....	IB
Third Culture Kid.....	TCK
The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.....	
.....	UNRWA

Abstract

SECOND-GENERATION PALESTINIAN AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: EMERGING AND CONFLICTING IDENTITIES

Julie A. Mendoza, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Ilham Nasser

The purpose of this study is to investigate the secondary-school experiences of second-generation Palestinian American adolescents living within the Washington, DC metropolitan area, studying in a single Virginia school district. It also highlights the unique issues that the population of Palestinian American youth face in schools, especially with the divide of American public opinion in respect to Israel and Palestine. This study also addresses the implications of these political considerations both internally and externally upon Palestinian American students within a secondary-school setting. This qualitative study employs a critical research orientation utilizing semi-structured interviews with each of the 12 participants as well as a journal of researcher memos. Participant criteria specified that each individual was a U.S.-born, second-generation adolescent of Palestinian descent, the child of at least one parent who was a first-generation immigrant from Palestine or an Arab state, approximately between the ages of 14 to 18, and a student in a public high school within one of Virginia's school systems.

This study supports the exploration of several pedagogical considerations, and, as a result of the data acquired and analyzed, four major recommendations for teachers and administrators are generated that address multiple areas—curricular concerns, extra-curricular activities, appropriate humor, and classroom environments. Finally, the study concludes with suggestions for further research regarding the second-generation Palestinian American adolescent population.

Chapter One

The Problem

Ever since there has been a television in a living room, images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have filled the screen. The conflict in the Holy Land between the Israelis and Palestinians is, and has been for decades, one of the most featured items on the world news stage. There is never a dull moment, it seems, and the news is often peppered with a new development regarding peace or its lack as the conflict rages on and spans the course of generations. Geographically home to the world's three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—Israel and Palestine have been in conflict for generations, yet the struggle takes different shapes and priorities over time. For many Americans, their interest in that region is deeply personal and, as a result of their religious beliefs, reaches down to soul and spirit. For those whose roots of heritage remain implanted in this part of the world, the events in the Holy Land are immensely personal and intertwined with their very existence.

As a teacher of middle school students, in 2009 I attended a cultural heritage festival hosted by my school that proved to be an eye-opening learning experience for me. It was there I saw firsthand the impact of the events in Israel and Palestine on the educational environment in the United States. My school is composed of a very diverse population, with approximately one third of the students enrolled in the ESOL (English

for Speakers of Other Languages) program. As a result, the cultural heritage festival is cause for a sincere celebration. This specific year, teachers were assigned a country to represent with their homerooms via a tri-board presentation. I was assigned a country but then asked our Middle Years Program coordinator if I could work with my class to represent Palestine instead. This was not on the list of countries offered, but I made a special request since I was anticipating an upcoming trip to the West Bank and wanted to learn as much as I could beforehand. I received a “yes” from our school’s Middle Years Program coordinator, and while I did not think about this too much, I was told by our school’s Arabic parent liaison that this presentation was of great importance, as Palestinian families attend our heritage festival every year and in the past have found their heritage missing from among the displays. The location that houses the festival—the school cafeteria—is decorated with dozens of world flags, but Palestine’s flag is not displayed. Yet we have numerous Palestinian families at our school. This instilled in me a desire to know more about how our Palestinian students feel about their ethnic identities and sense of belonging in a diverse environment, such as my school, in light of the tension between educational issues and the needs of my students in the midst of world conflicts and politics.

The international disputes over the Palestinian flag and statehood seeped into my school unintentionally, and I wondered how students felt about these differences of opinion. This incident is reflective of a wider, deeper, and more divisive issue that is present in U.S. history, evidenced in recent polls taken among the American population which offer a bleak picture of American attitudes towards the conflict in the Middle East,

both in general terms and also regarding specifics, such as the representation of this identity in schools. Regarding Israel and its Arab neighbors reaching a peaceful coexistence, a February 2014 Gallup poll revealed that 64% of Americans believed that this will never happen (Saad, 2014). Most Americans have given up hope regarding the idea of a peaceful existence between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Another survey, conducted by Pew Research Center, in which participants were asked if they believe there is a way for Israel to coexist peacefully with an independent Palestinian state revealed that only 50% of Americans believed this to be a possibility, with 41% responding negatively and 9% responding that they did not know (Pew Research Center, 2013). When it comes to Americans' hopes for the Middle East in regards to Israel and its Arab neighbors, and also with Palestine specifically, the polls reveal little optimism. In both respects, at least half of the Americans surveyed are unable to muster hope for peace.

American optimism regarding Palestine has diminished over the years. For example, in 2014 a Gallup poll questioned Americans regarding their attitudes towards an independent Palestinian state composed of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The results indicated that 46% were in favor, while 36% were not, with 18% failing to express an opinion (Saad, 2014). This number, however, has plummeted since 2003, when 58% of Americans surveyed stood in favor of an independent Palestinian state (Saad, 2014). For Palestinians looking on, the prospect of support from America is dim.

Finally, it is important to note that when asked with whom their sympathies lay—Israelis or Palestinians—the share of Americans responding in both February 2014 and February 2015 in favor of Israelis was the same: 62%. In February 2015, 16% responded

that their sympathies were with the Palestinians, decreasing from 18% in February 2014 (Saad, 2015). These statistics are important. Not only do the statistics indicate that support for Palestinians is decreasing, but also that support for Palestinians is lower than the support offered to Israelis.

When one considers the findings of these surveys, specifically the Gallup survey (Saad, 2015) in which most of the Americans surveyed said they harbor sympathy for Israel over Palestine, it suggests that this bias will be manifested in situations within school systems. The opinions unearthed regarding Americans' attitudes towards Israelis and Palestinians will have implications within a school, bearing fruit and affecting the identity development of young individuals. Palestinian American students will experience the effects of these opinions as they navigate their school experiences from day to day. The opinions unearthed by these surveys towards Israelis and Palestinians present challenges for Palestinian American students as they traverse through schooling, especially for youth who are navigating their sense of identity and connectedness to their other American friends and educators. As a result, this study utilizes a critical research orientation as a means to "critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (Merriam, 2009, p. 10). Critical research is a lens to understand the cultural and political forces within public schools encountered by all students, including Palestinian American students.

A Personal Statement

As an educator, my own interest in this topic stemmed from a book that I read approximately nine years ago. I read an autobiography of a Palestinian priest entitled

Blood Brothers, in which Elias Chacour documents his own family's experience with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and his ensuing lifelong pursuit of peace (Chacour & Hazard, 2003). I was perturbed as a young adult after reading his biography, since I only knew Palestinians from television images in which they were throwing stones at Israelis during the First *Intifada* (uprising) against the occupation in 1987. After reading Elias Chacour's autobiography, I began to see another side of the story. I realized that there was a narrative that I had never learned, and I wanted to have a greater understanding of why this conflict continued to unfurl year after year. Reading this book snowballed into a period of reading, watching films, and having meaningful conversations about this conflict until I had the opportunity to travel to the Palestinian territory of the West Bank as a volunteer for a summer. From the balcony of a Palestinian family's apartment in Beit Sahour (neighboring Bethlehem), as we surveyed the scenery of a massive settlement in the distance (Har Homa), the family patriarch asked me about my country's government and its position on the Palestinian question and our response as a nation to the Palestinian people. I had no answers to give him and found myself asking the same questions.

Upon my return and in the coming years, I wondered about the Palestinian American community living in the United States. It is no secret that following the events of September 11, 2001, it has not been an easy period in the United States to be an Arab American—airport hassles, critical comments, accusations of “terrorist,” and other components of racial profiling are still commonplace. Additionally, the United States government is a steadfast ally and sizeable financier of Israel, giving about 60% of its Foreign Military Financing to Israel (Sharp, 2012). This financing, however, is

supporting a military occupation against Palestinians. As a result of these facts, I began to develop an interest in the challenges associated with being a Palestinian American youth, specifically within the context of schooling and the sense of identity that may be in total disagreement and conflict with their teachers' or peers' knowledge and opinions about them.

Background

Defining Palestine

This study features second-generation Palestinian American adolescents, whose roots are in Palestine. If one were to do some research on the conflict and try to learn more about the area, a simple Google search of “What is Palestine?” would reveal that even trying to understand what Palestine is can be confusing. The meaning of this word depends upon whom one asks. For a young person who is trying to understand more about Palestine, even a simple online search on the topic of Palestine will bring an assortment of conflicting results. High on the list of Google search results in a November 2015 search on “What is Palestine?” was a site entitled “Palestine Facts,” located at <http://palestinefacts.org>. One would assume that something high in the search engine’s hierarchy of results would be a rich source of information. Navigating through the website, the “Geography and Population Basics” tab would seem a natural landing place. The first word under “Geography and Population Basics” was *Israel*, with all of its geographical facts and figures (“Palestine Facts,” 2013, Geography and Population Basics section, para. 1). Interestingly, the geography of Israel was described in relation to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, making it clear that they were not a part of the geography

desired for the purposes of its description (“Palestine Facts,” 2013). So, according to this website, Palestine is Israel, with the West Bank and Gaza intentionally excluded. If this website is accurate, where do the Palestinians fit in the picture? One might wonder, how does a Palestinian American youth feel looking at this information, knowing that on the website he or she has been excluded from the entire population of “Palestine?” For a student who is Palestinian, what does this message mean, and what is its effect? How do they explain to others that this is not their side of the story, when teachers themselves rely on those search engines for information?

Trying to understand Palestine is made more complicated when one examines recent historical events for Palestinians seeking formal recognition within the context of the United Nations. For example, on November 29, 2012, Palestinians received a symbolic victory after gaining non-member state status at the United Nations General Assembly. While cause for much celebration, this victory changed very little for Palestinians living inside of Palestine. This change put Palestine within the realm of statehood, but a state lacking formally recognized borders would have to come from further negotiations with Israel (“Palestinian Statehood,” n.d.). Although the new status was a victory for Palestinian people, in the end very little changed, including the continued absence of an internationally recognized, bordered state (“Palestinian Statehood,” n.d.). More recently, the display of the Palestinian flag in the UN rallied international support, with 119 votes in its favor, with only eight votes, including that of the United States, against the raising of this flag (Sanchez, 2015). For Palestinian American youth following these events, the United States’ repeated actions against

Palestine were sure to trigger emotions amongst them as they watched the process of Palestine's recognition repeatedly countered by the United States, their country of birth and residence.

Although the majority of the international community supported this victory for Palestine at the United Nations General Assembly, the endeavor lacked the support of and was even opposed by the United States. The United States joined a small minority—nine, to be exact (“U.N. General Assembly,” 2012)—of like-minded countries in casting an opposing vote. On that day, Palestinian Americans watched as their country of citizenship voted against their country of origin (“U.N. General Assembly,” 2012).

Palestinian Americans were left to wrestle with the contradictions of living in a land that stands out as a minority in the international scheme and vocally votes against the progress and forward movement of Palestine. One might ask, for second-generation Palestinian American young people, what is the effect of the message that their country of birth and residence, the United States, votes against the very existence of the land of their heritage, Palestine?

Palestinian Populations

Palestinian Americans are in a unique situation in that they face distinct challenges as a result of two different factors, both of an ethnic nature. First of all and most obviously, they are of Palestinian descent. When it comes to this ages-old conflict and American public opinion, the position of the majority of Americans is clear, supported most recently by Gallup's poll (Saad, 2015). Public opinion has shown that not only are Palestinians on the less favorable side of the coin, but additionally they are Arab

Americans, which presents unique challenges, especially following the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001. Arab Americans are largely Christians, with another Zogby (2002) poll revealing 53% of Arab Americans self-identifying with various denominations of Christianity and a minority of 24% self-identifying as Muslims. Regardless of religious affiliation, however, Bayoumi (2009) writes, “Arabs and Muslim Americans are the new ‘problem’ of American society” (p. 2). He goes through history to trace the ostracized communities of American history, beginning with the African American community to Irish and Italians, to Germans to Jews to Japanese to Chinese, then Hispanic Americans. He identifies the current “problem” community—Arabs. Bayoumi (2009) says:

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Arabs and Muslims, two groups virtually unknown to most Americans prior to 2001, now hold the dubious distinction of being the first new communities of suspicion after the hard-won victories of the civil-rights era. Even if prejudice continues to persist in our society, the American creed of fairness was not supposed to mean that we ought to be judged not by our religion, gender, color, or country of origin but simply by the content of our individual characters. The terrorist attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the explosion of political violence around the world have put that dream in jeopardy for American Arabs and Muslims. In the eyes of some Americans, they have become collectively known as dangerous outsiders. (p. 3)

In an interview with an Arab American, Bayoumi asks about life after September 11 among the Arab American community and he receives the answer, “We’re the new blacks. You know that, right?” (Bayoumi, 2009, p. 2). He draws a parallel to a community, the African Americans, that has been the subject of notorious discrimination throughout American history, now putting the Arab American community within the same category of those ostracized. The recent events in Ferguson, Missouri hit home for Palestinians as they watched events unfold in the United States that paralleled confrontations with the Israeli Defense Forces. The Ferguson event sparked a solidarity movement amongst Palestinians, who were the first to send messages of support (Khalek, 2015). Tara Thompson, organizer of Hands Up United, an activist group traveling to Palestine, stated: “Palestinians were the first to reach out, sharing ways to protect Ferguson protesters from tear gas. . . . Our struggles are aligned which makes it imperative that our people be aligned” (Khalek, 2015, Drawing Parallels section, para. 4).

The presence of Palestinians in the United States is by no means a new phenomenon, but the events of September 11 have put all Arab Americans, including Palestinian Americans, under a new kind of radar. Indeed, Palestinians have been in the United States for more than a century. It is difficult to know how many are living in the United States, however, because they are considered “white” on federal census documents and so the ability to differentiate beyond this checked box proves challenging (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). However, the United States Census Bureau’s (2010) most recent statistics estimate that there are approximately 83,241 Palestinians living in

the United States. The largest concentrations of Palestinians living in the United States reside in Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Schulz & Hammer, 2003).

Palestinians have been immigrating to a variety of places in the diaspora for decades, including the United States, with the earliest presence of Palestinians in the United States traced to the late 18th century (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). The largest waves of immigration, however, can be traced to pivotal times in the history of Palestine. The majority of Palestinians who left were refugees and exiles from the war of 1947-1948, marking the departure of approximately 700,000 people (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). Palestinians remember this event as *al-nakba*, which translated means “the catastrophe.” The events of *al-nakba* coincide with the founding of the state of Israel. A second exodus occurred after the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, called *naksa*, which translated means “the year of the setback” (Schulz & Hammer, 2003, p. 38). This year also marked the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights (a portion of Syria). As a result of these events, Palestinians and their descendants now make up the world’s largest refugee population (“Al-Awda,” n.d.), many of whom now live in the United States.

The Problem of Refugees

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the chief organization facilitating assistance for Palestine refugees. UNRWA defines Palestine refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946, to 15 May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict” (United Nations Relief and

Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA], n.d., Who We Are section, para. 5). Approximately 5,000,000 refugees are registered with UNWRA, which offers advocacy and assistance to refugees living within Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. A third of the refugees live in one of 58 camps (UNRWA, n.d.). The first numerical figure of refugees associated with the UNRWA at its founding in 1950 was 750,000 refugees (UNRWA, n.d.). This means that the population of refugees is now more than six times the number of original refugees associated with the organization.

Defining the Problem

Palestinians have been in the United States over the course of two centuries, so their presence is not new. On the contrary, their presence in the United States is well established over time. The result of Americans' public favor leaning away from the Palestinians will have very real repercussions in school settings. Consider the example of Lamia, a Palestinian student, who is featured by Abu El-Haj (2007), as she recounts a classroom experience between this student and her teacher. The setting for this confrontation was an urban school setting with a Palestinian community, one of whose members was Lamia, who was born in the United States but spent several years in the West Bank. This confrontation between the student, Lamia, and her teacher was regarding the existence of her Palestinian homeland. Lamia recounts:

I look at [the map] and asked him, "What happened to Palestine?" He said, "Palestine is not a thing." So I felt mad. . . . So I told him, "What do you mean it's not a thing?" He said, "It's not a thing, so I don't want to hear anything

about it.” I looked behind him and saw a big map on the wall. I said, “Why don’t you point out on the map where it says Palestine?” I thought he was going to say Israel, but he didn’t say Israel. So I just gave him a chance to say something. Just that it exists. Not even a thing! So he ignored me. I said, “You want me to get up there and show you?” He said, “No, forget about it. I said it’s not a thing, and that’s it.” I said, “Look, I came from Palestine, and you’re saying it’s not a thing. Then you need to tell me, where did I come from?” (Abu El-Haj, 2007, p. 286)

Unfortunately Abu El-Haj notes that this is one of numerous similar encounters for Palestinian students in this institution of study. She says:

Many of the Palestinian youth in this study have experienced similar encounters with teachers who refuse to acknowledge both the legitimacy of their aspirations for an independent state and their everyday experience living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank. Unfortunately for Lamia and many of her peers, these encounters often ended, as it did in her case, with disciplinary sanctions. (Abu El-Haj, 2007, p. 286)

One empathizes with Lamia over the frustration that she must have felt, and when one considers that she was disciplined as a result of this encounter (Abu El-Haj, 2007), it is a disheartening prospect.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this qualitative, critical research study are as follows:

1. In the context of selected American public high schools, what does being Palestinian American mean to second-generation adolescent students of Palestinian descent?
2. What are the views of Palestinian American adolescents regarding the ways in which their ethnic identities find expression in the context of U.S. schools?
3. What are the challenges that face Palestinian American students as they go through the U.S. school system?

Summary

Chapter One provided an introduction to this study among Palestinian American high school students, exploring reasons for interest in Palestine and statistics regarding American popular opinion regarding the conflict in the Holy Land. This chapter also investigated the problem that will guide this study, which has its foundation in the midst of adversity regarding Palestinians in popular American culture and the potential effect on the identity development of Palestinian American adolescents within a high school setting. Additionally, this chapter provided a personal statement regarding my own interest in this topic and my journey as a researcher in this field. This chapter also included a background to the problem upon which this study is built, citing the differing definitions of Palestine and the response of the United States to recent political events pertaining to Palestine. Three research questions that will guide this study were provided. Chapter Two will provide a literature review on topics related to this study.

Chapter Two

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of information regarding research theories surrounding adolescent identity, including ethnic identity in general and also identity among second-generation Arab Americans. This chapter also provides a synopsis of information on issues surrounding the American experience, including an analysis of what it means to be an American as well as the experiences of American minorities. Finally, the chapter includes information regarding the Palestinian community, among both Palestinian American youth and also Palestinians scattered throughout the diaspora.

Research and Theories on Adolescent Identity Formation

A student in Lebanon's Shatila camp made this comment: "But what's the use of having a Palestinian identity if Palestine the place is not ours? . . . So we don't carry the identity of the place we live in, and the identity we carry has no place. Who are we?" (Sukarieh, 1999, p. 53). This student touches on one of the key questions of identity for any young person who is trying to understand his or her own identity: "Who are we?" or on an individualistic note, "Who am I?"

Classical Views of Identity

Erikson's *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) brings attention to and highlights the adolescent identity crisis in which young people find themselves. Erikson (1968) breaks

identity development down into a process of eight symmetrical steps, including trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair (p. 94). According to Erikson's theory, each of these steps builds in succession, similar to a ladder. Identity development, according to Erikson, takes place surrounded by crisis—Erikson (1968) says that each stage is “organized around a specific crisis that must be resolved in order to increase the likelihood of identity development” (p. 19). Adolescence lands these teens into the fifth stage of identity vs. confusion (Erikson, 1968).

The role of the judgment of others is pivotal in the process of identity formation, therefore an important part of adolescence as well. The judgments of others take center stage. Regarding identity formation, Erikson (1968) says:

Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves. (pp. 22-23)

The power of the voices and influences surrounding the adolescent cannot be undermined during this critical time in the life of an adolescent.

This theory does capitalize upon the importance of the adolescent period as a springboard for what is to come. But it does not make mention of ethnic identity and the search for one's understanding of the relationship between one's own heritage and the positive or negative reception of this heritage in a specific culture. Speaking from the

perspective of second-generation immigrant children, C. Suarez-Orozco and M. Suarez-Orozco (2002) make the case that this theory comes up lacking. In reference to Erikson's theory of identity, C. Suarez-Orozco and M. Suarez-Orozco (2002) claim:

This model explains well the experiences of youth living in homogenous worlds where there was significant complementarity across social spheres. In an increasingly heterogeneous, transnational world, however, social spaces are more fractured and discontinuous than ever before. The Eriksonian theory of continuity and sameness in identity-making needs to be updated to effectively engage the complexities of experience in this era. (p. 92)

Based on these comments, the Eriksonian model leaves a gap for second-generation immigrant children.

Identity Status Theory

Another identity theorist is James Marcia, who springboards off of Erikson's theory with the creation of four horizontally moving, identity status components in the midst of adolescence. As a concept, Marcia (1980) describes the importance of identity as a structure:

The better developed this structure is, the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world. The less developed this structure is, the more confused individuals seem about their own distinctiveness from others and the more they have to rely on external sources to evaluate themselves. (p. 159)

The ability to go forth with a greater sense of security and surety is often lacking during the tumultuous years of adolescence.

While Erikson (1968) makes note of eight stages in an individual's identity development that build upon each in a vertical motion, Marcia defines four horizontal identity statuses that are modes of dealing with identity issues often present in late adolescents. Marcia's four statuses are identity achievement, foreclosure, identity diffusion, and moratorium (Marcia, 1980). Identity achievement includes adolescents who are pursuing self-chosen occupation and ideological goals (Marcia, 1980). Foreclosure includes those whose occupational and ideological positions were chosen by their parents rather than themselves (Marcia, 1980). Identity diffusion includes those who have no occupational or ideological direction (Marcia, 1980). Finally, students in moratorium are those who are struggling with occupational and/or ideological issues and who are engaged in an identity crisis (Marcia, 1980).

For adolescents, it would seem that moratorium is a common resting place, as it is a period of struggle, of crisis, and of not yet having arrived at a mature identity. Because adolescence is a period of extreme change, Marcia (1980) also makes mention of the crucial nature of adolescence as a means transitioning where identity is concerned:

It is a period of transition in approach to cognitive tasks – from concrete to formal operations; in approach to moral issues – from law-and-order (“duty”) reasoning to transcendent human values; in approach to psychosocial concerns – from others’ expectations and directives to one’s own unique organization of one’s history, skills, shortcomings, and goals. (p. 160)

The key is the transition from “others” to “one” in terms of a personal identity.

Adolescence presents the potential opportunity for an individual to transition from the expectations of others to one’s own perceptions of what is important and valuable.

Both Erikson and Marcia contributed to the knowledge gained regarding the journey of identity development and its various components. Erikson, however, presents a vertical progression marked by crisis along the way, while Marcia dissects adolescence into four potential statuses of identity development, with the identity achievement resting as the actualization and end goal. In her exploration of identity development among second-generation Asian American students (India specifically), Sequeira (2012) noted that each of these theories is too simple for the complexities of ethnic identity development. Sequeira (2012) says, “For immigrant adolescents . . . identity development seems more complex than ‘Who am I?’ as posited by Erikson and Marcia but rather ‘Who am I, and does my identity, culture and ethnicity fit into the host society?’” (p. 31).

Phinney’s Stages of Ethnic Identity Development

More recently, Phinney (1989) attempted to bridge the gap between Erikson’s model, Marcia’s model, and the area of ethnic identity among adolescents. In his study, he took 91 American-born tenth graders from two high schools, partially represented by 64 students in three ethnic minority groups (Asians, Latinos, and blacks), as well as white students. His findings showed that 60 of the 64 minority students were assigned to one of three stages of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989). The first stage included diffusion/foreclosure, a beginning stage in which there has been no real search of ethnic identity, characterized by statements such as “My past is back there; I have no reason to

worry about it. I'm American now" (Phinney, 1989, p. 44) or "I don't go looking for my culture. I just go by what my parents say and do, and what they tell me to do, the way they are" (Phinney, 1989, p. 44). The second stage is a moratorium stage, evidenced by some investigation regarding a personal ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989). This stage is represented by a young person's response of "I want to know what we do and how our culture is different from others. Going to festivals and cultural events helps me to learn more about my own culture and about myself" (Phinney, 1989, p. 44). The third and final stage is an achieved ethnic identity, characterized by statements such as "I have been born Filipino and am born to be Filipino. . . . I'm here in America, and people of many different cultures are here too. So I don't consider myself only Filipino, but also American" (Phinney, 1989, p. 44). The model presented by Phinney is an attempt to represent ethnic identity development stages building upon the established models of Erikson and Marcia. This study will examine ethnic identity among Palestinian American students and the complexity of their identity as minorities within the school system.

Identity and the Second Generation

Bayoumi (2009) makes the case that Arab Americans are "the new blacks" (p. 2) in his writing, aligning these two communities together as victims of oppression. In addition, C. Suarez-Orozco and M. Suarez-Orozco (2002) claim that immigrant children enter the United States with a positive attitude towards education, but that this attitude cannot be maintained in light of toxic levels of cultural violence. C. Suarez-Orozco and M. Suarez-Orozco (2002) say, "Children will tend to spend much of their psychic energy defending against these assaults on their sense of self" (p. 95).

The question of identity and ethnic identity in particular have been examined by mental health professionals who were interested in the interconnectedness of a positive identity formation and the well-being of young people. The picture is grim for Arab American students' well-being when they are not growing up in a culture that nurtures a positive ethnic identity development. Britto (2008) highlights this reality when she says,

For Arab Muslim children and adolescents, ethnic identity formation is already challenging due to the inherent complexities of being a minority, but all the more so when the culture and the political milieu may not be supportive of positive ethnic identity development. This discordance between self and context potentially puts children at risk of poorer mental health outcomes, but also serves as a call to scholars to expand this fascinating area of research. (p. 855)

Not only do these students identify school as the primary place that puts them in the position of both enemy and outsider (Abu El-Haj, 2010), but this positioning can have serious repercussions concerning not only students' self-image and perception, but also students' health and well-being (Britto, 2008).

The Meaning of American

Throughout United States history are many individuals who were born in the United States who were made to feel as though they did not belong. Their experiences beg the question: Who does belong in America? What does it mean to be an American?

The idea of what it means to be an American is complex and multi-layered. The question "What is an American?" brings with it fewer answers and more questions. For example, how is America defined? Is it limited to the United States, or can one infer that

Canada, Central America, and South America are also included in the description? If the geographical boundaries are unclear, the question of how to identify those living within these boundaries is equally unclear.

For the purposes of this study, the idea of America is limited to the United States of America. Although this narrows geographical boundaries, the answer to “Who is actually an American?”, even within this physical space, remains at large. There are rival answers to the question of “Who is an American?”, and to explore this idea it is helpful to delve into the history of the United States to see how history answers this question.

Although European explorers were given credit for their ventures into a new world, the fact remained that this new world was already indigenously populated upon the explorers’ arrival. This indigenous population, which in the present-day United States is referred to as the American Indian population, reserves the right of being called the first Americans in the United States. However, as time passed, even hundreds of years, and as the United States evolved and formed its own government, the legislation of this new nation began to dictate who was welcome in the United States as a citizen and who was unwelcome.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 was the primary point at which the United States enacted legislation on who belongs in the United States and who does not in terms of the privilege of citizenship (Naturalization Act, 1790). In this legislation, the answer was made clear that those who were welcome were white. In its own words:

Any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be

admitted to become a citizen thereof on application to any common law Court of record in any one of the States wherein he shall have resided for the term of one year at least, and making proof to the satisfaction of such Court that he is a person of good character, and taking the oath or affirmation prescribed by law to support the Constitution of the United States, which Oath or Affirmation such Court shall administer, and the Clerk of such Court shall record such Application, and the proceedings thereon; and thereupon such person shall be considered as a Citizen of the United States. (Naturalization Act, 1790, para. 1)

This legislation allowed aliens who had lived in the United States for two years, who were white, and who were of good character the opportunity to become legal citizens of the country. For all of those who did not fall under this category, including people of color, citizenship was denied. At this time, in the United States, the question of who belonged in the United States could largely be answered by the color of one's skin.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 was the first act of legislation dealing with “the alien” and citizenship in the United States, and numerous pieces of legislation followed that sought to either restrict or enhance the rights of those living in the United States in regards to skin color. Hundreds of years later and still a refuge for the immigrant and refugee, the United States continues to grapple with the question of who belongs in the United States as citizens, evidence being that immigration reform is a contentious issue for each presidential campaign.

In the Naturalization Act of 1790, Congress put forth conditions of both skin color but also the requirement of good character amongst would-be citizens of the United

States (Naturalization Act, 1790). The idea of the meaning of American as having a good character component was not absent from future voices to speak on the subject, including the voice of a Swedish writer and Nobel-laureate economist, Myrdal, who wrote extensively about being an American but was ironically not an American himself. In his book, *American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), he coined the phrase “The American Creed” which refers to “liberty, equality, justice, and fair opportunity for everybody” (p. xlvi). These values, rolled into the “American Creed,” are examples of good character ideals that evolved into a national phenomenon.

The exploration of the meaning of American includes historical questions of geographic location, skin color, and character ideals, but it also includes questions regarding the reality of the existence of an American identity and what that means for the United States populace. Schildkraut (2011) identifies multiple schools of thought on the topic of American identity. In her writing, the American identity is of more a political nature. Four different theories of American identity are provided. First and foremost is the popular notion of liberalism, in which there is minimal government intervention in private life. This is coupled with a promotion of freedom in economic and political realms along with equality of opportunity (Schildkraut, 2011). Additionally, this form of identity is associated with achievement of the American Dream through hard work (Schildkraut, 2011). Another idea associated with American identity is that of civic republicanism, which emphasizes the responsibilities that come with being an American, such as active citizenship, being an informed citizen, and working toward a greater good (Schildkraut, 2013). Ethnoculturalism, another belief associated with American identity,

posits that cultural ancestry defines American identity, and more specifically the ancestry of white, English-speaking Protestants whose relatives came from northern Europe (Schildkraut, 2013). Lastly, incorporationism has its footing in the notion that being an American is compatible with both the celebration of an individual's ethnic heritage and also the assimilation into the dominant culture of one's residence (Schildkraut, 2013).

The questions surrounding the meaning of "American" are multi-layered, like an onion. The ideas associated with the meaning of "American" have metamorphosed in the United States over centuries, taking into consideration skin color, moral character, ideals, and political bends. Regardless of bend—skin color, moral character, ideals, or political beliefs—each is inclusive of some and exclusive of others, leaving further layers to be unpeeled as the questions concerning this topic are left unanswered and are laid bare for further scrutiny in the years to come.

Educational theorists have long struggled with the concept of who is an American while making efforts to provide more inclusive education to all groups. Dewey (1916) in argued that schools are an "assimilative force" (p. 17) and a place where "the intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment" (Dewey, 1916, p. 17). Nearly a century later, the United States is still debating immigration issues, and schools are also trying to navigate the waters of what it means to be an American while respecting the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the students.

Experiences of American Minority Populations

Research on Palestinian American youth is very sparse. There are, however,

additional populations living in the United States who wrestle with issues of citizenship and national belonging. Some examples of these populations include the Japanese American, American Indian, Sikh American, and Mexican American populations. Although each community is unique, each of these bears unique ties to the Palestinian American population in the midst of their journey to belong.

Japanese Americans

A connection exists between the historical catastrophes involving minority groups such as Japanese Americans and the current dilemma among Palestinian Americans. The students in Abu El-Haj's (2007) study were pitted as outsiders, even terrorists, guilty before proven innocent. Those perceptions smack sharply of a dark chapter of United States' history: the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. During this time, these American citizens were relegated to internment camps in the Northwest. Comparable to the experience of Palestinian Americans, the Japanese Americans were made to feel as if they were criminals, as if they were at enmity within their own country of citizenship. President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 ("Our Documents," n.d.), issued on February 19, 1942, had approximately 110,000 people of Japanese heritage—70,000 of whom were American citizens—sent to one of ten internment camps ("Our Documents," n.d.). Having taken place only 70 years ago, this episode is parallel to the experience of Palestinian Americans who watch their country of residence turn against the people of their own ethnic heritage, both in Palestine via support of a military occupation but also on American soil as Palestinian American youth in the studies mentioned feel isolated, harassed, and as if they are outsiders. What is puzzling about this

is the fact that the United States was at war with Japan but is not at war with Palestine or with the Palestinians.

Even three and four generations later, the Japanese American community is still reeling with issues of identity and belonging. Parallels exist between the experience of Japanese Americans and Palestinian Americans in the midst of racial profiling of a whole community. The Japanese American community understands the pain of profiling and the catastrophic results based on ethnic identity and the supposed threat to the United States. In her writing focusing on “Children of the Camps” workshops and forums chronicling the experiences of Japanese American internees, Ina (2001) states,

The United States government justified the violation of the rights of an entire community of people based on race. This “racism” trauma then, similar to victims of abuse, affects the person’s sense of self and results in specific conflict and confusion. (p. 19)

As United States citizens, these internees “found themselves faced with the psychological conflict of being dependent upon the very source of their abuse” (Ina, 2001, p. 19). As American citizens living in the United States, these internees were dependent upon the land of their residence, also the facilitator of their miserable internment experiences.

Closely related to the experiences of those Arab Americans who have suffered racial profiling, the Japanese American internees relayed the following feelings: “I am a loyal American citizen, but by virtue of my race I am the enemy”, “I didn’t commit any crime, but I am treated as if I am guilty”, “I was abandoned by my own country, and I wanted to know why”, and “I was asked to declare my loyalty to a country that put me

and my ailing parents in camp for something we didn't do" (Ina, 2001, pp. 22-23).

Isolated and detained in the name of national security, this population understands all too well the betrayal of racial profiling. Similar to the experiences of the Arab American population, the repercussions of profiling amongst the Japanese American internees were significant in terms of emotional health and even mental health.

An event intended to honor the relationship between the United States and Japan brought attention to the now-targeted Arab and Muslim populations living in the United States. Each year the Cherry Blossom Festival brings throngs of visitors to Washington, DC to celebrate the beautiful foliage and to remember the relationship between Japan and the United States. During one of the festival events in 2008, the Cherry Blossom Freedom Walk, Columbia University Professor Gary Y. Okihiro spoke at the Japanese American Memorial and remembered California's Manzanar internment camp "with its littered remains of my ancestors, was a place of degradation, shame and humiliation" (Najjab, 2008, para. 3). In light of this fact, he necessitated the importance of never again allowing racism to drive government policy, while mentioning the Department of Justice's initiatives against Muslims and Arabs:

The roundup of Muslim and Arab non-citizens after 9/11 on the pretext of immigration violations was religious and racial profiling without any evidence that they posed a danger, and a second report detailed the physical, verbal, and psychological abuse inflicted upon them and the inhuman conditions of the confinement. (Najjab, 2008, para. 6)

Okiihiro's speech is representative of the fact that the Japanese American and Arab American and Muslim communities have a foundation of solidarity in the United States as a result of each community's experiences of profiling—racial profiling for Japanese and Arab Americans, and religious profiling for Muslims. Okiihiro's remembrance of the Manzanar camp as a place of degradation and shame (Najjab, 2008) is revelatory of the degradation and shame of the experiences of Arab Americans and Muslims living in the United States who have been similarly targeted even 60 to 70 years later.

Japanese Americans wrestle with issues of identity and belonging in the United States for multiple reasons. One reason is the gruesome history of the internment camp experiences. Another of the primary reasons for this grappling with issues of identity and belonging rests in the idea of race. Tsuda (2014), in his interviews with 55 Japanese Americans of the second and fourth generations, had one participant who stated, "We have never been really accepted as American because we're not white. If you're not white, you're a foreigner" (p. 410). He explains that the Japanese American community has obtained high rates of socio-economic success and cultural assimilation, but because American national identity is limited to those who are white, the Japanese American community members remain foreigners in the eyes of the American mainstream (Tsuda, 2014).

Tsuda (2014) identified questions that were the primary markers of a lack of belonging amongst his participants. A fourth-generation participant recounts her confusion as the recipient of the question, "Where are you originally from?":

When I was asked where I was from at some cocktail party, I couldn't understand what people were getting at. So I thought maybe they wanted to know where I was raised, so I'd say "Los Angeles." Then, when they asked "No, where are you originally from?" I thought maybe I was being asked where I was born, so I'd say "Seattle." Recently, it finally began to dawn on me that maybe they thought I was from some Asian country because of the way I look. When I realized this, it really bothered me! I was like, my family has been here in the United States longer than many whites. Why do I continue to be seen as some kind of foreigner? (Tsuda, 2014, p. 410)

Another example from Tsuda's (2014) research included an incident from a member of the U.S. volleyball team, who recounted an experience preceding a game.

We were on tour and playing the Chinese national team. We were leaving the hotel and getting on the bus to play our match. When I walked up to the bus with my American teammates, the bus driver said, "The Chinese bus is over there." It was really surprising because I was wearing the American team jersey like the rest of my teammates! (p. 411)

Tsuda's research amongst the Japanese American population of second- to fourth-generation members is representative of a community having to prove itself as American. His research points to the experiences of Palestinian American young people because, as members of the Arab American community, they also are intertwined with issues of identity and belonging although citizens of the United States (Abu El-Haj, 2007). The idea of whiteness being intertwined with a true American identity is hardly new, as it

reaches back to the earlier days of documented United States history and the passing of the Naturalization Act of 1790 (Naturalization Act, 1790). More than two centuries have passed since the Naturalization Act of 1790, however, and the idea of whiteness as a prerequisite for a true American identity is still widespread.

American Indians

The American Indian community remains a community of study hundreds of years after the colonists came to America and eventually catapulted the forced removal of the native population from much of the land. Naturally, these events bred issues of belonging and identity for the generations to come, including among the current generation of children. Smokowski, Evans, Cotter, and Webber (2014) write, “The history of persecution and oppression of the American Indian people, coupled with ongoing discrimination and disadvantage, likely contributes to higher rates of depressive symptoms” (p. 352). As a result, many studies focusing on the American Indian populations deal specifically with mental health issues resulting from tragic events, the ripple effects of which wash over generations.

Studies investigating the topic of mental health in this population often include the variable of ethnic identity as a factor for mental health, including a 2009 study at a tribal school in the Northern Plains. This study involved 95 students in an attempt to investigate two main hypotheses—first, that ethnic identity is positively associated with a sense of community and second, that ethnic identity is positively associated with psychological well-being (Kenyon & Carter, 2001). The results of study supported the

first hypothesis and asserted that ethnic identity is positively associated with a sense of community, upholding American Indian values of collectivism and community (Kenyon & Carter, 2001). As a result, for those youths who had a stronger sense of ethnic identity, they also had a stronger sense of connection to their tribe (Kenyon & Carter, 2011). The second hypothesis was supported, as ethnic identity was shown to have a positive effect, but it did not show a relationship to depression or other psychosomatic symptoms (Kenyon & Carter, 2011). The authors asserted, however, that ethnic identity can be a protective factor for the participants, although the absence of ethnic identity may not necessarily be a detriment (Kenyon & Carter, 2011). Kenyon and Carter concluded that there was evidence that programs for adolescents must include opportunities for them to both think about what it means to be a part of their ethnic group and also to have positive feelings and attachments to the group (Kenyon & Carter, 2011).

Tyser, Scott, Readdy, and McCrea (2014) initiated a study of the American Indian population, focused on 164 American Indian students living on a reservation in the Northern Plains. The study examined multiple factors and their link with depressive symptoms in both middle and high school participants. The results of the study showed that self-reported grades, goal self-efficacy, dispositional optimism, and American Indian cultural identity were all linked with fewer depressive symptoms (Tyser et al., 2014). A strong link to one's culture amongst the American Indian population is, in a sense, an antidote to depression.

The suffering of the American Indian population and the concerns surrounding mental health reinforce the dangers relating to mental health among populations living in

a culture that may not be supportive of their identity development (Britto, 2008). Arab and Muslim children are in this way intertwined with American Indian children. These studies of American Indian young people make clear the importance of cultural identity as a kind of remedy in the midst of potential mental health concerns.

Sikh Americans

Unfortunately the lack of knowledge and familiarity of the many minorities living in the United States continues to fuel more discrimination and mistreatment of minorities similar to that of Japanese Americans. For example, in the case of the Sikh community, CNN's Belief Blog followed the story of two Sikh brothers, Harmeet and Harkirat Soin, one who chose to wear the turban, or *dastar*, and the other who abandoned it like thousands of other Sikh men attempting to avoid discrimination (Basu, 2012). The article documents the assassination of a Sikh gas station owner, Balbir Singh Sodhi, just four days after the terrorist attacks of September 11. Following this event the Sikh Coalition, an advocacy group, has documented 700 attacks or bias-related incidents, culminating in the most deadly of them all, a shooting in a Sikh Temple on August 5, 2012 that cost six worshippers their lives (Basu, 2012). The Soin brothers mention their experiences, including growing up in a family that took pains to prove their allegiance to the United States by putting a "Proud to be American" and "Sikh American" bumper sticker on the family automobile. "It was to show people that we are with you. We are not who you think we are. We are not radical Muslims," says Harkirat Soin (Basu, 2012, Opinion: White Power Music section, para. 3). The Soin brothers are members of a community who, although American, must go through exaggerated motions of appearing "American

enough” in order to avoid discrimination, based on their physical appearances and the fear of being pinned as radical Muslims. Ironically, the Soin brothers’ experiences of being targeted as radical Muslims, which they are not, bring to light the level of ignorance of those Americans who have very little knowledge regarding the religious affiliations of the American minority and immigrant populations.

Mexican Americans

Just as Japanese Americans and the Sikh community have been subject to enmity within the United States over the course of time, the country’s sizeable minority population, Mexican American, is not immune to hostility in regards to its presence, either. Pew Research Center figures show that 33.7 million Hispanics of Mexican origin resided in the United States as of 2012, with 65% of this population born in the United States (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). Of the 35% born outside of the United States, 18% are listed as unauthorized migrants (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). According to the figures, 82% of the Hispanics of Mexican origin living in the United States are either native-born, naturalized citizens, or legal, permanent residents.

The question of immigration has taken the front stage as the United States is preparing for a new presidential election. The narrative and discourse of the leading presidential candidates have already sparked national dialogues. For example, Donald Trump recently attracted a lot of attention for saying, “What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc.” (Walker, 2015, para. 7). Another candidate, Ben Carson, stated that he does not think that the

United States should have a Muslim president (Bradner, 2015). The media went on and on with these candidates' statements and dedicated a sizable amount of airtime to them. One can only imagine the effect that words such as these have on immigrant minorities living in the United States, some of whom are naturalized citizens or legal permanent residents (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). A sizable number of Americans stand behind these views in regards to Mexican Americans and Muslims living in the United States. To youths who are second-generation Mexican Americans and Muslims, the messages from these politicians are those of intolerance, discrimination, and rejection of the "other."

An Under-Researched Population

Research on the topic of Palestinian American youth is very limited, making this an under-researched population. One of the major studies on identity development among Arab American youth, specifically Palestinian American youth, was by Abu El-Haj (2007), who conducted a study among a group of Palestinian American high school students. The students that she worked with were part of a small Palestinian Muslim immigrant community living in a large U.S. city. The focus of Abu El-Haj's (2007) research was to examine the complex and contradictory ways that Palestinian American immigrant youth are positioned by others and themselves in matters relating to citizenship and national belonging. While all of her participants were U.S. citizens, most were also transnational migrants who spent the majority of their childhood years in Palestine. She writes about how these Palestinian American youths construct their national and citizenship identities and the difficulties of feeling that one belongs in a

place but resides in another. When referring to these Palestinian American students, Abu El-Haj (2007) says:

They struggle to feel a sense of belonging to the nation in which they hold citizenship. . . . On the other hand, these Palestinian American youth view their U.S. citizenship positively in terms of legal and political rights and economic access. Yet, they tie their national identities—their sense of where they belong—to a Palestinian homeland. (p. 287)

This is a significant contribution to a scant body of research on identity among Palestinian youth because it unearths the dichotomous pull that these youths feel between where they live and where they belong. It also pits these youths as “enemies within” (Abu El-Haj, 2007, p. 287) their communities. This is more severe than not belonging: It is living in a kind of culture where one is made to feel as if one is at enmity with one’s country of citizenship.

In light of this, it is not surprising that Abu El-Haj (2007) reveals a detachment among these children related to their citizenship, in that it brings them both legal and political rights together with economic access, and yet these privileges do nothing to sway their sense of belonging. When it comes to where they belong, the students feel that they belong to a Palestinian homeland, regardless of the political and economic privileges afforded to them in the United States. There are some things that money and privilege cannot buy, and a sense of belonging seems to be one in the case of these students (Abu El-Haj, 2007).

Although informative, the study is limited, however, in that it is focused on youth who are only Muslim, neglecting the sizeable Christian population. Most Arab Americans are Christians, and this community should not be neglected. A Zogby International Survey (2002) revealed that 53% of Arab Americans self-identify with either the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestant denominations of Christianity, with 24% self-identifying as Muslim. Abu El-Haj's study was conducted amongst Muslims; however, research is needed to include the Christian population among Palestinian Americans. It also focuses on a group of mostly transnational migrant students, many who have spent a significant amount of time in Palestine in their younger years, the majority of the families from the same village in the West Bank (Abu El-Haj, 2007). Additional research is required to include a broader sample, inclusive of adolescents of both religions and geographical areas that are not limited to the same location.

The school investigated in her study was one with a certain amount of turmoil and ethnic tension. Abu El-Haj (2007) identifies that she initially began working with this population as a result of the administration's request for help after multiple racial fights broke out between Russian and Palestinian immigrant students. Some felt that Palestinian students, particularly the boys, were being disciplined to extremes as a result of images of Arabs as terrorists. As a result, the Palestinian students felt that the school climate was one of hostility (Abu El-Haj, 2007). This is a study among a group of students in a school with an administration that has fostered an antagonistic atmosphere towards its Palestinian students (Abu El-Haj, 2007).

Abu El-Haj (2010) conducted another study in the same community and the same

high school on the topic of nation building in light of the war on terror. In this study, she focused on whether schools serve as a site for “liberalizing” Palestinian and Arab American youth through “Americanization” (p. 243). Regarding Palestinian high school students’ identity, she inquired as to whether or not living in the United States allows students to remain socially adept. She mentions the fact that Palestinian students living in the United States are now residents of a country that is often perceived as an enabler of the Israeli occupation (Abu El-Haj, 2002), still in action since its beginning in 1967 when Israel occupied all of historic Palestine. Abu El-Haj (2002) notes:

As one example, the identities of Palestinian immigrant youth are not only forged in the United States, but also within the context of a nationalist struggle against Israeli occupation. This is not an abstract political struggle for many Palestinian youth living in the United States. . . . They also experience the United States as a party to that conflict. . . . Must social incorporation in the United States depend on giving up their sense of connection to Palestine? (p. 313)

The same question could be asked among the second-generation Palestinian American children who are working out the intricacies involved with living in a country that facilitates occupation via the sizeable financial support of the occupying nation. Abu El-Haj is concerned that Arab students’ political opinions may be judged specifically and differently, solely based on the fact of their ethnicity.

Members of the Palestinian Diaspora

The Palestinian diaspora is composed of several groups of Palestinians. One group is encapsulated by UNRWA’s term of “Palestine refugees,” (UNRWA, n.d.).

Additionally, many individuals affected by the conflict in 1948 did not fall under UNRWA's definition of refugee—the Bedouins, for example, lost access to grazing lands but did not lose their homes (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). For Palestinians who fled to countries where UNRWA did not operate, they also were not registered as refugees (Hammer, 2005). Another event, the *naksa*, “the year of the setback” (Schulz & Hammer, 2003, p. 38), begat many refugees and occurred in conjunction with the Six Day War of 1967. While some Palestinians fled as a result of the fighting, others were not allowed to return to the West Bank or Gaza following the war. For those who were not physically present on their land during the war, for reasons of studying abroad, working overseas, or other reasons, they lost the rights to live on their land (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). The Six Day War of 1967 produced a new generation of refugees and non-refugees with a renewed set of dire consequences for those living in the West Bank and Gaza, but also for those living in Jerusalem, as the War of 1967 led to the annexation of 70 square kilometers of the West Bank, which now includes East Jerusalem and its outlying areas (“In Pictures,” n.d.). Following this annexation, Palestinians living in Jerusalem were declared permanent residents of Israel, a new category of people, who have rights comparable to foreign citizens who have come to Israel (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). For those who stay outside of Jerusalem for more than 7 years, however, their residency can be revoked (Schulz & Hammer, 2003), leaving them without a place to call home.

Young Adults in the Palestinian Diaspora

Another body of research is included in Hammer's (2005) research among Palestinian young adults between the ages of 16 and 35. This group of young adults is

also specific in that each is the offspring of one or more parents who are from Palestine, and each has moved back to Palestine after spending their childhood in a host country. Her objective is clearly stated: “This study is an attempt to show the young faces of the Palestinian Diaspora, those who had to create their Palestinian identity without having lived in Palestine” (Hammer, 2005, p. 6). Although another valuable study among an under-researched population, it spans the entire diaspora and does not include Palestinians currently living in the United States.

In her study of Palestinians in the diaspora, Hammer (2005) says, “While studying Palestinian migration, I was startled by the fact that Palestinians all over the world have, to different degrees, managed to pass on a sense of Palestinian identity to their children since 1948” (p. 4). The year 1948 is significant for two reasons, similar to a double-sided coin. This is the year of the founding of the state of Israel, but among Palestinians the events surrounding this creation are collectively termed the “Nakba,” or translated into English, the “Catastrophe.” The events of 1948 created the world’s largest and longest suffering refugee population (Al-Awda, n.d.). Hammer’s research reveals that identity among the Palestinian community, regardless of members’ placement on the globe, is faithfully instilled across generations.

In her research Hammer touches upon a recurring motif regarding the idea of identity among Palestinians living in the diaspora—the notion of an identity forged entirely around a place in which one has never lived or possibly even set foot. A national identity can be partly defined by what is lacking rather than what has been experienced. Turki (1994), a Palestinian writer who grew up in Lebanon, pinpoints this idea:

So it was in the land of others, in the place where it was not, that Palestinians found their peoplehood. For the Palestinians did not truly become Palestinian until their country was dismembered and its population scattered to that state of having escaped. Our name was born in exile, not the home-ground. (p. 160)

According to Turki, the identity of a Palestinian is that of one who has known a place from a distance. This identity is significant for the many Palestinian American young people who have never even set foot in Palestine, but who still identify strongly with a Palestinian identity.

In his exploration of Palestinian identity, Khalidi (1997) speaks to the connection of land and identity. He admits the difficulty of understanding this connection when perceived through an American perspective. He says:

It is difficult to convey how dense can be the associations with place in a society like that of Palestine, and especially difficult to do so when the referent is American society, in much of which mobility has greater value than rootedness. In Palestine and other Arab countries, these local associations are still meaningful to the degree that people can often be easily identified as to their place of origin by their family name, and to some degree remain identified with these places, even if they have never lived there. (p. 153)

According to Khalidi's description, land is a place of rootedness and belonging—even for those Palestinians who have never lived in Palestine and have known it only as a result of what they have been told. Al-Barghouti (1998) speaks to this by identifying the generations of Palestinians who have grown up hearing about every nook and cranny of

Palestine through verbal descriptions from others, but who remain strangers to the land itself. He says:

The occupation has created generations of Palestinians who are strangers to Palestine, generations who are familiar with every alleyway of their places of exile but who are ignorant of their homeland. . . . These generations are condemned to love an unseen lover, a distant, difficult lover separated from them by guards and fences and sleek terror. The occupation has transformed us from the sons of Palestine into the sons of the idea of Palestine. (Al-Barghouti, 1998, pp. 60-61)

Each writer points to generations of Palestinians who have known Palestine from a distance and returned to this place only in a figurative, intangible sense, and never with the sense of ownership that a resident might feel.

Summary

Chapter Two provided an examination of the literature surrounding this study. The chapter began with research and theories surrounding adolescent identity formation, including ethnic identity development, by focusing on the identity theories of Erikson, Marcia, and Phinney. Also, this chapter explored the complexity surrounding the idea of what it means to be an American. Additionally, the chapter covered parallel experiences of immigrant groups to the United States focusing on Japanese, Sikh and Mexican minority populations. Finally this chapter provided a review of literature surrounding Palestinian American youth and Palestinians in the diaspora. Chapter Three will provide a thorough account of the methodology of the study.

Chapter Three

Introduction

In the context of United States public schools, second generation adolescents of Palestinian descent are participants in American culture and its diversity, yet they may also be the recipients of contradictory messages regarding their heritage. The research and studies explored earlier highlight the fact that while pursuing a livelihood in their country of citizenship, they may be the recipients of messages at school that may cause them to feel as though they are enemies or outsiders (Abu El-Haj, 2007). All the while, these adolescents are navigating both the American and Palestinian cultures, with one foot in each, but never fully belonging to either. This study will explore the ways in which Palestinian American students understand their schooling experiences, situated in the American cultural and political contexts.

This study of schooling experiences among second generation Palestinian American adolescents utilized a qualitative methodology. In her writing on qualitative research, Merriam (2009) identifies four orientations to research—positivist, interpretive, critical research, and postmodern/poststructural. This study employed a critical research orientation. When researching a problem, Crotty (1998) defines critical research as “a contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and research that challenges . . . between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a

research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression . . . between a research that accepts the *status quo* and a research that seeks to bring about change” (p. 113).

Additionally, critical research is inherently political and change-oriented (Patton, 2002).

This study is aligned with critical research because it is rooted in political and cultural realms concerning identity among Palestinian American adolescents, with an intent to critique, challenge, and bring about change. Because recent public opinion shows that American favor is not with Palestine, but with Israel (Saad, 2015), critical research theory is fitting as a method to unpack this reality and challenge these opinions and their manifestations within a public school setting in order to bring about change.

Merriam (2009) identifies multiple key concerns of qualitative research that were of first importance within the context of this study of the schooling experiences among second-generation Palestinian American adolescents. The first and foremost concern is that understanding springs from an emic, or insider’s perspective. Rather than understanding springing from the researcher’s perspective, understanding must come from the perspective of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Carefully balanced with the first concern is the second, which specifies that in qualitative research it is imperative that the researcher be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). I was the primary research instrument, rather than a survey, computer, or questionnaire. This is aligned with Maxwell’s (2005) words, “In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done” (p. 83). Therefore, to a certain extent, the results of this study hinged upon the tie between myself as a researcher with my participants. I did my

best to ensure the relationships that were established during this study facilitated the research design. In order to foster these relationships, I was transparent with participants and their family members regarding my reasons for carrying out this study, especially due to the sensitivity surrounding the issue of the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the inquisitiveness of parents regarding my choice of topic. Third, Merriam (2009) claims that qualitative research usually involves fieldwork in which qualitative research is concerned with an inductive research strategy, building theories rather than testing existing hypotheses. Finally, qualitative research produces something that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). These considerations served as guides for my qualitative study.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. In the context of selected American public high schools, what does being Palestinian American mean to second-generation adolescent students of Palestinian descent?
2. What are the views of Palestinian American adolescents regarding the ways in which their ethnic identities find expression in the context of U.S. schools?
3. What are the challenges that Palestinian American students face as they go through the U.S. school system?

Participants

The participants for this study included second-generation adolescents of Palestinian descent residing in Virginia, in a county located within the Washington DC metropolitan area with an ethnically diverse population characteristic of an urban area. I

chose second-generation adolescents rather than first-generation adolescents because this population is deeply interwoven into the American fabric. The study participants met the following criteria: 1) The individual is a U.S.-born second-generation adolescent of Palestinian descent; 2) The individual is between the ages of 14 to 19; 3) The individual attends a public high school; and, 4) At least one parent of the individual is a first-generation immigrant from Palestine or an Arab state.

Selection

After conducting five interviews I met two participants on the same day who were of Palestinian descent, each of whom had at least one Palestinian parent. One participant's mother was raised in Kuwait, and the other's parents were raised in Lebanon. I was unable to interview these participants because their parent(s) were not born in Palestine, and I knew that I needed to amend my participant criteria so that I could include these two young people who each had a story to tell. As a result, I amended my criteria to expand my population to participants who have at least one parent who is a first-generation immigrant from Palestine or an Arab state. This change was essential as many Palestinians grew up in Arab countries and were never allowed to hold the citizenship of the countries in which they were born.

I utilized these criteria for choosing my participants in agreement with Erikson's (1968) identification of adolescence as a pivotal time in relation to identity development when "the process has its normative crisis in adolescence, and is in many ways determined by what went before and determines much that follows" (p. 23). Based on the importance of this stage of development, the population that I chose was a rich

resource of information from which to glean what is happening in the process of ethnic identity development. I chose to focus on ethnic identity, interviewing second-generation Palestinian American adolescents of Palestinian descent. Therefore, I did not limit the sample in relation to religious identity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, refugee status, or other criteria in order to attract a broader sampling of participant perspectives.

Sampling

Prior to this study, I had never met 10 of the 12 participants. As a middle school teacher in the county of study of my participants, I knew two of the participants by association, having met them in my school when they were younger. They were never in my class or my extracurricular activities, however, so any association was solely facial recognition. In order to reduce any influence as a teacher that students may recognize, or as a researcher, I was transparent with my participants regarding my reasons for conducting the interviews, stating that I had been a volunteer in Palestine and was interested in learning more. Additionally, I was open to answering any inquiries that the participants may have had regarding the interviews. I was also open to answering any inquiries that parents may have had when I met in homes with participants for interviews.

For the purpose of this study, the most suitable method for seeking potential participants was through purposeful sampling. Merriam (2009) identifies purposeful sampling's importance by clarifying: "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Patton (2002) identifies the importance of utilizing information-rich cases, or "those from which one can learn a great

deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 46). As I searched for participants for my study, I made constant use of the counsel of others who referred participants to me who were information-rich (Patton, 2002) for the purposes of this study. In conjunction with this process, I submitted paperwork to the university Institutional Review Board that clarified the criteria surrounding the selection of my participants and it was approved.

Data Collection

Sources of Data

The data collected in this study came from several key sources. Primarily it included semi-structured interviews with 12 Palestinian American high school students. I conducted one interview per student. Additionally, I collected data via a record of memos that I typed onto a Microsoft Word document each day following the interviews in order to record my impressions, frustrations, and other reactions. Creswell (2008) defines memos as:

notes the researcher writes throughout the research process to elaborate on ideas about the data and the coded categories. In memos, the researcher explores hunches, ideas, and thoughts, and then takes them apart, always searching for the broader explanations at work in the process. (pp. 447-448)

Methods of Data Collection

The primary source of data was interviews with the participants, followed by the memos that I wrote the same day of each interview. The interviews were varied in length, ranging from approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour 44 minutes, depending on how much

each participant chose to share, and each featured a variety of questions (See Appendix C). Each interview featured background information about each participant (“What is your year in school?” and “How many years have you attended your present school?”), then moved to open-ended questions (“What would you identify as your heritage?” and “When someone asks you where you’re from, what do you say? Why?”). The interviews also included more detailed, probing questions (“Have you ever experienced a conflict with a peer at school regarding your culture, religion, and/or family background?” and “As a Palestinian American student, do you think that your experiences at your school are different from the experiences of your non-Palestinian American friends? Can you explain?”). A variety of questions provided rich responses for the data collection process.

The locations for the interview were varied. The site was subject to participant preferences. All of the participants except one invited me to their homes to conduct the interview. The remaining participant met me in a restaurant.

In addition to the interviews, a source of data was analytic memos, which I wrote on the same day of each interview after conducting each interview. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) note that analytic memos can be developed for many topics. This study utilized memos for several specific purposes that Saldana notes, such as how one relates to the participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, p. 96). For example, a memo that I wrote following an interview allowed me the opportunity to process my experience of stereotyping a participant based on some of his comments, my consequential surprise when he nearly cried when he talked about his family living in Palestine, and my realization that I had prejudged this participant and was incorrect in my premature

assessment of him. The memo following this interview allowed me the opportunity to reflect upon my own biases and make corrections that were sorely needed. Additionally, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) mention analytic memos as identifying problems with the study, as well as personal or ethical dilemmas with the study. I also experienced problems in my study that the memos helped me to reflect upon, such as the desire of a set of parents to be present in the room during the interview at different times. Processing the experience after the fact in a journal of memos helped me to think about how to proceed in the future if a comparable parental situation were to occur.

This ongoing journal or analytical memos was something that I completed at home the same day after each interview, and it allowed me to evaluate successes and failures along the way. For example, when I had an interview that did not go as smoothly as anticipated, which was often, I was able to think aloud in the journal about what to do differently in the future. Additionally, one of the most significant functions of the memos was that it brought to light my own pre-conceived ideas. After I began my interviews, for example, I was concerned that I had built the case for a problem that did not exist amongst my population, based upon the responses that I was receiving to my interview questions. Once I began transcribing and combing through my data, however, I realized that although my participant responses were often more subtle than responses in similar studies that I read, they were indeed revelatory of problems that I did not anticipate and proved that there were more stories to be told and shared.

I utilized member checking with each participant to ensure validity. I asked follow-up questions with participants during the interviews. For example, when Nour

mentioned her friends as having a culture to live by, I was unsure of what she meant. As a clarifying question, I asked: “What do you mean ‘culture to live by?’” Additionally, I restated information given to me by the participant in order to make sure that I accurately understood what they said.

Data Analysis

As a means of capturing the data, each interview was recorded onto my iPhone “Voice Memos” program. Additionally, I used a back-up, hand-held recorder to capture all of my interviews. As I was working through interviews with participants, I transcribed each interview verbatim onto a Microsoft Word document. I began transcribing as I was working through interviews, and I finished transcription after all of the interviews were complete.

After transcribing my data, I coded the data by hand and discovered dozens of codes that emerged from the data. Some examples of emergent codes included Hlc (home language of the child), Hlp (home language of the parent), Aoh (Arabic outside of home), and Faa (feelings about Arabic). Following this process of coding, I looked for themes among the codes and sought to group codes into broad categories. For example, codes pertaining to terrorist jokes from “others,” terrorist jokes from others in-group/non-Muslims, and terrorist jokes from other in-group/Muslims were grouped together into a broader category regarding terrorism used as humor. During this process, I differentiated between codes related to the study and discrepant evidence, as some of the information shared in the data included extraneous information not related to the study. For example, some of the participants shared regarding their personal experiences outside of the United

States, which did not tie in directly to the research questions that pertain to their experiences in the United States. Additionally, some of the discrepant evidence shared was not directly tied to the study—for example, a participant sharing about her friends’ preferences for mangos. After combing through the data and establishing categories, I used large adhesive notes, divided each note into two halves, and taped them onto my wall. On each half, I wrote the name of a potential category. Then, using small adhesive notes I went through my data and wrote down quotations and references to quotations and posted them under the correct category. Following this method, I was able to further group the categories using inductive analysis to look for possible intersections and relationships between the categories, while noting preliminary themes. I moved the adhesive notes containing the themes, quotations, and references to my writing space, where I was able to further expound upon the potential themes. At this stage, for example, ideas related to terrorism used as humor were conjoined with ideas related to fear, social isolation, and discrimination and were gathered together under the theme of “sources of taboo.” The themes that emerged served as the exoskeleton for Chapter Four. As I transitioned to synthesizing my findings, I created pseudonyms for each participant in order to protect their identities.

Validity Issues and Limitations

Every study has inherent, potential threats to validity. For this study, research bias, interpretation bias, reactivity, and my data collection timeline included threats to validity. In order to minimize these threats, a plan in response to each concern is provided.

Research Bias

My arrival at this topic of study is the result of my own experiences on both a personal and a professional level. I spent two months in Palestine where I became familiar with the occupation and the inequities and difficulties that it presents upon life for Palestinians. I taught English in the West Bank towns of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour and learned firsthand about the difficulties of everyday life presented by a military occupation. I also went on a delegation through Interfaith Peace Builders that traveled throughout Israel and Palestine to learn about grassroots peace efforts on the ground. Additionally, I am an ESOL teacher, and I have deep-seated empathy for students who may feel that they cannot be themselves at school because their identities will not be celebrated by their peers, teachers, or administrators. I am aware of these biases within myself.

I do not consider myself an insider where this study is concerned for two reasons. I am on the outside looking in, as I am neither Palestinian nor Arab American. My own heritage is Pennsylvania German, and so I am not able to understand the participants' responses as an insider or one who has known comparable life experiences. Additionally, as both a researcher and a teacher, I am not a peer of my participants, who are high school students. I am a researcher trying to bring the voices of these students to life.

I am also a teacher who has a passion for students whose families have immigrated to the United States, many of them with ethnic identities not necessarily welcomed onto American soil following the experiences of September 11, 2001. This is my bias, added to my experiences in Palestine as an observer, and in order to move

beyond my own bias as much as I could while collecting data, I needed to perform member checks to make sure that I was understanding my participants' responses from an emic perspective, concentrating on the participants' perspectives rather than my own as a researcher. I made certain that I followed up with my participants for clarification during interviews to be sure that I understood what they had to say, in an effort to minimize my own research bias. Additionally, I used my analytical memos as a means of working through my own thought processes and emotions.

Interpretation Bias

I served as the primary research instrument (Merriam, 2009), and therefore I was the only source in charge of my data. In order to keep my own interpretation bias to a minimum, I participated in regular member checks during the interviews. With the intention of keeping my own interpretation bias to a minimum, member checks proved instrumental as I worked slowly with each participant during each interview, asking clarifying questions and restating information to my participants in order to ensure that I was correctly understanding what they had to say in an effort to reduce my own bias and interpretation.

Reactivity

In order to minimize reactivity, I was specific about my role as a researcher, especially for those participants who may have remembered me as a teacher in a school that they formally attended. This reinforced Maxwell's (2005) insistence that "the research relationships you establish can facilitate or hinder other components of the research design, such as participant selection and data collection" (p. 83). Additionally, I

asked my participants questions that elicited memories of personal experiences. In this way I was able to reduce the opportunity for participants altering responses to match what they may have thought I wanted to hear, rather than what they could share about their own life experiences.

Data Collection Timeline

Finally, this study had limitations in the area of validity. I experienced an unusual circumstance with the Office of Program Evaluation within my county of study. While collecting data, I utilized member checking with each participant during each interview to ensure validity. I asked follow-up questions to be sure that I understood what they had to say with accuracy. Once I was transcribing, however, I learned that my research sponsor in my county of study was ready to retire at the end of the school year. As a result, when I inquired as to whether or not I would be able to contact my participants if I extended my research into the next year, it was recommended that I complete all data collection by June and not extend, since my sponsor was ready to retire. Therefore, I was unable to follow up with participants after June while transcribing, since the period of my data collection had expired and I was no longer sponsored. Nevertheless, I am confident that thorough interview protocol and hours of accurate transcribing allowed me to move on with the data analysis.

Summary

Chapter Three provided an outline of the methodology for my qualitative research study. This chapter provided three research questions relating to Palestinian American adolescents and their high school experiences. It also provided an identification of the

research study participants and the criteria used for their selection, as well as an in-depth look at the data collection procedures for this critical research study. Additionally, it addressed the specifics of the data analysis. Finally, this chapter provided information regarding validity issues and limitations of the study. Chapter Four will include a comprehensive examination of the results of this study.

Chapter Four

Introduction

Chapter 4 will examine the results of this study. Multiple themes emerged based on data analysis that will be discussed in detail. The themes encompass broad ideas, which are elaborated in detail. “The Meaning of American” was the first theme that stood out from the data, which expounded upon the many complexities of being an American. Next, “Whitewashed” arose from the data as an additional theme, highlighting the difficulties involved with skin color and a population’s acceptance or rejection of the label given to the color of their skin. “Palestine as Home” was another result of the data analysis, which discussed the idea of participants’ attachment to a place that they knew to be home, even if home was a place where they had never set foot. “Sources of Taboo” was gleaned from the data as participants discussed items of taboo and discrimination that occurred in their school experiences. The theme of “Strength in Diversity” emerged and explored participants’ school experiences and how the diversity of their schools’ student populations helped them to feel as though they belonged.

The Meaning of American

One theme that emerged from the data was the complexities involved around being an American. One of the interview questions was “What makes you an American?” (See Appendix A). Responses included “The fact that I was born here” (Saleh), “I was

born and raised here” (Muna), and “The fact that I was born here, the fact that I have pride being American ‘cause I have pride being Palestinian, but also I’m proud of being American, and I’ve lived here all my life, and I know it here” (Aliyah). Although the participants often used birth and the developmental years as a reason for being American, frequently throughout the interviews the idea of being fully American was fraught with complexity. It seemed at first to be a question with a simple answer, but once probed the idea became harder and more challenging.

When I asked Nour about what makes her an American, she responded, “Um, I was born here. Um, I lived her all my life. I can vote. Um, I have citizenship and that’s also my culture.” This was in step with multiple responses from participants. But when I asked her about how her life at home and at school were different, she said, “Different because um at home sometimes we speak Arabic, sometimes, I mean the culture is more like, um, easy to recognize, and there it’s just like American American.” When I inquired about the meaning of “American American” she said, “Like speaking English only. Um, you can’t really talk about like the different foods, like the Palestinian foods, the Palestinian dances and all that; it’s like a home thing.” Interestingly, to be “American American” was to be English speaking only. As one who speaks both Arabic and English, this is a category into which Nour is unable to fit if she includes both of her languages in her interactions outside of the home. Additionally, according to Nour being “American American” is not the inclusion of cultural markers such as Palestinian foods and Palestinian dances—being “American American” is the absence of cultural markers such as Palestinian foods and Palestinian dances. Although Nour was born and raised in the

United States, is a citizen, will be able to vote, and says the United States is also her culture, it is clear that for her to appear “American American” at school, she must leave her Arabic language, Palestinian foods, and dances at the door. Nour has an American passport, but her comment would lead one to believe that this does not qualify her as “American American” unless she is speaking English only, eating culturally American foods, and dancing culturally American dances.

Nour’s comments bring to light the complexities of America and what being an American involves. The United States has long been a haven for the immigrant and refugee. Additionally, there is no official language of the United States. One would imagine that in light of both of these facts, being “American American” would mean an embracing of ethnic foods, dances, and other languages. Nour’s comments make it clear, however, that her Palestinian heritage separates her and even has no place at her very diverse school setting. Her idea that “you can’t really talk about like the different foods, like the Palestinian foods, the Palestinian dances and all that; it’s like a home thing” makes it clear that there are some parts of her heritage that she feels more comfortable leaving at home before walking into her diverse school setting.

When I spoke with Ali about his friends, he mentioned the diversity of his friends as well. He referred to his friends who are Salvadoran, African American, and white American. Later, as he was going through a friend’s heritage a second time, he referred to his “white American” friend as just “American.” Ali’s description of his friends is important for two reasons. First of all, what is “white American”? It is a marker of skin color and residence, but not of ethnic heritage. It essentially eliminates any ethnicity as

belonging to his white friend. Additionally, when his “white American” friend is later tagged as “American,” it makes it clear that Ali’s idea of the true American is not the Salvadoran, nor the African American, but the American with white skin. As subtle as this may seem, it is important because it is these comments in passing that are revelatory of how participants perceive what it means to be an American, especially as adolescents who are developing their sense of identity in a multicultural society.

When I asked Saleh what it means for him to be an American, he responded:

The fact that I was born here. Like if any of my friends make a joke—“You’re not even an American” or something like that—I’ll be like, “I’ve been here longer than you” cause I’m older than most of my friends, just by a little bit. I was born in October ‘94, and that’s like the oldest in my grade I guess. So I’ll use that a lot.

For Saleh the issue of not being an American was something that was projected upon him by his friends. In jest he is accused of not even being an American, although he was born and raised in the United States, so in self-defense he often uses his age as a means of making himself belong as an American in the eyes of his peers. Furthermore, by defending himself as an American in the eyes of his peers, Saleh is claiming his American identity before them regardless of whether or not they perceive him to qualify as an American according to their standards.

It is thought-provoking that Saleh’s friends would tease him about not even being an American. When I asked him about the groups with whom he most closely identifies, he said of his peers:

I've grown up with them my whole life, like we went to school together since elementary, and we grew up in middle school and now we're together in high school. And we like, all know each other, and and you know, we always hang out. One of the things that he holds dearly is the fact that he and his friends have grown up together. Why, then, would they accuse him of not even being an American, if they have gone through each level of schooling side by side? What makes his peers more American than Saleh, also one born in the United States? This teasing brings to light the complexities of being an American for many people of diverse ethnic backgrounds who were born in the United States. Many Americans, like Saleh, were born and raised in the United States and as citizens enjoy the nation's privileges, yet they are perceived as un-American. While no one except for Saleh's friends can account for why they tease him in this way, one is left to wonder why Saleh's friends would accuse him of being less American than they are.

When I asked Rana about what she thought Americans would think of Palestinians, she responded by using the phrase "pure white American." As she responded to the idea of what Americans would think of Palestinians, she said;

I think most people would assume terrorist Muslim extremists, like peo—, like pure white American I guess that's the first thing who don't know really much of what's going from listening to the news and always hearing oh, bombing, Palestinian Muslim, especially after September 11th.

The phrase "pure white American" is noteworthy, as each word is nuanced with meaning. A "pure" American is presumably one that has not been mixed with anything else. A

“white” American is one defined by skin color. This phrase stands out because not only does Rana put herself into a category of one whose ethnic identity sets her apart as one who is not pure where being an American is concerned, it also delineates the idea that being white and American are one and the same.

When I asked Rana about how she would describe Americans, she described the inner conflict for Palestinians living in the United States who “realize that we should be grateful for the life that we’re living here rather than living in a war zone.” But she also responded:

Yeah, I mean also Palestinians here who realize like, oh my life could be there, so they’re grateful type thing, so they’re not very cocky I guess. Whereas Americans, I don’t really think they have that knowledge or that experience.

In addition to her separation of Palestinians living in the United States from “Americans,” she claims about herself, “I’m different from how like, because I’m not purely American, I do have that Palestinian background, that Arab that, that I feel like my like, I wouldn’t class myself as purely American.” I probed into how she would disassociate herself from “purely American,” and she said:

I mean just the culture, I have a different culture, I, languages, like many people like they only know one or two languages, I can say I know three ‘cause I took French in high school. Um. The—I guess that’s it, just culture, heritage.

Rana is free to classify herself as she chooses. But her comments add to the confusion that can accompany the experience of being an American, interestingly enough even in a county as diverse as the one in which she lives and studies. Although the United States is

a nation of immigrants, a culture composed of communities from around the globe, Rana makes it clear that her Palestinian heritage and her ability to speak multiple languages keeps her from being “purely American.” If one’s ethnic heritage and multilingualism is incongruent with a purely American experience, what then is an American?

Nour offered an interesting sentiment on the subject of diversity. In response to an inquiry about her closest peers whose parents immigrated from India, Nour said that they have a “different culture than the norm.” I probed into the meaning of “the norm,” and she responded, “The norm being white.” This comment is coming from the perspective of the same person who said, “I feel like here . . . it’s very diverse and I can makes friends with like all the other like groups of people that come from other places and connect with them, too.” Although Nour appreciates the diversity of her school setting, she still perceives the norm as being white.

Nawal’s response to describing an American, though succinct, is telling: “I guess not, I don’t know, trying to be like, Americanized. Not Palestinian.” For Nawal, the idea of one’s behavior is a dichotomy of either/or. Either you act Americanized, or you act Palestinian. It is one or the other, as if they are antonyms.

Several of the participants were quick to point out that being an American is not belonging to a gelatinous and like-minded group of people. Indeed, when I asked Nour, “How would you describe an American?” she responded: “Um. That’s a hard question because there’s so many different kinds of Americans.” Additionally, Khaled spoke to difficulty of describing an American when he said:

America is like, this might sound more superficial or hopeful than it is, I mean America is pretty diverse so like, you could come to America and like and then seclude yourself in this entirely culture your own just your own people so you could come and it could be Mexican and stay in like a Mexican community, so I don't know if there is one recurring or if there is any set culture for Americans I guess.

In contrast to some of the other participants, Khaled shares his idea that being an American allows one to be fully engaged in one's own culture while still being an American since American culture is not "set," or well defined in itself.

One participant, Yasmin, shared a middle school experience in which a teacher forced a version of American identity upon her. Yasmin was standing in front of the class, and her Palestinian identity was removed from her as a result of her interaction with the teacher. She explained that she had to complete a project about where she is from, and she told the class that she was from Palestine but was born in America. Her teacher found this problematic, however, and challenged her on this fact. Yasmin explained:

She was like, if you were born in America, you're American. I was like no, I'm Palestinian but I was born in America. My parents are Palestinian. She was like, "Where were your parents born?" I was like, "They were born in Jordan and Syria." And she was like, "You're obviously not Palestinian." . . . I was like, "I'm definitely not American. I'm definitely not Syrian. I'm not Jordanian." I was

like, “I’m Palestinian because all my family before that, before my parents, they were all born in Jordan, I mean Palestine, and they lived in Palestine.”

Yasmin recounted the ensuing argument that took place. In the end, she said that the teacher declared, “In America, in American rules where you’re born is where you’re from.” And I was like, “Whatever.”

In this example, Yasmin’s teacher explained to her a set of rules of what it means to be American. These rules are of the teacher’s own creation, and yet she forced Yasmin to publicly renounce her own Palestinian heritage in order to claim an American heritage instead. This is another example of either/or—either you are of one heritage or another, but you cannot be either both or even identify as being from somewhere else.

In summation, the idea of what it means to be an American is very complex for these participants. Although each one of them was born in the United States and is attending high school in a very diverse school setting, the idea of being an American is still multilayered. For Nour, she even coined a new phrase—“American American”—to describe English speaking only, with the absence of her Palestinian heritage cultural markers. Nawal went so far as to describe an American as “not Palestinian.” Rana referred to a “pure white American,” and Yasmin even had her middle school teacher dictate for her how an American is defined. These participants’ experiences are evidence of the fact that the American identity is not easily defined and can be a point of tension.

Whiteness

In connection with the complexity of being an American is the complexity of the subject of whiteness. Palestinian Americans are considered “white” according to the

United States Census Bureau (n.d.). However, the interview data of this study quickly reveals that Palestinian Americans do not identify as white. Aliyah is a prime example of this point. When I asked her, “What groups of students do you most closely identify with at school?,” she responded, “The white people.” Through the interview she referred to her schooling context by mentioning the Arabs and Palestinians, but here she refers to white people as a separate population. In another part of the interview, she referred to her “half Turkish, half white” friend at school. According to the United States Census Bureau, the Turkish student is also eligible for the “white” box to check on the census, and yet Aliyah identifies her friend as half-white. Aliyah differentiates whiteness as not belonging to her own personal identity.

Additionally, Aliyah brings another facet of whiteness into the discussion—acting “white-washed.” As Aliyah was talking about her friends’ response to her religion and ethnicity, she commented, “Let’s see, they haven’t really said anything about my ethnicity. They kind of make, they say that I’m like white-washed now.”

Unsure of what “white-washed” meant, I inquired and learned, “I don’t really act very Arab. Or I think I do, but they don’t think I act as Arab as like they would think I would”. Unsure of what “acting Arab” meant, I probed a bit further and she said: “I guess I have no idea. Kind of just um, I don’t know you talk different, you say different things, I don’t know.” I offered to come back to this question at the end of the interview, when a clearer idea of what “acting Arab” meant was presented to me:

I think people whenever they think Arab, they all automatically think like I don’t know how to, like fob, like fresh off the boat, like you act differently. And um I

know my friends they kind of make fun of me cause sometimes I say things, like Muslim things or Arab things, like “Insha’Allah” and stuff like that, and they’ve, they’ve gotten used to it cause I tell them what it means once. And I say it all the time, and it’s just, they don’t even notice it anymore. So that’s why I feel like I, I’m kind of whitewashed, but I act Arab because it’s just, it’s like a culture.

Aliyah’s ideas about “acting Arab” became clearer at the end of the interview, and her definition of acting Arab was not of her own thinking but it was according to what other people think about acting Arab, specifically her friends. Additionally, it is important to note that it is Aliyah’s friends who accuse her of acting white-washed. They play a role in distinguishing her as set apart from those with white skin. Aliyah’s peers obviously play a big role in helping her to define and distinguish her ethnic identity.

One item that stands in contrast to other participants’ interviews is that Aliyah refers to acting “white-washed” in contrast to “acting Arab.” For some other participants, the dilemma was more a contrast of acting “American” rather than “Palestinian.” Aliyah’s dilemma of how to behave is based on race rather than country of residence—white or Arab? When I asked Aliyah about what makes her Palestinian, she said, “The fact that I, I act like it cause I might, I may act white-washed, but I also act really Palestinian.” Aliyah’s comment is a stark contrast to the reality of the United States Census Bureau, since Palestinians are considered white in the census. However, for Aliyah, acting white-washed and Palestinian are two totally different ways of conducting herself.

Other participants echo the dilemma with whiteness. When I asked Ali how people at his school would describe him, he remarked, “They wouldn’t, they don’t even

look at me, Middle Eastern, they would never think I would speak Arabic, any near there; they always think I'm like white or Italian. I get that most of the time." For Ali, he refers to himself as Middle Eastern, while "white" is a label that he would receive from his peers.

Sahar echoed a similar sentiment. In reference to her school she said, "Everybody's like, there's Arabs, Asians, black people, white people, everybody's there. It's very diverse." Sahar listed Arabs and then listed white people in her enumeration of the different racial groups at her school. It is significant to note that Sahar differentiated Arabs and white people in her listing. In doing so, as an Arab American, she conversationally distanced herself from the white people group. As an Arab American, Sahar listed the white people as those other than herself.

For participants of this study, it is clear that what they may check on a census box has little to do with how they self-identify or who they perceive themselves to be. Not once did a participant in the study refer to him or herself as white. The topic of whiteness is an important topic because it is an example of a title being forced on a group of participants who are quick to disassociate with this term. There is a dichotomy between the label that they are given—white—and the other ways in which they choose to self-identify. Self-identification has numerous possible facets, including the idea of home and how one identifies with this place.

Palestine as Home

This study examines the Palestinian American identity among selected high school participants. Repeatedly throughout the study is the idea of Palestine as a

homeland. This is consistent with participants who have been to Palestine as well as those who have never visited.

In this study, the phrase “back home” was utilized. This is significant because each participant was born in the United States. None of these participants were born in Palestine, nor did they grow up in Palestine. Not all of them have visited, and for those who have, visits were temporary.

When I inquired of Sara as to her experience of growing up in the United States, she said: “Growing up in the United States is the, it’s like, I think it’d be like a better experience than growing up back home. Because it’s um, ‘cause back home they’re like experiencing wars and the kids would get traumatized.” Although she was born and raised in the United States and talks about her experience growing up in the United States, still Sara refers to Palestine as “back home.”

When Muna discussed the differences between Palestine and the United States, she stated:

Here they would never let like a poor person walk the streets, they would like offer them homes and like, I know the government pays for like apartments for the homeless and stuff, they have like homeless shelters. They don’t have that back home.

It is interesting that although Muna has never visited Palestine—only Jordan—she still refers to Palestine as “back home.”

Participants in this study were asked the interview question, “When someone asks you where are you from, what do you say?” (see Appendix A). Of the 12 participants,

seven answered “Palestine.” One answered, “Half Egyptian, half Palestinian,” one “American Palestinian,” another “Palestine or Jordan,” and another “Palestine or Jordan or both.” Finally, when one participant answered the question of how she responds once asked where she is from, she said, “I ask, do you mean like, origin or where I live right now?” and followed up with “Sometimes I feel like I’m from Palestine, but I live in Vicksburg, and I was born in Adamsville.” Of all of the responses, each included a tie to Palestine as a place of belonging, regardless of whether or not participants had even visited this destination.

Although participants clearly have very close ties with Palestine as demonstrated through their responses to the question “When someone asks you where are you from, what do you say?” it is also clear from participants’ responses that although they are members of diverse communities, they are very aware that they come from a place that is misunderstood by the general American audience. Multiple participants responded that they did not think that most Americans know where Palestine is.

When I asked Nour about how she felt Americans in general would describe Palestinians, she responded: “I don’t think they know what Palestinians are. . . . They confuse it with Pakistan and stuff.” Ali shared a similar sentiment when I asked him about how he felt that Americans in general would describe Palestine. He responded,

To be honest I tell them, when a lot of people ask me where I’m from, I tell them Palestine; majority of people don’t even know or have never heard of Palestine . . . Pakistan, I would get that a lot, like oh Pakistan, I’d say no it’s Palestine.

Nour and Ali both acknowledge the frequency of Palestine being mistaken as Pakistan.

Some participants mentioned the difficulty of trying to explain their heritage to those who may not understand where Palestine is located geographically, to the point that they may alter their explanation to accommodate the listener's background knowledge. For Muna, her description of where she is from is contingent upon the background knowledge of the person asking the question. When I asked her how she answers when someone asks her where she is from, she responded, "I don't know, it depends like, how I met them or something. I don't know, I usually just say like Middle Eastern or or tell them half Palestinian, half Jordanian." For those who "don't know a lot about the Middle East," Muna responded that she chooses to simply tell them that she is Middle Eastern. Muna chooses her response regarding her heritage based upon the listener, as if she is tired of describing and explaining her background.

Aliyah talked about her cousin, who has a similar difficulty. She said, "Sometimes my cousin, she tells people that she's Lebanese 'cause she doesn't want to have to explain what Palestine is." In order for her cousin to avoid confusion and a long explanation, she bypasses her Palestinian heritage completely. Aliyah's family members were Palestinian refugees living in camps in Lebanon, but they were not Lebanese. The Lebanese identity, however, provided an easier answer for her cousin than having to explain where or what Palestine is.

In addition to a misunderstanding by the general American audience of where Palestine is, participants indicated a misunderstanding of the Palestinian people themselves. Several participants responded with a grim answer when I inquired as to how they felt most Americans would describe Palestinians. Saleh in particular noted the

political drudgery of seeking peace in the midst of conflict, saying that he felt Palestine to be a “lost cause” from an American perspective. He said:

I guess it’s just like maybe like a lost cause, like there’s no point to really defend them or help them, um, cause I mean what wars have been going on for 50 years or so. And every president just uses it, the duck, the sitting duck. . . . So, yeah, I guess they would just define most Palestinians as sort of like a lost cause, maybe just like people that don’t really need help or don’t aren’t really in a significant like significant enough to receive it.

Saleh, although very proud of his heritage, is still very aware that the country in which he is raised generally views his mother’s side of the family as a lost cause.

Khaled’s response to how Americans in general would describe Palestinians was also very forthright.

For the people who actually are aware I think they’d describe them the majority at least as like terrorists. I think they think that we’re, we are terrorists. Um like I don’t know, like another another whatever extremist factions to be squashed out, so like I think a lot of them draw a parallel between us and Al Qaeda. I mean just Palestinians in general, not even Hamas, not even just Hamas. So I think they think we’re terrorists, like to be dealt with like any anyone else.

Khaled identifies this forthright description with those Americans “who are aware.”

Essentially his description brings to light the fact that he believes himself to exist in a country that identifies him and those who share his heritage with members of Al Qaeda and other extremist groups. When I asked him how this differs from how he describes

himself, he responded, “A whole world.” Khaled is quick to completely disassociate himself with how the general American audience may perceive him.

While most participants appreciated the diversity of their school and had friendships in the very diverse community, the idea of solidarity was an important one, especially when one considers the strong words that multiple participants shared regarding how the general American audience misunderstands Palestine and Palestinians.

Saleh explained the importance of his Palestinian community at school:

I guess Layna and I and certain other Palestinians that I know feel like a sort of connection I guess with each other. Um, and, whenever the like, argument comes up I guess or just the topic in general of Palestine and Israeli, you kind of feel like your back’s against the wall sort of because of most of the people there have the opinion pro-Israeli, I guess, in that certain situation.

Saleh’s response makes it clear that his experience as a Palestinian American at his school has been isolating in that he knows that his opinions are different than “most of the people there.” It is clear that his relationships with other Palestinians at his school offer a place of belonging for him.

Aliyah offered a similar sentiment regarding her relationship with other Palestinians at school. She said:

Yeah and with Palestinians, it’s kind of weird, but we, I mean it’s not really something we talk about, you know, we don’t really talk about anything other than the fact that we’re Palestinian cause I think that living here, being Palestinian does mean a lot. . . . One of my friends, Emad, was Palestinian, and as soon as I

figured out he was Palestinian we became instant friends, but we never really talked about Palestine.

For Aliyah, her relationships with Palestinian friends are also important. In fact, she describes her relationship with her friend Emad as an automatic bond, even though they did not discuss the topic of Palestine. It is clear from participants' responses that their relationships with other Palestinian students at school are very important to them since they share a deep and common bond of ethnic identity.

Sources of Taboo

In light of the greatly appreciated diversity among the participants, participants often seemed hesitant to directly mention discrimination. After all, as members of diverse learning communities, participants appeared to be largely very content at their schools, evidenced by the many positive things that they had to say about their schools. However, in subtle places in the interviews, both overt and covert discrimination became apparent.

One example of discrimination that Rana described was under the pretense of no discrimination being present at her school at all—"There isn't any like discrimination or anything like; it's something I know like, Palestine is a very taboo topic." If there is not discrimination, why should Palestine be taboo? In this instance, Rana described an event at her school during her junior year where a Holocaust survivor came in to speak to students. Following this event, her father prompted her to investigate the possibility of his personal acquaintance coming to her school as a speaker, also a survivor, but of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, which took place in Lebanon in 1982. The Lebanese Phalangists, in collaboration with the Israeli army, killed approximately 2,000 Palestinian civilians

living in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps (Samaha, 2012). Rana recounted the school's reaction to her request:

Originally my government teacher, she was very open to it, and she like, "Oh, I'll talk to the rest of the history department." She needs to get like approval and stuff. . . . and every time I had asked her about it, she was always like, "Oh no, we still haven't decided." And like it kept on getting pushed off to the end where I was like I just stopped asking. I knew the end result anyways, like I knew, I had a feeling it wasn't going to happen. . . . Even though they're very open and they there isn't any like discrimination or anything like, it's something I know like, Palestine is a very taboo topic.

In this example, Rana was either unaware or unwilling to admit that there was discrimination at her school. If there truly is no discrimination as she claims, there would be no taboo. But because there is a taboo, it exposes the fact that discrimination does exist.

Religion presents a culture of its own, and participants often remarked on aspects of their faith as being important for them as far as traditions to be kept. The participants were representative of multiple faiths or belief systems. Multiple participants discussed their devotion to their Islamic faith and how that is important to them. Another kind of discrimination that is more subtle but very raw is that of social discrimination. In high school, one's social circles are very important and for the only hijab-wearing participant of the study, Yasmin, she noted the isolation that came with wearing the hijab at her school. Because she was the only participant who mentioned wearing the hijab, her

experience is not verified by other participants' experiences, but it is important to include.

All of my friends have their hair out, all the time, even my Arab friends. They don't wear it, and they are Palestinian. So I mean I was um, my parents made me wear it, but my dad doesn't know that I take it off at school. And my mom knows but she doesn't like it. But like I tell her because I don't want to keep it like a secret. . . . I remember when I went to eighth grade I wore it and I was like, it's going to be cool, and nobody spoke to me. Like, nobody, they were like oh that's quiet hijabi chick. And then like two days into school I took it off and I had a bunch of friends, and I was like, ok, that's the reason why.

This personal experience comes from a student who dresses very modestly. She has never worn a bathing suit, and she wears long sleeves and pants. She also shared that she was unable to join the volleyball team due to the shorts and being unable to show her neck in public. All of these clothing restrictions she shared freely, but the one place where she clearly drew the line was wearing the hijab. Why? Because once she took it off, her social circle was manifold. In an interesting twist, she said:

I'm not gonna lie—like when I see people with hijab in Highland I'll be like, oh they're quiet, and they don't like to make friends, but then I'm thinking, when I wore the hijab that's what I thought they were thinking of me.

As much as Yasmin felt that the hijab was inhibiting her social life, she realized that she was using the same standard of discrimination against other girls that she saw wearing the hijab in school. Although she noted three other girls at her school who wear the hijab, she

commented upon a remark that her teacher made: “I remember once one of my teachers was explaining it and she was all like, ‘I don’t know why you take it off.’ She’s like, ‘You’ll find a bunch of people.’ And I’m like, ‘You really can’t.’” Yasmin learned this to be true, not only by her own difficulty with making friends when she wore the hijab, but also by looking inside and realizing how her own perceptions of students wearing the hijab had come to mimic the perceptions of those who did not want to befriend her when she wore it.

Closely linked to the experience of discrimination is the feeling of fear. One participant, Khaled, shared an experience that was a solitary experience for him in terms of other participants but it is also important to note. Interestingly, it is not Khaled’s fear but that of his mother that keeps him from acting upon and speaking up for the things that he strongly believes in. His mother, a Palestinian, is afraid that her son’s political activism will attract the United States government’s attention. As a result of her intimidation in the face of the United States government, she encourages her son to lay low. Khaled began by sharing an experience in middle school where he wore the keffiyeh (the traditional Palestinian scarf) to school. He shared his mother’s reaction:

She usually tells me like don’t do anything just to provoke a reaction, kind of lay low so I stopped wearing the keffiyeh. . . . The most political oppression I’ve actually experienced is from within my own family. Like I’m not like silenced by the media, or like, I’m not silenced by my teachers saying:

“Khaled, can you stop talking about Palestine.” I don’t get that from them; I get it actually way more from my own house.

Khaled described himself as a “Facebook activist,” but even the activism that he felt prompted to act upon was inhibited by his mother’s fears. He described how he shared some items from a Facebook page called “Exposing Israeli Crimes Via Social Media,” and his mom’s reaction which was rooted in fear. He described his desire to share about other world atrocities such as the diamond mines of Sierra Leone or apartheid in South Africa, but he said: “Even that’s like, ‘Don’t rock the boat.’ It’s a very ‘don’t rock the boat’ mentality.” As a result of his own mother’s fears, Khaled has learned to be very cautious with what he shares because he realizes that the repercussions could be severe. He shared:

Whenever I’m like I’m going to say something over social media or the internet and that can be recorded, I’m always think, I think that I always think more than any other kid, how can this like, how can I be viewed by the US government like this? How how can I be viewed as terrorist, how can my words be misconstrued to be I don’t know, something like anti-American? So I’m always thinking about that.

Khaled is by far the most verbal participant that I interviewed, and his interview actually lasted much, much longer than any of the others. With all that he has to share, however, he has learned to hold his tongue. Fear, stemming from his mother, has given him a reason to be cautious. Raised in a home culture of “don’t rock the boat,” Khaled is very careful of what he shares online since he realizes that it could at any time be used as evidence against him that could portray him as a terrorist. In spite of his fears, he was

able to share openly for the purposes of this research study—perhaps because of the anonymity factor of the study that permitted him to speak openly.

Another source of taboo that surfaced in this study is that of terrorism. Terrorism was a recurring motif of this study. Although Khaled felt the fear of being painted as a terrorist as a means of silencing his desire to speak out about the things he felt strongly about, terrorism as an idea masked itself differently throughout the interviews. Most frequently, participants spoke of terrorism as a concept that is used commonly as a joke.

Two different kinds of jokes about terrorism surfaced throughout the interviews. The first was humor used among the in-group. The in-group includes one's friends. Saleh noted such an instance when I asked him if his closest friends had ever said anything that bothered him about his religion, ethnicity, or beliefs. He responded:

I mean a lot of the time they'll make jokes about it or like um, just like some of them are really bad, like really rude jokes, but I mean I mostly shake it all off. If there, if there's like a religious joke or something or like a terrorist joke or something, I'll like look at them and I'll . . . I don't usually don't take any of it to heart, it's mostly just humor and just kind of make fun of each other and just laughing around.

Later in the interview when I asked him if he had ever been discriminated against, he said, "There's been terrorist jokes or whatever here and there, but those are most of the times with friends."

Yasmin verified Khaled's experience with jokes made about terrorism by the in-group when I asked her about how others would describe her. She noted, "Um Arab I

don't know, they like mess around. They like when they're trying to make a . . . stereotypical joke they'll like say terrorist or something, and it's like they're not serious, but it's like a joke." When I asked her if these jokes were made by non-Arabs or Arabs, she responded, "Sometimes Arabs."

Khaled echoed a similar sentiment about jokes, but he offered his own explanation on why his friends make jokes. He said, "They're so past the part, like, ok like it's so like all Arabs are not terrorists so at that point it just becomes funny." He also offered insight into why his friends offer such jokes. He explained, "I guess cause they recognize that that stigma is out there and they realize how ridiculous it is and that's why we're able to joke about it so freely."

The other kind of terrorism humor that participants identified was out-of-group humor that was overheard but not directed at the participants specifically. Tariq shed light on an example of this kind of humor:

Well, yeah, you always have those terrorist jokes and whatnot you know. But that's like about it, no one really goes any further, cause no one knows, like you can't, like you can't joke around about what you don't know, so like if you hear terrorist attack on the TV, you're going to joke around about terrorist attack.

Tariq's use of the word "always" makes me it clear that he has frequently been witness to this kind of humor, even though he graciously dismisses it as the result of a lack of understanding.

Nour also bore witness to out-of-group humor directed at terrorism. When I asked her if she had experienced a conflict at school regarding her culture, religion, or family

background, she responded, “No more than the usual terrorist against Muslims, but it wasn’t against me. The comment, like, all Muslims are terrorists. But it’s a joke.” I probed regarding this response and she replied, “I mean, it’s like a common thing for people to say. But, I mean they don’t say it specifically to me, they’re say it to someone else but I’ll overhear.” What stands out from Nour’s comments is the fact that she describes these jokes using words like “usual” and “common.” These are obviously comments that she has heard time and again. Regardless of whether the terrorist comments are in-group or out-of-group, it is very clear that for these participants, overhearing terrorist humor is certainly nothing new.

Strength in Diversity

The participants of this study are students in a school system in a large metropolitan area with ethnic diversity that is characteristic of an urban area. Ethnic diversity is also prized among the participants and was a recurring motif mentioned time and again in interviews. For example, when asked about her experience at school as a Palestinian American, Nour said, “It’s very diverse and I can makes friends with like all the other like groups of people that come from other places and connect with them too, so, it’s not that bad.” When I asked Sahar what she likes about her school, she said “It’s so diverse. Everybody’s like, there’s Arabs, Asians, black people, white people, everybody’s there. It’s very diverse. “ Going even further, during her interview Aliyah stated, “I know people my age, we, it’s not that we don’t care but race, especially in my school, race isn’t, it’s not an issue. You know, cause we’re so diverse, we don’t see it.” Her statement drives the idea that diversity is so pervasive at school that race is neither

problematic nor even a filter through which students perceive one another. It is clear from participant responses that ethnic diversity is highly prized.

When I asked Khaled about his group of friends the ethnic diversity was the first thing that he mentioned:

So we're a very diverse group, so I guess like yeah like the stigma doesn't really have, any sort of stigma can't survive in a group that's so diverse. I mean it's not white-dominated, so we can't have, no one group can be discriminated against because there's no majority that can discriminate against the minority. There's no minority. They're really diverse, and like and we have fun.

Because of the diversity and the lack of a majority group, Khaled feels that there is protection for minorities from discrimination. Khaled, like other participants, greatly valued the diversity among his peers and approves of diversity as an asset because it protects him from discrimination.

According to participants, the diversity of their schools was a prized factor in their comments. Aliyah commented, "Yeah I mean, Arcadia is like really diverse, so so it's, you never feel out of place really." When I asked Khaled what he likes about his school, he said, "It's very diverse, very ethnically diverse and diverse ethnicities and viewpoints." Overwhelmingly, when participants spoke about their schools, they referred to them very fondly. When I asked Muna about what she likes about her school, she responded, "I think that compared to the other schools, it's a really good school. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else." Rana, who had just graduated, said, "I loved my school." Students' high praise is the best compliment that a school district can receive. In

light of students' affections for their schools, it is important to examine what this county is doing right. If students are feeling an atmosphere of acceptance, one must look at what participants note as helpful means for their positive school experiences.

The Role of School in Promoting Diversity

Participants' responses indicated several items that help to make their schools accepting of Palestinian American students as well as a diverse population in general. It is important to note that acceptance is fostered not only during school hours, but overwhelmingly in what happens after school. Rana's response makes clear the impact of clubs at her school that help to foster a feeling of acceptance among the student body:

We just have so many different clubs, like we have a black student alliance, we have a Muslim student alliance, we have there's some Christian groups, there's Amne . . . clubs. There's just so many different clubs. Amnesty, there's like so many that leave, like there's a place where you can find friends of similar cultures and because of this I feel like no one's judging or overly discriminative.

Rana's response makes it clear that her school makes a conscious effort to find a place where everyone can identify with the community, and this helps to eliminate discrimination and judgment.

Nour also verifies Rana's comments with her own thoughts about after school activities. She said:

They're all really div-, you have all the different sports, all the different like, the Amnesty club, all those clubs you can join and make friends, or you can

just walk down the hallway and see, and talk to teachers and students and they could refer you to each other.

Nour's response speaks to the fact that what happens after school is very important. After-school events help one find friends and to network, as well as to seek support and acknowledgement of one's differences, even in a diverse culture. After-school events also permit teachers and peers to network with one another in an informal context ("just walk down the hallway and see").

In her response, Aliyah mentioned the Muslim Student Association as a means of helping Palestinian Americans and/or a diverse community feel accepted at her school. In addition to this, she was a strong advocate for her school newspaper.

Yeah so that helps and the school newspaper, the school newspaper is really good and they bring up a lot of parts, a lot of pieces about just any culture in general. I think this year we did have a story about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. . . . Yeah and then we had another story about Syria, another story about an editorial's piece about being Muslim during this time.

I inquired as to the newspaper opportunities from Aliyah and learned that newspaper is offered as a both an in-school class and an after-school activity. Although Aliyah is not a member of the newspaper staff, she found the featured articles on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Syria, and life as a Muslim to be tools for helping students who may relate to these topics to feel as though they belong at her school.

Another popular activity after school that multiple participants mentioned as providing a sense of acceptance is the international heritage night often featured at

various district high/secondary schools. Khaled explained international night and the opportunities it affords in this way:

We actually have international night. . . . Everyone brings in food from their culture, and that's kind of like a gateway to expose everyone to your culture. Like oh, this is Palestinian cuisine. I mean I haven't done it, um, just cause I'm kind of lazy, but you can come like show them this is Palestinian cuisine and then that can like spur conversation.

The international night is a natural opportunity for people of different backgrounds to come together in order to share their foods, according to Khaled, and Tariq mentions his own family's participation in his school's international show by saying, "Then there's like a show portion, and my sister, my oldest one she would belly dance for them."

The international night is an important event for students to share their heritage. Participants often shared that there is a lack of knowledge among others regarding Palestine. Saleh shared:

If I say, um, I'm Palestinian Egyptian, like, where's Palestine? And they're like, oh isn't that uh, isn't that in Israel? Just something like that, just little stuff like that like, that's the knowledge that they have of it, you know that, that it's part of that or, that it's not actually a place.

To add to the confusion, Nour responded that Americans in general "confuse it with like Pakistan and stuff like that." An international night allows students the opportunity to share their Palestinian heritage with a community that has little understanding, according to participant responses. For those who Saleh interacts with who perceive Palestine as

“not actually a place” or who Nour meets who perceive her heritage as stemming from Pakistan, an international night at school gives students and opportunity to clear up confusion. It is of little wonder why students repeatedly mentioned their school’s international night as an opportunity for fostering diversity.

Participant responses regarding after-school activities are thought provoking because they are “extracurricular” and largely outside of the classroom and teacher sponsors’ formal contract hours. However, these activities are the result of teachers being willing to go above and beyond to sponsor clubs and international nights, even though it is extra work for them, often unpaid, so that students are better able to have a place to fit in at school. Any county can have a diverse population in which a number of ethnicities are represented. It is the many resources the county provides, however, that foster the sense of diversity and community that these participants appreciate at this county.

Inside of the classroom, Nour mentioned a world religions class as a game-changer at Radford High School. As she was saying “all Muslims are terrorists” and “It’s like a common thing for people to say. But, I mean they don’t say it specifically to me, they’re say it to someone else but I’ll overhear,” I asked her about her feelings when she hears someone say this. A class that her school has provided that has proven to be a support system for her when she hears such comments is the world religions class. When asked about her feelings upon overhearing such comments, she said:

Kind of annoyed but at the same time the program that our school is meant to like so many people took world religions this year, and it’s growing. And there’s like a Twitter for it and people are into, like, we start off the year by stating stereotypes.

And then the teacher, like, explains why they're wrong and we learn about the religion so I feel like in our school it's like, growing to learn about it and to understand that that's not true. So as we grew it didn't really happen as often. In the midst of negative comments regarding terrorism, Nour finds the school's world religions course to serve as an antidote to move the students forward and away from negative stereotypes.

In addition to the power of the world religions class as a source to remove stereotypes, Nour finds the class as a place to share her story. As the daughter of parents representing two religions, the world religions class gave her an opportunity to discuss her experiences and gain peer support. She shared:

A positive experience, just taking a world religions class and explaining my situation. Having a Christian mom and a Muslim dad and talking about Palestine and how they got married and move here. And stuff like that, I mean sharing that with everyone and having their support was really a positive experience.

For Nour, the opportunities afforded by the world religions class were truly transformative. Not only did she experience the course as a means of reversing negative stereotypes, but she also found it as a place to share her story. Nour was the only participant who mentioned a world religions class at her school, reminding teachers and administrators of the importance of providing opportunities in the curriculum for students to express who they are freely.

Another participant response regarding an item that speaks in favor of diversity and acceptance at school is the International Baccalaureate Program. The International Baccalaureate Program's website says that students who participate in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (for students in high school) will study at least two languages and increase understanding of cultures, including their own ("The International Baccalaureate," n.d.). Khaled shared his experience in the International Baccalaureate program:

I really don't experience any of that racism cause the classes I have are only with other IB students, and they're very, this program International Baccalaureate. . . . It teaches about all these different viewpoints Almost all kids have like these stigmas against Arabs but most of them they, they're very, they're very mature so they don't ever display those stigmas for me. So I don't really experience any racism I think at all. I've actually, I've experienced more support with about my Arab American heritage from them than anything else.

Khaled's statements reveal an interesting dichotomy—although he realizes that almost all of his IB peers have stigmas regarding Arabs in place, they do not give voice to those stigmas and thereby exhibit racist behavior towards him. The IB program exposes students to different viewpoints, giving Khaled's peers the maturity not to give way to racist remarks and therefore they are able, refreshingly, to give him more support than grief.

While programs, classes, and activities are important, it is noteworthy that specific interactions with teachers made an impact on students feeling like they belong in

their schools in accordance with their ethnic and religious identities. Saleh noted a positive experience with his coaches who are accommodating of his religious convictions:

I guess I've been really fortunate with the coach that I've had and the friends I've had. Like the coaches will unlock the door for me so I can pray like you know before practice or something or help me with whatever faith aspect I have to take care of. And they've been, most of the time they've been really understanding of it.

As one who identifies closely with his faith and also received “most athletic” in his senior accolades, the fact that Saleh’s coaches were willing to accommodate his religious convictions allowed two of his priorities—his faith and his athleticism—to work together thanks to his coaches’ understanding. Additionally, Saleh shared regarding one of his coaches whose comments towards Saleh were especially meaningful:

Yeah, my one of my the teachers that I was closest with my senior um he he like he I guess he respected me a lot for ‘cause he’s like um, he was, he said, “a lot like you were me, or I was you when I was in high school”. . . . In my yearbook when he signed it, like the last thing he wrote was like, “And always remember stay true to your faith.”

For Saleh, this experience sticks out to him as a memorable teacher interaction that encouraged him in the things that are most important to him.

Other participants echoed Saleh in that they mentioned the importance of teacher interactions. For example, Ali mentioned his history teacher who had visited Palestine.

“Basically we had a great conversation you could say. He was talking about how he had been to Palestine cause he was in the army.” This instance is one in that Ali identifies in which they “connected a bit.” Although this was a simple interaction, it was meaningful enough to Ali that he remembered this conversation with his teacher as he progressed as a student.

Khaled supported the meaningfulness of a teacher interaction as he talked about his teachers and said, “They acknowledge my Palestinian identity.” He described an instance from history class in which his teacher called on him specifically to explain a concept. He proceeded,

She’s even called on me to explain some things like we were talking about post-World War Two and how the Ottoman Empire was divided up. And she gave me the opportunity to explain to the class what happened with Palestine and Lebanon and Jordan and all of them and I explained it.

The aftermath of World War Two is a very important time historically in the region, as it is the period of history in which Israel was founded. As a result, it is notable for Khaled that his teacher called on him to explain this time period from his Palestinian perspective.

Summary

Chapter Four provided a discussion of the findings for the 12 participants. Themes emerged based on data analysis that were discussed in detail, including, “The Meaning of American,” an exploration of the complexity surrounding an American identity; “Whitewashed,” which delved into issues of race and color; “Palestine as Home,” which discussed the prevalence of Palestine as a homeland for participants;

“Sources of Taboo,” which discussed social boundaries transgressed in a high school setting; and “Strength in Diversity” and the comfort of belonging within a multicultural setting. Chapter Five will provide responses to each of the research questions and will discuss the conclusions of this study.

Chapter Five

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the study's findings, followed by an examination of the meaning of the findings in relation to the research questions upon which this study was established. The limitations of this study are included. Finally, implications and recommendations are provided for teachers, administrators, and future researchers regarding identity development among Palestinian American youth in the midst of secondary-school experiences.

Overview of Findings

This study examined the schooling experiences of Palestinian American adolescents regarding issues related to identity within a large, metropolitan school system. It is critical to understand the experiences of these students because Palestinian American youth are critically under-researched, misunderstood, and isolated, specifically in a post-9/11 era in which discrimination towards the Arab American community is keenly felt and in which Arabs and Muslims are the “new ‘problem’ of American society” (Bayoumi, 2009, p. 2). In light of the socio-political milieu, this study employed a critical research orientation, as identified by Merriam (2009), in an effort to explore both the political and cultural realms concerning identity among Palestinian American adolescents.

To investigate and highlight the identity development experiences of a select group of Palestinian American adolescents, the research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. In the context of selected American public high schools, what does being Palestinian American mean to second-generation adolescent students of Palestinian descent?
2. What are the views of Palestinian American adolescents regarding the ways in which their ethnic identities find expression in the context of U.S. schools?
3. What are the challenges that face Palestinian American students as they go through the U.S. school system?

In this chapter, attempts to answer and respond to each research question will be provided and discussed.

Being Palestinian American

In relation to the first research question, for the participants, Palestinian American identity was often multi-layered and very complex. Data revealed that the idea of being American, specifically, was often very complicated by itself. The term “American” was a term used for a variety of meanings. Although these participants were active members of a very diverse school system and each was born in the United States, identification with the term “American” was often conflicted, as it brought with it phrases that participants used to further clarify their idea of what qualifies as an American. Participants used descriptions of “English speaking only” and “pure white American” as ways to explain the reason for not feeling fully American, since they do not project the idea that they belong into either of those categories. Just as some participants’ responses provided

reasons for not feeling fully American, one participant highlighted the fact that this was not even a choice, as his friends made that decision for him by teasing him with words such as “You’re not even an American.” The participant in this case had to defend his own American identity with the fact that he was older than his friends and therefore by birth he had been an American for a longer amount of time than his younger friends, bringing up his conviction that you may become an American by birth. This complexity of defining “American” is experienced by many minority groups, mainly because of the way they look and the color of their skin. Tsuda (2014), in his study of Japanese Americans, learned from a participant that if you are not white, you are not fully American. Sikh Americans understand this phenomenon as males have suffered discrimination for wearing the turban (Basu, 2012). For those who are not white and English speaking, the word “American” is not always fully inclusive.

Identity with Palestinian culture was less divisive, as evidenced in participants’ responses to the question, “When someone asks you where you are from, what do you say?” Of all of the responses, each included a tie to Palestine as a place of belonging, regardless of whether or not participants had even visited this destination. In the context of American public high schools, participants in this study operated within the perception that he/she was tied to Palestine in some way. This idea of Palestine as a place of belonging is preeminent through the Palestinian diaspora, as evidenced by the many families who still hold the keys to their homes in Palestine that they were forced to abandon as refugees. The key is a symbol of the hope of return, but as Schulz and Hammer (2003) explain:

As time has passed and as exile has proved enduring, however, the hope and the dream have been transferred to the younger generation. Ceremonies have been held to hand over keys to the children. As the first generation came to realize that maybe they were not going back after all, then it was the children who would come home: “If we can’t go, then maybe our children will.” (p. 204)

Participants of this study are representative of the diaspora, as they look to Palestine as a place of belonging and a place that they know as “back home.” It is common in many Palestinian communities to refer to Palestine in this way and to transfer this idea to the children, because their children are not sure what to call this place. Is it Palestine or Israel? Is it an occupied territory and if so, where is it? Is it the West Bank or historic Palestine? The political stand that one may be perceived to take answering each one of these seemingly simple questions makes it easier to remain vague and call it “back home.” Older generations of Palestinians will understand that and transfer it to their children (Nasser, Berlin, Wong, 2011).

There are many children for whom the idea of home is complicated. The experience of calling Palestine “home” without having stepped a foot in it brings to mind the experiences of other groups of children, including the experiences of third-culture kids, who are also rife with issues of identity and belonging. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) define a third-culture kid (“TCK”) as:

A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are

assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background (p. 19)

As a result of these life experiences, third-culture kids live in a kind of alternative culture. Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) identify this as a “created culture that is neither the ‘home’ culture nor the ‘host’ culture; it is the culture between cultures” (p. 755).

The experiences of Palestinian American young people are consistent with literature on third-culture kids, as the participants of this study fit well into this idea of a created culture. None of the participants have ever lived in Palestine, and yet so many feel free to call it “home.” As children of at least one Palestinian parent who was born in Palestine or an Arab state, Palestinian American children move between cultures freely as they navigate their lives at home and at school, encountering multiple cultural milieus each day. To generations of children living in the Palestinian diaspora, whose grandparents and parents come from other countries and who also have conflicted experiences when it comes to understanding where home is, few can relate in the same way as a third-culture kid.

As a researcher, I understand the experiences of these children because I was raised as a third-culture kid. My father was in the military, and we moved every two-and-a-half years. To this day, I dread the “Where are you from?” question because I do not know what to say. Growing up, I lived in many places, but the one place that we always returned to was the place where my parents were raised: Pennsylvania. This felt like home to me, and yet, interestingly, it was the one place where I never lived. As a researcher, I have this common thread of understanding with my participants of what it

feels like to belong to a place and feel as though I am from the one place where I have never lived.

Expressions of Identity

In relation to the second question, “What are the views of Palestinian American adolescents regarding the ways in which their ethnic identities find expression in the context of U.S. schools?” the data revealed a variety of feelings regarding several themes related to ethnic identity. First of all, ethnic identity was a complex issue in that participants possess an identity belonging to a place that is often, at best, misunderstood. For example, some cited the confusion of others’ identification of Palestine as Pakistan. One shared that her explanation of her heritage was dependent upon the background knowledge of the person she was talking to—this defined whether or not she would use the term “Middle Eastern” or whether she would identify her Palestinian or Jordanian heritage. Another referenced her cousin, who, although Palestinian, would refer to herself as Lebanese because explaining what Palestine is proved too complicated. Even though all participants articulated a tie to Palestine when asked where they were from, identifying as Palestinian at school was not always easy, since Palestine was a land unknown to some participants’ peers.

Additionally, in the exploration of understanding how participants’ ethnic identities find expression within their schools, there was a variation of perceptions regarding how Americans in general perceive Palestinians. These perceptions were often reflective of recent polls (Saad, 2014 Saad, 2015) that were negative in regard to American response to the conflict in the Middle East. As it relates to ethnic identity

finding expression in the context of U.S. schools, multiple participants' perceptions of American opinions regarding Palestinians paint a very bleak picture. One young participant noted that most Americans would refer to Palestinians as a "lost cause." Another brought up the fact that he and others were perceived as "terrorist." On the other hand, however, participants reveled and found comfort in the diversity of their school system and saw this diversity to be conducive to a place of belonging for Palestinian Americans. Diversity was a redemptive factor for participants in light of living in a culture in which they knew they might be perceived as a "lost cause" or "terrorist." This study reveals that students felt as though they belonged in their school as Palestinian American among many other minority adolescents and that diversity was a key factor they shared with many and admired it as a way to enhance their senses of belonging. Diversity, as a safe haven for many groups in this urban area, is a place where differences are accepted and respected. It is a place where "otherness" is celebrated and being different is appreciated. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2012) recognizes diversity "as an essential component of any civil society. It is more than a moral imperative; it is a global necessity" (Purposes and Goals of the Standards section, para. 2). Based upon participant responses, it would appear that in this school system, diversity is prized as a global necessity. For the Palestinian American participants of this study, including those who have found avenues in their coursework to celebrate their heritage in world religions and social studies classes, the diversity that they enjoy at school is one of the few descriptors that makes them American after all.

Challenges

Finally, the third question, “What are the challenges that face Palestinian American students as they go through the U.S. school system?” brought to light the assortment of challenges that these participants face as they navigate the adolescent years and as they form their identities. One main challenge for Palestinian American adolescents includes an issue of racial identity, and the dichotomy of whether the identity is personally chosen or rather a societal label. For example, none of the participants told me that they are white. Phrases such as “Palestinian American” or “Arab American” were used as terms of self-identification, but never white. Yet, on their school system’s public access website, demographics are broken down into African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, multiracial, and white categories. Within what category do Palestinian Americans fit? If one were to ask the United States government, the United States Census Bureau (n.d.) specifies that Palestinian Americans are white. The United States Census Bureau (n.d.) defines white as:

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “White” or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian. (Race section, para. 1)

Nevertheless, the participants in this study knew that whiteness goes beyond the Census Bureau’s definition. Being white is partially skin color, but it is also a way of conducting oneself. Participants also indicated that it is English-language proficiency, not proficiency in another language.

Another challenge that Palestinian American adolescents navigate is the public perception of Palestinians and Palestine as taboo and their reactions to these perceptions. One participant articulated her experience of knowing that Palestine is a very taboo topic as she recounted her experience advocating for a family friend to speak to her classmates about the Sabra and Shatila massacre. Another articulated the fears of his mother regarding the degree to which he spoke freely on social media on issues related to Palestine, and also mentioned his own fears of how he can be viewed by the U.S. government in light of what he shares on social media. For him, his willingness to be a “Facebook activist” regarding issues that are culturally taboo came with a price tag—fear, grounded in legitimate concerns within the Arab American community regarding threats to basic civil rights and civil liberties in the aftermath of 9/11. The Arab American Institute (2015) makes note of the harm committed against the Arab American community in the wake of September 11 in light of numerous grievances: increased powers of search and seizure, racial profiling, indefinite detention, selective law enforcement, the use of secret evidence, lack of due process, and refusal of the right of habeas corpus. As a result of these measures used against Arab Americans following 9/11, the fears of the participants and their strategies of avoidance are legitimate.

Another challenge for Palestinian American students can present itself in relation to one’s physical appearance that symbolizes certain stands or beliefs, such as the hijab or the keffiyeh. One participant made it a daily choice of dodging what she perceived as the taboo of wearing the hijab to school as she took it off each morning before entering her school, without her father’s knowledge. She experienced loneliness while wearing it, but

instant friendships once it was gone. She knew that she needed to shed this religious symbol in order to fit in. Another interview participant experienced a similar situation as he wore the keffiyeh, which sent the message of a political stand for Palestine. For Palestinian American young people in this study, the taboos that they navigate each day within their school experiences are very real and present daily challenges. Each challenge is rooted in fear such as the fear of loneliness and social isolation in a period of life in which one only wants to fit in with other students. Those adolescents are rightly judging themselves in light of how others may perceive them (Erikson, 1968) and at the end of the day, it is the perceptions of others that override their actions as they submit to appearances that will be less provocative to their classmates.

Finally, the challenge presented as Palestinian Americans experience “humor” related to terrorism is important to note. Humor that is used to hurt and humiliate has no place in a school environment that is meant to be a safe place in which students are able to learn. Although this kind of humor is present both within the context of the in-group, or with friends, it is also present within the out-of-group, among those who are not necessarily friends or even acquaintances. Humor in general presents itself completely differently in any context depending on who is delivering the jokes—it is a far different experience to jest about something that is a sensitive issue with one’s friends than it is to bear the joke of a sensitive issue by someone who is not a friend and whose true intentions cannot be known. For any individual to overhear jokes such as Nour mentioned (“The comment, like, all Muslims are terrorists. But it’s a joke”) is more than anyone should have to experience. One participant mentioned “the usual terrorist” jokes, and

another referred to, “terrorist jokes and whatnot, you know” as nonchalant comments. Because schools are supposed to be a safe place for students to grow, the fact that this humor has taken root and become commonplace—even within the context of a school system with an exceptionally diverse student body—is problematic.

The participants’ reactions to terrorism as humor are consistent with literature on humor as a means of helping racial minorities to cope. The African American community, for example, uses humor as a means of explaining their reality, different from the reality for white people. Levine (1977) explains:

The experiences, the perspective, and the needs of many black Americans so often diverged from those of the majority of white Americans that their humor with its incisive commentary upon reality from the vantage point of black consciousness was not easily comprehensible to whites. (p. 313)

In this case, African Americans use humor that their community is able to understand in a unique way.

Jazmine Hughes (2015), an African American comedian, explains that humor is often used by racial minorities against white people in order to “placate themselves in the face of the overwhelming reality: It’s just better to be Caucasian” (p. 1). As these jokes are being told, however, she acknowledges that white people want to make jokes as well, but making jokes about themselves often backfires. Hughes (2015) says:

This is how the party ends—with white people wanting in on the joke so badly that they create a separate category of “cool” white people who mock their own whiteness in an effort at solidarity. “White people be like ‘white people be like,’

but they be the white people that white people be like!!!!” as one Tumblr post neatly summarized. (p. 9)

Hughes’ example capitalizes on the fact that white people are another group using humor to create meaning.

Just as African Americans and white people use humor in the midst of their circumstances, the Arab American community also uses humor to cope with difficult times in a unique way that their community is also able to understand. A recent event held in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah dubbed “1,001 Laughs” showcased seven Arab American comedians who were raised in the United States (Scheidlin, 2015). The comedic events were sold out, and in the midst of the routines, themes evolved such as explaining one’s identity, being stereotyped as a terrorist, experiencing difficulty with air travel, and the experience of life as an Arab or Muslim American (Scheidlin, 2015). A specific example included Amer Zahr, both a performer and a producer, who disclosed to the audience his childhood Christmas wishes to Santa Claus: the passage of Resolution 242 and 194 (Scheidlin, 2015). Additionally, he made light of the “VIP Lounge” in the Tel Aviv airport where Arabs often are sent (Scheidlin, 2015). Zahr credits the success of the events to the fact that “Palestinians love to laugh, and we know how to turn crazy and sad situations into things that make us laugh” (Scheidlin, 2015, para. 3).

Participants in this study acknowledged that terrorism is used as humor within their circles, and their attitudes are consistent with this festival in that they do not allow these jokes to submerge their confidence in their Palestinian American identities. The

data for this study reveals that these participants face unique challenges as Palestinian Americans as they enter through the school doors each morning, such as dressing in certain ways, presenting themselves and who they are based on who is asking, and dealing with terrorism-related humor. The list of challenges brings up questions for schools on whether they are equipped to make students' learning experiences as safe as possible, so that all students are comfortable in an environment conducive to learning.

Limitations

This study had limitations in the areas of participant criteria and cross-cultural bias.

Participant Criteria

This study had limitations in the area of participant criteria. As I prepared my proposal and submitted my materials to the IRB office, my participant criteria outlined that I would interview the following population via purposeful sampling: 1.) The individual will be a U.S.-born, second-generation adolescent of Palestinian descent; 2.) At least one parent of the individual will be a first-generation immigrant from Palestine; 3.) The individual will be approximately between the ages of 14-18; and 4.) The individual will be in a public high school within a specific Virginia county.

As I sought participants for my study, I utilized a community of personal connections in order to meet those who may have been eligible. What I encountered along the way was a helpful network of friends and colleagues who referred me to those within their circle who are Palestinian American high school students born in the United States and attending high school within the county of my study. I began the process of

interviewing participants. However, twice within the same day I met with two potential participants who belonged to the Palestinian American community who had one or both parents who are Palestinian but were not born directly in Palestine, but rather within the diaspora of the Middle East. Dramatically, when I met one of the potential participants in her home, I learned that one of her grandparents, who I met when I entered the home, had actually fled Palestine on foot in order to journey to Lebanon as a refugee. I left the family home severely disappointed, and I knew with conviction that my participant criteria had gone awry. A participant whose family member fled on foot to Lebanon, not of his own volition but as a refugee, should not have been excluded from my study, since she had much to contribute regarding her experience as a Palestinian American high school student. As a researcher beginning my study, I was faced with a serious dilemma and was forced to make a choice. Not including participants whose family members were dispersed among other Arab countries, even with the trauma of refugee accounts, consequently excluded participants whose stories also needed to be told. As a result, I amended my second participant criteria so that participants who had one or both parents who were Palestinian but born in one of the Arab states could also participate in my study. The two potential participants who I met previously and with whom I had to cancel our interviews graciously understood the circumstances when I explained to them initially why I had to cancel, and when they learned of my amended criteria, they were both glad to reschedule and participate. Amending my criteria was a crucial step for me because it allowed for me to interview participants who made a significant contribution to the study who previously would have been excluded.

Cross-Cultural Bias

This study also had limitations in the area of cross-cultural bias. In chapter four, the use of “white American” by my participant, Ali, was coined for the purpose of this study. As I combed through my data and went through my findings, I found myself wrestling with this term. Ali used this term in reference to others, as if he did not belong in this category as a Palestinian American youth. I am one who would fit into Ali’s term “white American,” the term with which he referred to others and not himself. My own heritage is Pennsylvania German, and my parents and grandparents were born in the United States. As a fourth-generation American who is also Caucasian, I also find myself distancing from the label of “white American.” It essentially eliminates my cultural heritage as well, as if my relatives came not from a country in Europe but from the country of white. As I reflected upon my experience as a researcher in this study, wrestling with the term “white American” was really challenging for me, as it pushed me into a gelatinous group of people that is categorized by a white skin color, when actually there is a wealth of diversity.

Additionally, as I processed my experience as a researcher, another thing that was really difficult for me was interacting with the topic of terrorism used as humor. The idea of terrorism used as humor by the out-of-group members was appalling to me, but it was not surprising to me that it occurred. I suspected as much. There are two reasons for this fact. As a middle school teacher, I am well aware that kids can be unkind to one another. Additionally, people are afraid of what they do not understand. For those who may be unfamiliar with Islam or Arabs and who may make inaccurate assumptions about these

people groups based on media events, they may mask their misunderstandings with humor. Racial slurs and slandering are not new, although they are appalling. But what was surprising to me, however, was the use of terrorism as humor by the in-group, or other Muslims or Arabs among my participants' acquaintances. In my own set of assumptions, I thought that this topic would be clearly out-of-bounds as offensive and wrong. As a result, I was really surprised when I learned that terrorism was a topic freely used and tossed around as something humorous. It was difficult for me on a personal level to suspend judgment where this humor within the in-group was concerned, since my own filter was so sensitive to this type of humor as inappropriate for anyone and everyone.

Finally, this project shone a contrasting light on how these participants perceive their heritage versus how I perceive my own, particularly those who have never been to Palestine. Multiple participants in this study have not had the opportunity to travel to Palestine, and yet they cleave to their heritage in a very real and meaningful way. As an American whose descendants are largely from Germany, I also have never visited the country of my ancestry. However, it is not an ambition that I have, and I feel no real connection to it. This is a stark and humbling contrast to my participants who feel so connected to a place that they also have never been.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study are intended to support a body of research regarding a population about which research is sorely lacking. The implications of this study will help to advance a body of research about Palestinian American adolescents that can

inform teachers and school administration about how to best meet the needs of this under-researched community. Consequently, four major recommendations are provided based on this study's findings. These recommendations are the product of the research data as well as the process of data analysis.

The research data suggests that what happens within school walls is instrumental to ethnic identity development for Palestinian American adolescent students as they navigate their secondary-school experiences. Participants mentioned several outlets for identifying with topics of ethnic identity development, including a world religions class, heritage night, the school newspaper, Arabic classes, and clubs relating to items of religious or ethnic identity. Only one student mentioned a world religions class that she attended, and yet for her it was an instrumental experience, as she was able to discuss her parents' journey of marriage coming from two different religious traditions. Only two students mentioned involvement in the International Baccalaureate program, a globally minded educational program not offered at every school of the school system of study. It is important for schools to further develop and provide opportunities for participation in classes such as world religions and programs such as International Baccalaureate, as well as other in-school and after-school activities that provide students with opportunities to grow in areas related to their ethnic identity development. Research among the American Indian population shows that students must have opportunities to both think about what it means to be a part of their ethnic group, to have positive feelings and attachments to the group, and also that ethnic identity is protective against psychosomatic symptoms and depression (Kenyon & Carter, 2001). This district has the luxury of being able to afford

some of these opportunities at various secondary sites, and these opportunities should be further developed, since they are instrumental for the student population in terms of ethnic identity development. For school systems that are smaller or less diverse, it is equally important that they provide similar avenues of growth regardless of size or diversity.

In addition to emphasizing courses, programs, and activities that foster ethnic identity, it is important that these efforts are not thwarted by a school climate in which hurtful humor is tolerated. Multiple participants reiterated the fact that terrorism is used as a joke at school, to the point that their recollections of these incidences was quite casual, making it clear that these events are commonplace. School administrators are required to discuss student rights and responsibilities with each of their students as a means of limiting liability, and part of this discussion should include the fact that humor that is targeted against an ethnic or religious group will have disciplinary consequences.

Just as hurtful humor has no place at school, it is critical that teachers create classroom environments in which contributing members feel free to share their experiences without fear. This study brought to light the importance of participants being able to share their experiences freely within their classes. One student mentioned that she had a positive experience with her world religions class when sharing about her parents' differing religious beliefs. Another mentioned how his teacher acknowledged his Palestinian identity and asked him to share about how the Ottoman Empire was divided up following World War Two and how this impacted Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. On the flipside, a participant mentioned his hesitancy to share his feelings on the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, and another noted the humiliation that she felt during a class presentation in middle school when her teacher negated her Palestinian identity in front of the class. One participant recalled the difficulty and resulting failure of her attempt to host a guest speaker to share about the Sabra and Shatila Massacres. Based on participants' responses, the freedom to share is very meaningful, but there is sometimes an element of fear or discrimination that prohibits them from being able to share their experiences freely. In light of this fact, it is necessary for teachers to create classroom environments in which all students feel freedom to share their experiences without fear.

A tool for actualizing this kind of classroom environment includes the addition of materials to the curriculum that include Palestinian and/or Palestinian American voices. For example, the literature that students read in school not only helps those who identify with the protagonist to have a surer sense of self, but it is also a tool for helping classmates to understand “the other,” or the individual who may be unrepresented or misunderstood. There are many books featuring Palestinian protagonists that could be added to the curriculum that would provide a point of connection for Palestinian American students, but would also serve as an instrument of understanding for students of other heritages.

In addition to literature, echoing the use of hip-hop used as a teaching tool for African American struggles—exemplified in artists such as Tupac, Dead Prez, and Public Enemy (Knopf-Newman, 2013, Hip-Hop Education and Palestine Solidarity section, para. 3)—there is a wealth of Palestinian hip-hop that can be used as a teaching tool in the classroom. Knopf-Newman (2013) describes the Palestinian hip hop scene as:

A rich body of music and poetry, exploring a variety of political and historical parallels. Such analogies can educate American youth about Palestine, because it enables them to comprehend the context; oftentimes it helps them connect other struggles with Palestine, an important element of cultivating global solidarity.

(Hip-Hop Education and Palestine Solidarity section, para. 3)

Incorporating this musical art form into a classroom setting would allow for an additional creative teaching tool that would bring light to the Palestinian narrative, educating each of its listeners on the topic in an innovative manner. This musical art form brings a ray of hope for Palestinian American adolescents, as it puts a tool into their tool belt that will allow them to influence their peers in a positive manner.

Finally, this study sheds light on the fact that more research is required about this population. This study adds to a very limited body of research on the topic of Palestinian American youths. This study has been the community of inquiry for Abu El-Haj, but besides this author, the research is extremely sparse in relation to this singular community. It is very apparent that in light of the study's findings, there are further areas for inquiry.

Participants find great strength in diversity. This does not minimize the difficulties that are unique to their experiences as Palestinian Americans, but it does add a layer of comfort and community for participants to know that they are among a diverse community where they feel the freedom to make friends and share experiences. The opportunity to attend such a diverse school system is a privilege, but what becomes of those Palestinian American students who do not have this same privilege? Because

research on this specific community is so limited, there are still wide gaps to fill. Further research is required to address the experiences of Palestinian American adolescents in schools located in both less diverse and more rural school systems, away from the diversity that often comes within a metropolitan area.

Additionally, the mention of terrorism used as humor was frequent enough to be delineated as a theme, both among in-group and out-of-group peer populations. What are the long-term effects on Arab Americans concerning this kind of humor among the generations following September 11? Research is required to investigate how this kind of humor affects Arab Americans' self-images and ethnic identity development, specifically in the tender and instrumental years of adolescence.

Finally, this study brought to light participants who do not harbor an allegiance to any one religion. Although Christianity and Islam have the greatest number of devotees where religion is concerned among the Palestinian American population, as a result of the interview questions, it became apparent that multiple participants did not subscribe to either Islam or Christianity, either not adhering to any one religion or even professing atheism. As much as research is lacking regarding the Palestinian American adolescent population, data is also deficient when it comes to members of this community who do not subscribe to a religious faith.

Summary

Chapter Five offered the conclusions of this study. The chapter first afforded a summary of this study's findings and then reiterated each of the study's research questions and provided answers to each question. Next, the chapter discussed the

limitations of this study. Finally, the chapter provided implications and recommendations from the study's findings.

As I reflect upon the conclusions of this study, I am very grateful for my participants who shared their journeys with me so thoughtfully and freely. As a researcher who is seeking to transfer the results of this study to my own practice as a teacher, I am now so much more aware of my role as the one who facilitates a classroom environment that provides a place of belonging for all students—a tremendous responsibility. I am also more cognizant of the fact that as a teacher I am the primary gatekeeper, and therefore I have the opportunity to allow students to share perspectives and experiences that they may be apprehensive to share but that provide meaningful learning experiences for all classroom members. I conclude this study with a desire to internalize what I have learned from my thoughtful participants in order to extend their wisdom to future generations of students.

Appendix A

IRB Approval Materials



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance
Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

TO: Ilham Nasser, College of Education and Human Development
FROM: Aurali Dade *AED/ld*
Assistant Vice President, Research Compliance
PROTOCOL NO.: 8650
PROPOSAL NO: N/A
TITLE: Second Generation Palestinian American School Experiences: Emerging Identities
DATE: April 3, 2013
Cc: Julia Galle

Under George Mason University (GMU) procedures, this project was determined to be exempt by the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) since it falls under DHHS Exempt Category 2, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

A copy of the final approved consent document is attached. Please use this stamped copy for your research.

You may proceed with data collection. **Please note that all modifications in your protocol must be submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections for review and approval prior to implementation.** Any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, including problems regarding data confidentiality must be reported to the GMU Office of Research Subject Protections.

GMU is bound by the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research contained in The Belmont Report. Even though your data collection procedures are exempt from review by the GMU HSRB, GMU expects you to conduct your research according to the professional standards in your discipline and the ethical guidelines mandated by federal regulations.

Thank you for cooperating with the University by submitting this protocol for review. Please call me at 703-993-5381 if you have any questions.

**SECOND GENERATION PALESTINIAN AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES:
EMERGING IDENTITIES**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and school experiences among second generation Palestinian American adolescents. If you agree to allow your child to participate, you will be asked to allow them to participate in an interview of approximately sixty minutes, with a possibility of a shorter, 20 minute follow-up interview if needed. Your child may refrain from answering any interviews questions that they choose.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to participants other than to further research in the area of ethnic identity among Palestinian American adolescents.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information that I collect from your child will be kept private. I will record the interviews onto my iPhone, a digital voice recorder, and after the interviews I will transfer the files to my password protected, personal computer. I will delete the files from my phone once they are on my computer. I will not use your child's name, nor will I use the names of his/her school, friends, or teachers—I will use pseudonyms (a code name) on all data.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation is voluntary, and they can stop participating from the study at any time and for any reason. If he/she decides not to participate or withdraws from the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits. There are no costs to your child. Interview criteria for participants require that they live in the DC metro area, attend high school, and have at least one parent that was born in Palestine and immigrated to the United States.

CONTACT

My name is Julie Galle, and I am studying International Education at George Mason University. You can call me at this phone number (703) 993-4916 if you have any questions about this study. You can also call my advisor, Dr. Ilham Nasser, at George Mason University, at this phone number (703) 993-4916. You can call the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at (703) 993-4121 if you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this research.

Revised 07/2005

1 of 2

APPROVED
R. 50
George Mason University

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your child's participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree that my child may participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

APPROVED
8/6/50

George Mason University

The participation criteria of having one parent born in Palestine who immigrated to the United States is reflective of the study's original participant criteria.

**SECOND GENERATION PALESTINIAN AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES:
EMERGING IDENTITIES**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and school experiences among second generation Palestinian American adolescents. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately sixty minutes, with a possibility of a shorter, 20 minute follow-up interview if needed. You may refrain from answering any interviews questions that you choose.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to participants other than to further research in the area of ethnic identity among Palestinian American adolescents.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information that I collect will be kept private. I will record the interviews onto my iPhone, a digital voice recorder, and after the interviews I will transfer the files to my password protected, personal computer. I will delete the files from my phone once they are on my computer. I will not use your name, nor will I use the names of your school, friends, or teachers—I will use pseudonyms (a code name) on all data.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you can stop participating from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits. There are no costs to you as a participant. Interview criteria for participants require that they live in the DC metro area, attend high school, and have at least one Palestinian parent born in any of the Arab States who immigrated to the United States.

CONTACT

My name is Julie Galle, and I am studying International Education at George Mason University. You can call me at this phone number (703) ~~993-4916~~ if you have any questions about this study. You can also call my advisor, Dr. Ilham Nasser, at George Mason University, at this phone number (703) 993-4916. You can call the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at (703) 993-4121 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Revised 07/2005

1 of 2

APPROVED

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

APPROVED
R. G. S.

George Mason University

The participant criteria of having one or both parents of Palestinian descent born in any of the Arab states who immigrated to the United States is reflective of the amended participant criteria.

Appendix B

Assent Form

SECOND GENERATION PALESTINIAN AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES: EMERGING IDENTITIES

ASSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: WHAT WE ARE DOING

The reason for this research is to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and school experiences among second generation Palestinian American adolescents. If you agree to help with this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. If there are other questions that I need to ask, I will follow up with you. The interview should take about sixty minutes.

RISKS: WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

The risks for taking part in this study are very minimal. The possible risk includes answering questions about potentially difficult personal experiences related to school and ethnic heritage.

BENEFITS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU

There are no rewards or money paid for being in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOUR INFORMATION

The information that I collect from you will be kept private. I will record the interviews onto my iPhone, a digital voice recorder, and after the interviews I will transfer the files to my password protected, personal computer. I will delete the files from my phone once they are on my computer. I will not use your name, nor will I use the names of your school, friends, or teachers—I will use pseudonyms (a code name) on all data.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

PARTICIPATION: YOU HAVE A CHOICE

You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. If you change your mind after you start and want to stop that is OK. I will not get mad and nothing will happen to you.

CONTACT: WHO TO CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

My name is Julie Galle, and I am studying International Education at George Mason University. You can call me at this phone number (703) XXX-XXXX if you have any questions about this study. You can also call my teacher, Dr. Ilham Nasser, at George Mason University, at this phone number (703) 993-4916. The George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance knows all about my research and said that it was OK for me to do it. You can call them at 703-993-4121 if you have any questions about being a part of this research.

ASSENT

I have read this form and I agree to help with this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Background:

1. What is your name?
2. What school do you attend?
3. What is your year in school?
4. How many years have you attended your present school?
5. What is your nationality?
6. What are your parents' places of birth?
 - Mother
 - Father
7. What are your parents' occupations?
 - Mother
 - Father
8. What were your parents' ages/years of immigration?
 - Mother
 - Father
9. From where did your parents' immigrate?
 - Mother

Father

10. At home, do your parents speak with you in English or Arabic? What language do you speak with them?

11. Do you ever speak Arabic outside of your home and with whom? How do you feel when you speak it?

Self and Others' Perceptions:

12. How would you describe yourself?

13. How would others at your school describe you?

14. How do their perceptions of you affect how you feel about yourself?

School:

15. Tell me about a typical day at school.

16. Tell me what you like about school.

17. What don't you like about school?

18. Who do you spend the most time with in school and why?

19. Please describe your closest friends.

20. Why did you choose these friends?

21. What do you like about them?

22. How are they like you? In what ways?

23. How are you different? In what ways?

24. Have they ever said anything about your life that bothered you, regarding something such as your religion, ethnicity, or beliefs? How did you react?

25. Please describe your teachers.

26. Are they similar to you? In what ways?
27. Are they different from you? In what ways?
28. What do you think that they think about you? Why?
29. Have they ever said anything about your life that bothered you, such as about your religion, ethnicity, or beliefs? How did you react?
30. Do you feel like you belong at your school?
31. Have you ever felt discriminated against at school?

Heritage:

32. What would you identify as your heritage?
33. When someone asks you where you're from, what do you say? Why?
34. Have you visited Palestine? Please tell me about what you remember most from your visit.
35. If you have never visited Palestine, please tell me about what you hear from parents or relatives about Palestine and being Palestinian?
36. Do your parents or relatives read books or tell you stories about Palestine? What types of stories and books do they share with you?
37. What does it mean to connect to your Palestinian heritage?
38. What makes you an American?
39. What makes you Palestinian?
40. What parts of your culture are most important to you?
41. Have you ever experienced a conflict with a peer at school regarding your culture, religion, and/or family background? If so, please tell me about it.

42. Have you ever experienced a conflict with a teacher at school regarding your culture, religion, and/or family background? If so, please tell me about it.
43. Did your parents face any challenges living in the United States related to their being Palestinian?
- 44.) Think about what it is like to be a Palestinian American at your school. What is it like?
- 45.) What groups of students do you most closely identify with at school?
- 46.) As a Palestinian American student, do you think that your experiences at your school are different from the experiences of your non-Palestinian American friends? Can you explain?
- 47.) How is your life at home different or the same from your life at school?
- 48.) How would you describe growing up in the United States? What stands out to you?
- 49.) How do you think growing up in America is different from how your parent(s) grew up in Palestine?
- 50.) How would you describe a Palestinian? Does this differ from how you would describe yourself?
- 51.) How would you describe an American? Does this differ from how you would describe yourself?
- 52.) How do you think Americans in general would describe Palestinians?
- 53.) How is that different from how you describe yourself?
- 54.) How do you identify yourself?
- 55.) Describe a positive interaction with a peer at your school regarding your

background, culture, or religion.

56.) Describe a positive interaction with a teacher at your school regarding your background, culture, or religion. Please tell me about it.

57.) If you feel that your school is accepting of Palestinian Americans and/or a diverse population, what does your school do to make a supportive atmosphere for students?

58.) If you have visited Palestine, do you have positive memories of Palestine? Please describe them to me.

59.) If you have visited Palestine, do you have negative memories of Palestine? Please describe them to me.

60.) How is Palestine different from the United States?

61.) Are there students that you don't like to be around in school? Please explain why.

Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Email

My name is Julie Galle, and I am a PhD in Education candidate at George Mason University. I am also an ESOL teacher at Poe Middle School. I am working on my dissertation, *Second Generation Palestinian American School Experiences: Emerging Identities*, and I am looking for Palestinian American adolescent participants for my study who would be willing to participate in an interview. The criteria designate that participants meet these requirements:

- 1.) The participant is a student in a (name of county) high school
- 2.) The participant was born in the United States
- 3.) At least one of the participant's parents was born in Palestine and immigrated to the United States

If you know of anyone who fits these criteria and would be willing to participate, please feel free to pass along my contact information: [703 XXX-XXXX](tel:703XXX-XXXX) and XXXXXXXXXX@gmail.com

Thank you so much,

Julie

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Biography

Julie A. Mendoza graduated from Antilles High School, Puerto Rico, in 1997. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Grace College in 2001. She received her Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies and Teaching English as a Second Language from Wheaton College Graduate School in 2002. She has been an ESOL Teacher in Fairfax County Public Schools since 2003. She loves being a wife, a mom, a daughter, and a sister.

