"It's not part of the religion":
The "Null Curriculum" and the Sexual Identity Development of Muslim American Youth

By

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DEDICATION

To my husband Shuaib, and

My sons Ibrahim, Mohammed, and Isa -

For all the love, support, patience and Hot Tamales.

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Introduction

> **Me:** Do your parents talk to you about girls and what to do or what to say?
> **Bilal**[1] (*5th grade male from Muslim Middle*): It's not part of our religion. I'm sorry. (*Laughter from the group.*)

As a typical 5th grade boy, Bilal's response to a question about girls is, perhaps not surprisingly, to tell a joke. However, his comment that such topics are "not part of our religion" is highly indicative of a general feeling within the Muslim community - that issues of gender and sexuality are often seen as taboo. Indeed, in *Living West, Facing East*, Fida Sanjakdar (2011) posits that sexuality has become part of the "null curriculum" in Islamic schools – topics that are avoided and thus implicitly seen as not appropriate or un-Islamic. She suggests that because of the null curriculum, students are often left with unanswered questions about gender and sexuality, while teachers are handicapped by the inability to discuss these issues, even though the topics are central to human growth and development. Sanjakdar posits that providing a holistic Islamic sexual education - which encompasses physical, emotional, and religious teachings – can help Muslim youth develop a strong Islamic sexual identity, which in turn promotes sexual agency. My own study presented here reveals similar findings for Muslim American youth – that questions about sexuality are often left unanswered (or only partially answered), but that knowing religious scripts on sexuality can be agentic for youth. However, while Sanjakdar's study focuses on reforming institutional sexual politics, I focus on the impact of parents and peers on the development of sexual identity among Muslim American youth.

I will admit, though, that exploring the sexual identity formation of Muslim American youth was not the initial focus of my research. My original study focused more generally on the process of religious identity formation of Muslim American youth, which I undertook during the

[1] All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of study participants. School names have been changed as well.

spring of 2012. As I began to review the literature, I found that most studies on the religious identity development of Muslim youth have tended to focus on older adolescents - typically high school or college aged individuals (Chaudhry & Miller, 2008; Gaffar-Kucher, 2012; Kabir, 2011; Peek, 2004; Ryan, 2013; Stuart & Ward, 2011). Although religious development in terms of the ability to make moral and ethical decisions is most often associated with this age group (Fowler & Dell, 2004), religious identity can also be conceptualized as a type of cultural identity similar to race or ethnicity (Kalkan, Layman, & Uslaner, 2009). The process of identity formation in terms of race or ethnicity, then, typically begins at a much earlier age, as questions of identity often manifest initially from encounters with prejudice (Erikson, 1968; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). For Muslim youth, Balsano and Sirin (2007) observe:

> We are past the point of reaching consensus on whether religion, as a crucial component of Muslim youth's micro- and macro-systems, is in some way moderating youth's experiences of and responses to their environment. Rather, there is now a need to focus on assessing the extent to which the youth's religious practices, actual and self-perceived beliefs and behaviors, as well as various family and community resources, might serve as assets in the youth's healthy, positive development in the post 9/11 world. (p. 182)

Balsano and Sirin also posit that it has become increasingly acceptable to discriminate against Muslims as part of the global "war on terror" (p.178). And indeed, a 2009 Gallup poll survey reveals that over 75% of young Muslims said that they or someone they know personally has been discriminated against (Gallup, 2009), while Sirin, Abo-Zena, and Shehadi (2012) relate that "the majority of participants in these studies reported that they experienced this discrimination only *because they were Muslims*" (p. 235). A 2014 Pew Research survey further reveals that Muslims as a group face the most prejudice of any religious group in the US. Yet, even as these feelings of prejudice manifest, many Americans acknowledge that they either have "very little knowledge" (40%) or "none at all" (23%) of Islam (Gallup, 2010, p.10).

Muslims, however, constitute a growing minority group in the United States - estimates of the Muslim population in the US range from 2 to 7 million (Moore, 2007, p. 121). According to Kathleen Moore, the Director of the Center for Middle East studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara:

> As one of the fastest growing minorities in the nation's largest cities, Muslims today comprise a vibrant mosaic of ethnic, sectarian, and socioeconomic diversity. Representing an array of origins, the Muslim population hales from more than eighty different countries and multiple sectarian orientations and socioeconomic backgrounds. Muslim Americans represent every philosophical, theological, and political strain in Islam (p. 121).

Other studies have shown that Muslim Americans, while being fairly heterogeneous, still tend to be mostly middle class with mainstream American ideals (Pew, 2007). Yet, even in light of such findings, Muslims continue to face distrust from their non-Muslim neighbors. International events, such as the continued Israel-Palestine conflict and the rise of the Islam*ist* State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)[2], continue to exacerbate and reinforce these feelings. In addition, the misperception of a growing "Muslim tide" in the West is often cited as a main contributor of Islamophobia – the irrational fear and hatred of Muslims and Islam (Saunders, 2012). Negative stereotypes of Muslims are visible on television and in movies, in social media and on the news, on a daily basis. Positive images of Muslims, by contrast, are often few and far between.

Given this environment, I wanted to explore the ways in which Muslim American youth negotiate their religious identities. To do so, I designed a mixed-method study that uses both focus groups and a survey instrument to better understand the religious identity development of Muslim American students (ages 10-14) in a medium-sized city in the southern United States. The project contrasts three particular school settings – public schools that have a large Muslim

[2] As I do not believe that ISIS represents Islamic values or ideals, I chose to use the term Islamist rather than Islamic. For further elaboration on the distinction between these terms, see Bassam Tibi's (2012) *Islamism and Islam*.

population (which I call Pluribus Middle), public schools that have few Muslim students (which I call Minimus Middle), and an Islamic school (which I call Muslim Middle). Although I believed that gender would be an important aspect of religious identity formation, especially with regards to the *hijab*[3], it was not a focal point of the original study. However, during the data collection and analysis process, two interconnected occurrences made issues of gender and sexuality a more salient aspect of the study than religious identity formation.

First, initial analyses of the data revealed the strong religious identity of the Muslim youth in the study[4], and their resilience with regard to facing the negative stereotypes associated with Muslims and Islam. Although all the participants in my study had reported either personal experiences of discrimination or discrimination faced by a close relative (parent, sibling, aunt/uncle, or cousin), and articulated the belief that the discrimination was directly related to the fact that they were Muslim, this did not appear to lead to confusion regarding their overall religious identity as Muslims. They often noted that non-Muslim feelings about Islam were based on "ignorance" or misplaced blame with regards to the events like 9/11 – as Sarah, a sixth grader from Minimus noted, "though it was, like, specific people that did it, they blame an entire group of people for it." Rather than turning away from their faith because of negative stereotypes, then, youth actually turned *toward* their religion to deal with effects of discrimination. As Bilal from Muslim Middle said, "It's sometimes hard being Muslim, but Allah [God] watches out for you." Supportive parental and peer relationships also contribute to positive religious identity formation, with many participants reporting feeling comfortable discussing their faith with non-Muslim friends and neighbors. I do not mean to suggest that

[3] Hijab is the Islamic head covering worn by female Muslims.
[4] Part of the reason for the high level of religiosity found among participants may be attributed to sampling, which will be discussed further in the methods/findings sections.

there are not challenges inherent in the religious identity development for these youth, but rather that the challenges have less to do with questions about faith and more to do with ways of negotiating other environmental factors.

Shortly thereafter, I began conducting follow-up focus groups. These focus groups were intended to be member checks. I had summarized key points from both the initial focus group and the completed survey instruments, and wanted to ensure that my interpretations matched those of the participants. However, during the follow-up focus groups, new data about gender and sexuality began to emerge – especially at Pluribus Middle (the public school with many Muslim students). In addition, the new data were both more *confessional* (about specific beliefs or behaviors that the participants themselves espoused or engaged in) and more *interrogative* (asking for my opinions about Islamic teachings on gender and sexuality). I realized that as a Muslim woman who wore *hijab*, I was seen as an authority on Islam. At the same time, my primary role was that of a researcher. Being in this liminal space inspired me to reflect more deeply on the gender and sexuality identity of Muslim youth. First, I wondered what participants believed to be the *Islamic teachings* with regard to gender and sexuality. Clearly participants had questions on the topic, and were confused about what was authentically "Islamic." I also wondered how participants perceived their *peers*' *expectations*, and ways in which those expectations shaped the behavior of Muslim youth. Further, I wondered how *context* might affect participants' gender and sexual "performances." And finally, I wondered how approaches to gender and sexuality were *moderated by religious beliefs*. Certainly, religion plays an important role in shaping values on sexuality, but other changes in an adolescent's life can have equally important impacts.

These events highlight three important facts: (a) that Muslim youth perceive significant differences in their religious beliefs on gender and sexuality from their non-Muslim peers; (b) that the confusion over sexual identity is far greater than the confusion over religious identity for this particular group; and (c) that the confusion over sexual identity is directly related to confusion over the religious teachings on gender and sexuality in Islam. Sanjakdar (2011) defines sexuality as "a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p. 8). Although not all aspects of sexuality are applicable to the study's sample, it is important to acknowledge that they are all part of human sexuality. For this group, the primary focus on sexuality was on gender roles and identities, as well as beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors related to sex. Similar to studies on religious identity, studies about gender and sexuality among Muslim youth tend to focus on older adolescents (Halstead, 2006; Hopkins, 2006; Marcotte, 2009; Naber, 2005; Sanjakdar, 2011; Smerenick et al., 2010; Zine, 2001). However, also similar to questions of religious identity, youth begin exploring these questions at an earlier age when there is a greater perception of difference from their peers, as is true in this case.

To further explore this relationship between religious and sexual identity formation amongst Muslim American youth, then, I begin with a review of the relevant literature. I then share the details of the methods used in data collection and analysis. Finally, I present the findings from the study for discussion, along with the limitations and possible future directions for research.

Literature Review

Although there are a number of relevant literatures that could be employed to further our understanding of the religious and sexual identity formation of Muslim youth, I have chosen to concentrate on a few key areas. Specifically, I address issues of adolescent development, psychological theories of identity formation, sociological theories of performance, and theological perspectives on sexuality in Islam.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence is considered one of the most complex periods of human development. Although it is often associated with the teenage years, it can actually begin earlier and extend further (Steinberg, 2011). Adolescence is typically marked by a period of intense biological, cognitive, and social development. Biological changes during adolescence are typically referred to as puberty. The three primary physical changes during this period include: a rapid increase in height and weight, the development of primary sex characteristics (gonads and hormones that enable reproduction), and the development of secondary sex characteristics (including changes in genitals and breasts, and the growth of pubic, facial and body hair) (Steinberg, p. 24). Typical biological changes, such as physical maturation and sexual development, can affect an adolescent's self-image and self-esteem (Ahmed, 2003). Adolescence is also a period of rapid cognitive change. Inhelder and Piaget (1958) note that individuals experience improvements in attention and memory, are able to engage in more abstract and hypothetical thinking, are increasingly aware of the process of thinking itself (or metacognition), and are able to engage in self-introspection. These cognitive changes allow adolescents to think and reason in a wider perspective. Both biological and cognitive changes lead to social transitions – changes in social roles that afford different "rights, privileges and responsibilities" to adolescents than those they

posessed as children. These changes in social roles influence both the relationships that adolescents have with others (including family and peers), as well as the social contexts in which they find themselves.

Early adolescence can also be considered a "turning point." In "Promotion of Social Change: A Conceptual Framework," Vivian Tseng and her colleagues (2002) note that there are certain "turning points" in a person's life that "often represent opportune moments for shifting the flow of change" (p. 416). One such transitional period often targeted in prevention is the late childhood/early adolescent period, as youth move from elementary to middle schools. As noted, it is during this transitional period that many youngsters begin experiencing the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes of puberty. However, these youth are still young enough that their ties to parents remain strong. This combination of cognitive and social growth, coupled with the strong existing bonds with parents, make it an ideal period for targeted preventions. Indeed, one reason for focusing on early adolescence is the fact that it may be an especially ideal time to focus on interventions surrounding religious and sexual identity development, and additional research can help facilitate the development of such programs.

Psychological Theories of Identity

Eriksonian model. These physical, social and cognitive changes in adolescence have important implications for identity. One of the first and most influential scholars to explicitly study identity was Erik Erikson. According to Erikson (1963), identity development is a key task in adolescence. As children grow and develop, they become increasingly aware of the differences between themselves and others. The ability to think abstractly, as well as the ability to think about the future, allows youth to seriously consider who they are and who they want to be. The process of developing an identity, then, involves individuals exploring their choices in

order to "make a series of ever-narrowing selections of personal, occupational, sexual and ideological commitments" that eventually become their identity (Erikson, 1968, p.245). Erikson also suggests that the process of identity development is inherently relational – adolescents define themselves in response to important others in their lives. Individuals are motivated to develop an identity, and to maintain identity across time and place, as a means of self-verification and to reduce uncertainty about one's place in the world. Additionally, individuals who are able to achieve a coherent identity are more agentic – they feel in control of their decisions, and are able to take responsibility for them (Cotê, 2000).

As adolescents undergo a variety of personal changes and are simultaneously exposed to a myriad of different social choices, questions about self can sometimes lead to what Erikson terms an "identity crisis." An identity crisis is a situation in which the individual is confused about how to define her/himself, because of conflicting notions about the meaning of a particular identity. Identity crises can lead to significant emotional and mental stress, as youth feel unable to make identity commitments. Erikson refers to three main problems that can arise from an identity crisis – identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity. Identity diffusion is defined as a disjointed, incomplete sense of self; identity foreclosure is a premature establishment of identity without sufficient exploration, often conforming to parental or authority expectations; and negative identity is the selection of an identity that is undesirable in the eyes of significant others or society. Identity crises may arise in the sexual identity formation of Muslim youth, given the potential confusion of trying to reconcile parental religious teachings with peer norms on gender and sexuality. For instance, Ahmed (2009) discusses how Muslim American youth are sent mixed messages from different social contexts, and how they often feel that they have no one to turn to who can understand all of the various types of pressure that they face. She

suggests that those youth with strong social support from family, community, school, and peers are able to most successfully integrate different aspects of their identity.

Gender and sexual identity. According to Gayle Rubin (1984), "gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has had gender-specific manifestations. But although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice" (p. 308). Gender is often defined as the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women – as distinct from biological and physiological characteristics. Adolescence can be a period of gender intensification (Hill & Lynch, 1983), where there is increasing pressure to act in stereotypically masculine or feminine ways, though not all studies find this behavior (Jacobs et al., 2002). Environmental factors, such as peer expectations, seem to have a greater influence on whether individuals exhibit gender-appropriate behaviors than hormonal changes (Galambos et al., 2009). Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, and Osgood (2007) also find that birth order, the presence and sex of older or younger siblings, and parental attitudes all influence changes in an individual's gender-role behavior. Research also suggests that boys are more likely to be punished for exhibiting non-normative (feminine) traits, whereas it is more acceptable for girls to continue exhibiting masculine traits.

The physical, cognitive and social changes of adolescence make it a pivotal time for sexual identity formation as well (Steinberg, pp. 338-339). Changes in physical appearance, increases in sex drive and the ability to reproduce all impact an individual's sexual development. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2008), approximately one-third of American 14-year olds have had sexual intercourse; by 18, two thirds have. In addition, changes in cognitive ability allow adolescents to consider the implications of their sexual feelings, as well

as the impact of sexuality on their relationships. It also allows them to connect their actions with a system of values and beliefs. Finally, changes in social roles provide new social and institutional contexts for the consideration of sexuality, as well as the sexual socialization of individuals. A growing body of research also explores positive sexual development - which includes "accepting one's changing body, accepting one's feelings of sexual arousal, understanding that sexual activity is voluntary, and practicing safe sex" (Steinberg, p. 339).

Religious identity formation. Here we look at religious identity in terms of its potential impact on sexual identity formation. For instance, some scholars note that the focus on religious group membership can play a role in limiting identity exploration for youth, leading to identity diffusion or foreclosure (King & Roeser, 2009; Oppong, 2013). On the other hand, in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Smith and Denton (2005) posit that religious teenagers do better than their less religious peers in terms of "risk behaviors, quality of family and adult relationships, moral reasoning and behavior, community participation, media consumption, sexual activity, and emotional well-being" (p. 218), a finding supported by other studies (Hardy & Raffaeli, 2003). However, the impact of religiosity on sexuality seems to be gendered. For example, Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, and Randall (2004) find that in an analysis of ten longitudinal studies on the affect of religiosity on adolescent sexual behavior, religiosity did delay the initiation of sexual activity for females, but not necessarily for males. Maton and Wells (1995) also identify potential benefits of religion on well-being, including as a resource for prevention, as a resource for healing, and as a resource for empowerment. Erikson further suggests that the values and beliefs imparted by religion allow youth to better understand their place in the world and give meaning to their lived experiences.

Performance Theory

Since the publication of Judith Butler's groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, the theory of performativity has become increasingly pervasive in scholarly work on identity. The idea of performativity – "that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 25) – is used to posit that there is no ontological status for gender, that gender is constituted solely through "gender performances." In doing so, Butler brings into question essentialist views of gender and suggests that binary formulations of masculine and feminine are wholly socially constructed. Since the release of *Gender Trouble*, though, performativity has been utilized in a myriad of disciplines and in a number of different contexts, including in the study of religious phenomena. Indeed, as Armour and St. Ville (2006) observe, "[Butler's] ongoing investigations into the relationships between bodies, language, and cultural norms in identity construction should interest religionists, given the role of bodily practices (including linguistic ones) in the production of religious identities" (p.10). As such, the theory of performativity may be especially well suited for considering the intersection between religious and gender identities.

However, the idea of performance can be traced further back than Butler. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) utilizes the metaphor of a play to illustrate the ways in which individuals interact in everyday life. Goffman posits that human interactions are like roles in a play. We are actors that perform our roles for others, who in turn are performing roles for us. The goal of performing is "impression management" – to control how others view us. Goffman suggests that we perform for others in order to achieve personal goals, to present a consistent and positive view of ourselves to the world, and to conform to social norms. We can play these roles sincerely or cynically – either believing that the role we

play accurately reflects reality or knowing that our role is an act for the benefit of others. These performances can also be classified as front stage or backstage performances. Most of our performances are considered front stage – public spaces where we deliver lines from our "scripts." Goffman suggests that our scripts are learned socially acceptable ways of interacting. However, there are also backstage spaces, private spaces where we can drop our roles, or practice potential scripts before returning to the stage. For instance, John O'Brien (2011) employs Goffman to analyze how Muslims youth use "backstage rehearsals" to deal with stigma. Using ethnographic data, O'Brien observed how members of a Muslim youth group discussed ways in which to answer difficult questions about Islam, practicing for possible future performances. However, he also suggests that the group engaged in "deep education rehearsals," which promoted passive responses as a stigma management strategy. Because these rehearsals allowed youth to vent their anger over discrimination in private, they are able to reign in aggression and act passively in public.

Another predecessor to Butler is Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1977) describes "docile bodies" as objects that can be "disciplined" to perform in ways that conform to society's standards – "the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (p. 136). These disciplining activities are repeated, and by being repeated, become habitual for docile bodies, transforming and controlling them. Discipline is a much more "subtle" exertion of power than punishment, all the more powerful for its subtlety as individuals do not realize that their behavior is being conditioned. Foucault suggests that the repetition of movement, the allocation of time, and the use of spaces are all used to discipline bodies. For instance, athletes practice repetitive sports drills to train their bodies, and our lives are typically shaped by the notion of a 9-to-5 workday – acts that

become so ingrained that we do not need to think about or question them. This discipline comes from the social structures that constitute our environments – governments, schools, work, religion, and family, among others. We act in ways that are acceptable to the institutional forces that shape us. Thus, individual agency is restrained by social structures.

Drawing from Foucault, Butler (1990) argues that both sex and gender are socially constructed categories. In *Gender Trouble*, she suggests that "the gendered body is performative [which] suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality" (p. 136). That is, there is no intrinsic essence that is the basis for gender identity, but rather that it is the product of actions and behaviors, in other words, of performances. Similar to how docile bodies are disciplined to act in certain ways, we are taught to act in gendered ways that eventually become our gender identity. These performances are also socially constructed – we are taught what it means to be masculine or feminine, and base our performances on these social cues. However, Butler suggests that these performances are not an essential part of our beings. Using the example of drag, Butler notes how it disrupts the "very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates" (p. viii). Rather than viewing drag as an imitation, Butler posits that it is a performance that defines the boundaries and practices that create the notion of gender in the first place.

Both Elaine Graham and Saba Mahmood employ Butler's work on performativity to examine the intersection between religion and gender. In her 1996 book, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, Graham uses performativity to both critique historically patriarchal theological discourse, as well as to consider ways in which theology can promote agency. She posits that human agency is "historically situated, embodied and

contingent" (p. 30) and that there have been numerous ways in which women and other marginalized groups were conditioned to accept cultural scripts that diminished their own agency. Performativity posits that there is nothing inherently essential about this - that cultural scripts are not based on universal attributes, but rather reflect power structures that inherently favor white, male Christians. These power structures have been used to define acceptable gender roles and norms, as well as a number of other cultural scripts. Theology provides an especially powerful script, as authority is given by the divine. In this sense, using performativity as a lens, certain pervasive theological scripts can be critiqued as having diminished agency for women and other marginalized groups without being based on underlying universal attributes.

However, Graham posits that marginalized groups can also use religious scripts to promote agency. She notes that religion "carries implicit values" (p. 111) that give meaning to the concrete lived experiences of individuals. By providing a system of values and beliefs that enable individuals to subvert cultural practices, theological scripts can lead to greater agency. Graham suggests that what is needed is to critically critique the sources of authority and the proscribed norms that might diminish agency, while placing greater emphasis on the values inherent in lived experiences that challenge cultural norms. Similarly, in Saba Mahmoud's (2006) essay on the women's piety movement in Egypt, she posits that it is the ways in which performances are "experienced" that truly matters. She suggests that Butler's conceptualization of performativity is binary; performances either reiterate or subvert cultural norms. Mahmoud seeks to expand this dualistic framework by suggesting that "norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted…but [are] performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways" (p. 191), as seen when Muslim women provide different interpretations of "modesty" within the piety movement. These women continued to exhibit modestly in ways that seem stereotypically

patriarchal, but experience their modesty in a way that is grounded in their religious values and beliefs – in ways that Mahmoud suggests are agentic. Although the performance may be seem oppressive to others, the lived experience for women in the piety movement is inherently different.

In *Living West, Facing East*, Sanjakdar (2011) also uses the idea of performativity within the concept of "the null curriculum." As previously noted, a null curriculum is created when Islamic institutions treat issues of gender and sexuality as taboo; implicitly suggesting that such knowledge is un-Islamic. Although religious scripts can promote agency, they cannot do so unless individuals know them. Sanjakdar asserts that the null curriculum denies Muslim youth the right to a comprehensive and holistic Islamic education needed to develop the cultural scripts crucial for the development of sexual agency. Students believe in Islam and their Islamic identity, but are left with unanswered questions about gender and sexuality. Teachers are also handicapped by the inability to discuss gender and sexuality. For instance, a female teacher expressed her desire to confront student misunderstandings on gender roles:

> Sometimes I think that they [the students] are…so confused, so desperate for this knowledge. I would love to go to class and tell all the girls that Islamically, you don't have to do ANYTHING for your husband. [At this point, all the male teachers faced this teacher in disbelief and shock.] But when she does, she does so out of love. (Sanjakdar, 2011, p. 119)

The quote effectively illustrates the frustration that many Muslims, both teachers and students, feel when trying to discuss issues of gender and sexuality. In addition, it highlights how male response can make it difficult to find safe spaces in which to have such conversations. Sanjakdar posits that providing a holistic Islamic sexual education - encompassing physical, emotional, and religious teachings – can help Muslim youth develop a strong Islamic sexual identity.

Laura Carpenter (2010) explores the idea of sexual scripts further. She suggests that there are three levels of scripting – cultural scripts, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scripts are broader societal ideas that provide a "roadmap" to guide sexual decision-making, such as religious scripts. Interpersonal scripts are ways in which individuals "mutually influence one another's sexual conduct and beliefs"- as may happen within peer interactions. Intrapsychic scripts, then, are an individual's "desires, fantasies, and intentions" (pp. 161-162). Although these scripts are often different for men and women, Carpenter posits that there are transitional moments within every life when individuals are more likely to adopt new scripts.

Theological Perspectives on Sexuality

Understanding the fundamental teachings regarding gender and sexuality in Islam is also helpful in analyzing the religious script of Muslim youth. However, Muslims of various cultural, ethnic and socio-economic and even generational backgrounds have very different views on gender and sexuality in Islam. As such, it is important to first acknowledge these very real theological differences. Even so, I believe it is valuable to present normative views of gender and sexuality in Islam. I also note that the topic of gender and sexuality in Islam is quite broad – and that the issues addressed here are based on what appears to be most relevant to Muslim American youth.

The question of authority should also be addressed. The foremost source of authority in Islam is the Qur'an (Islamic holy book), followed by the Hadith (the recorded actions and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed). Most of the teachings Muslims hold to be true can be traced back to theses two sources. However, Islamic rulings can also be made by the consensus of religious leaders and by reasoning (Bowden, 2004, p.124-125). Given the caveats noted above, I provide a brief discussion of gender and sexuality in Islam.

Gender in Islam. Islam is often portrayed as a patriarchal religion that is oppressive to women. And indeed, there are many places in the world where patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an are pervasive. As El-Sohl and Mabro (1994) note, though, attributing the oppression of women "solely in terms of the Qur'an and/or other Islamic sources all too often taken out of context" (p. 1) ignores the multiple other factors that lead to patriarchy and oppression (such as racism, poverty, or political unrest). Fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, then, are often utilized in tandem with pre-existing power structures of oppression. By contrast, most Muslim scholars in the West believe that the Qur'an supports the equality of men and women before God. Asma Barlas (2002), for instance, asserts, "that the Qur'an is egalitarian and anti-patriarchal," as seen in the following verse:

> Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (Qur'an, 33:35)

In matters of faith, then, men and women are both seen as being accountable for their own actions, and are judged according to them. Scholars note that in Islam, women also have the right to an education, the right to vote and be politically active, the right to own wealth and earn money, the right to inherit money and property, the right to receive a dowry upon marriage, and the right to choose a spouse (Barlas, 2002).

Yet, within the Qur'an there are also verses that seem to set different standards for men and women. For example:

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. (Qur'an, 4:34)

Barlas suggests, however, that it is the translation of the above verse that leads to patriarchal interpretations. For instance, she notes that men are described "as the women's protectors and maintainers, not as guardians or rulers" (p. 185). However, the implication of the word "strength" (which Barlas maintains is not part of the verse) is that there is an ontological superiority of men. Rather, Barlas posits, since men are often the primary breadwinners, they have a responsibility toward providing for the family. She further notes that patriarchal interpretations "[ignore] that the Qur'an appoints women and men each other's *awliyd*', or mutual protectors" (p. 186). Similarly, Barlas questions the translation of "devoutly obedient", which here seems to imply obedience toward one's husband. Barlas suggests that another interpretation is that women who are devoutly obedient toward God will protect what is brought into the home. As exemplified by the textual re-interpretations of the above verse, Barlas posits that "treating women and men differently does not always amount to treating them unequally, nor does treating them identically necessarily mean treating them equally" (p. 5). She acknowledges the existence of patriarchal readings of the Qur'an, but posits that alternative readings that take into account historical and contextual factors can actually lead to liberatory theologies. She suggests that, "recognizing the existence of a patriarchy, or addressing one, is not the same as advocating it. Moreover, the Qur'an's provisions about polygyny, "wife beating," and so forth -which have been open to serious misinterpretation- were in the nature of restrictions, not a license" (p. 6).

Sexuality in Islam. Sex and sexual desire in Islam are considered a healthy, normal part of human existence. Islam, however, distinguishes between sex that is considered lawful (*niqaa*) and sex that is considered unlawful (*zina*). Normatively, what is considered lawful in Islam is sex between a man and a woman within the bounds of marriage. Other forms of sexual activity

(pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex/adultery, and homosexuality) are considered sinful in Islam.[5] It is for this reason that Islam encourages Muslims to marry:

> Those among you who can support a wife should marry, for it restrains eyes [from casting evil glances] and preserves one from immorality; but he who cannot afford it [marriage] should fast, for it [fasting] is a means of controlling sexual desire. (Sahih Muslim, Book 8, Hadith 3233 as cited in Husain, 2007)

However, marriage is not simply to protect against sexual urges – marriage is an emotional bond of love and support. The Qur'an states:

> And one of [God's] signs is that He has created for you mates from yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and has ordained between you Love and Mercy. (Qur'an, 30:21)

From this and similar verses, most scholars assert that marriage can be seen as union designed to create tranquility, love and companionship. Although children are a part of family life, Islam departs from other religious traditions in that sexual relations are not believed to be exclusively for reproductive purposes. Indeed, marriage is seen as a way to satisfy the sexual needs of both spouses, as:

> God's Messenger(s) said: "In the sexual act of each of you there is a *sadaqa* [an act of charity]." The Companions replied: "0h Messenger of God! When one of us fulfills his sexual desire, will he be given a reward for that?" And he said, "Do you not think that were he to act upon it unlawfully, he would be sinning? Likewise, if he acts upon it lawfully, he will be rewarded." (Muslim as cited in Husain, 2007)

However, there are also Muslims who believe that sexuality in Islam is primarily for reproductive purposes, which is believed to be encouraged by verses such as:

> And Allah has made for you your mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best. (Qur'an 16:72)

[5] There are a few Muslim scholars who also question interpretations of homosexuality within Islam, though normatively, most Muslims consider it a sin. Masturbation is considered permissible, but disliked by most scholars.

Until individuals are ready to marry, though, they are encouraged to guard their chastity and avoid unlawful sexual acts:

> Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity, and God is well acquainted with all they do. And say to the believing woman that they should lower their gaze, and guard their modesty. (Qur'an, 24:30-3 1)
>
> Do not go near to *zina*. Surely it is a shameful deed and evil, opening roads (to other evils). (Qur'an, 17:32)

As we see, sexual modesty applies to both men and women –both are encouraged to "lower their gaze." Similarly, if one is not able to protect their own modesty, they should not require it from their spouse – that is, there should not be a "double morality." In the Qur'an it states:

> Women impure are for men impure and men impure are for women impure; and women of purity are for men of purity and men of purity are for women of purity: these are not affected by what people say: for them there is forgiveness and a provision honorable. (Qur'an, 24:26)

Muslims are also encouraged to learn about the Islamic traditions on sexuality, even though it is a topic that may cause shyness or embarrassment. However, scholars also emphasize that such education should follow a certain etiquette (Husain, 2007) - that it should be frank and to the point for educational purposes, but should not be vulgar, as seen in the following example:

> A beloved wife of Prophet Muhammad, Umm Salama, tells of an instance when Umm Sulaim, Abu Talha's wife, came to speak to Prophet Muhammad. Umm Sulaim is reported by Umm Salama to have said, "O Allah's Messenger! Verily Allah is not shy of (telling you) the truth. Is it necessary for a woman to take a bath after she has a wet dream (nocturnal sexual discharge)?" Allah's Messenger replied, "Yes, if she notices a discharge." (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 5, Hadith 280 as cited in Husain, 2007)

Gender segregation and touching. However, the more relevant teachings for Muslim youth may be on the permissibility of "touching" members of the opposite sex – outside of the realm of sexual intercourse. As with many religious topics, this is a contested domain.

Normatively, scholars believe that physical touching (hugging, kissing) between *mahram*[6], or close relatives, is acceptable. They also tend to agree that actions preceding sexual intercourse, such as foreplay, kissing, hugging, and caressing, would be considered sinful outside the bounds of marriage because they are still expressions of sexual desire. However, there may be instances, such as shaking hands, where there may not be any sexual desire present. Rulings about this type of touching are often associated with the following hadith:

> Al-Tabari and Al-Baihaqi on the authority of Ma`qil ibn Yassar, narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "It would be better for one of you to have himself stabbed on the head with an iron needle than to touch a woman that is illegal for him." (al-Qaradhawi, 2008)

Some scholars interpret this hadith literally – that any type of touching with unrelated members of the opposite sex are to be avoided. Others, however, interpret "touching" as an allusion to sexual intercourse – that is, you should not have sex with someone to whom you are not married. These scholars allow the non-sexual touching of members of the opposite sex, as in greeting or friendship. In response, some note that although you may not feel sexual desire on your own part, none of us know the feelings of others and so it is better to avoid any type of physical contact with unrelated members of the opposite sex (al-Qaradhawi, 2008).

Lived experiences of Muslim youth. Although it is important to understand the fundamental, normative principles regarding gender and sexuality in Islam, it is also important to consider how Muslims integrate such teachings into their daily lives. For instance, gender is an aspect of identity that is also shown to affect how Muslim American youth dealt with stigma. Sirin and Fine (2007) suggest in their ethnographic study of Muslim youth in New York that females exhibited more strength of character and were empowered to educate others about Islam.

[6] *Mahram* refer to kin that you cannot marry because to do so would constitute incest, such as parents, siblings, aunts and uncles. A complete list can be found in the Qur'an, 3:22-24.

Males, on the other hand, struggled more in claiming their Muslim identity. Similarly, Zaal, Salah, and Fine (2007) discuss the pressures young Muslim women face in the post 9/11 world, in which "they are intensely aware of discrimination and surveillance and feel an obligation to respond with intention and purpose *to protect* themselves and loved ones, *to resist* reifying stereotypes or to negotiate the pressure *to educate* the misinformed" (p.174). Naber (2005) similarly notes how religious identity increases autonomy and helps subvert cultural ideals for Muslim girls.

However, Naber, as well as Talbani and Hasanali (2000), report the double standard with regard to dating for Muslim boys and girls. Although dating is taboo for Muslim girls, it is far more acceptable for Muslim boys. Smerecnik, Schaalma, Gerjo, Meijer, and Poelman (2010) further find that this double standard extends to sexual intercourse as well – in an analysis of an online forum on sexuality for Muslim youth, Muslim men reported sexual activity similar to their non-Muslim counterparts, while Muslim women reported significantly less sexual activity – though both Muslim men and women reported believing that sex should be within the bounds of marriage. The authors also noted that, "the interpretation of Qur' anic passages that implicitly address sexuality…polarized nature of subsequent discussions" and that youth were vocal about disagreeing with Imams (religious leaders) whom they believed had "too liberal" interpretations of Islam (p. 7). Similarly, Hopkins (2006) reports that the Scottish Muslim men in his study believe that the subordination of women is not a part of Islam, but that Muslim women themselves perpetuate oppressive traditions. He observes that, "young men adopt a range of contradictory masculine subject positions, such as emphasizing equality and opportunity whilst also reinforcing sexist stereotypes and expectations" (p. 350).

Additionally, Orgocka (2004) notes that many Muslim parents do not want their children to attend secular sex education classes that they believe will promote sexuality, especially their girls. She suggests that although mothers are often believed to be the best resource for providing sexual education to Muslim girls, they too can be embarrassed to talk with daughters about sexuality. Although she found some mothers who were comfortable being direct about sexuality, most were embarrassed, had no good model to look to, and lacked the skills to answer questions. Self-help books for Muslim youth and their parents such as *Growing up Muslim*, *The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook*, and *The Muslim Next Door*, attempt to bridge the gap between theological beliefs and the lived experience of youth growing up in the West. In *The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook*, for example, Hafiz, Hafiz, and Hafiz (2008) advise:

> Dating can be another taboo topic. Most parents take the easy way out and just forbid it. Dating should only be viewed as a preliminary step to marriage. If you're not ready for marriage, then don't date. It's truly as simple as that. Go out with your friends in a group—You'll have fun and won't get emotionally bogged down with a lot of feelings that you're not ready for as a teen (Kindle Locations 1120).

Research Questions

As we have seen, adolescence is a time of intense physical, cognitive and social change. These changes have a significant impact on the religious and sexual identity development of youth. Muslim youth, in particular, may be challenged by the perceived differences in their religious beliefs on gender and sexuality from those of their non-Muslim peers. For these reasons, I address four primary research questions:

1. What do Muslim youth believe are the *Islamic teachings* regarding sexuality?
2. What do Muslim youth believe are their *peers' beliefs* regarding sexuality?
3. What impact does *school context* have on sexual identity formation for Muslim youth?
4. For Muslim youth, in what ways is *sexuality moderated by their religious beliefs*?

From a psychological perspective, significant differences regarding beliefs about sexuality between parents and peers can lead to confusion and identity crises for Muslim youth. This confusion can lead to unhealthy gender or sexual performances, as youth attempt to negotiate social situations without the benefit of scripts that align their values and beliefs with their behavior. By contrast, knowing religious scripts about sexuality, even when different from peers, may prove agentic for Muslim youth, as they are able to align their performances with their values and beliefs.

Method

The data for this paper are drawn from a larger mixed-method study that uses both focus groups and a survey instrument of Muslim American students (ages 10-14) from a medium-sized city in the southern United States (the focus group protocol can be found in Appendix A, and the survey instrument can be found in Appendix B). In this section, the choice of method, field procedures (including sampling, recruitment, demographics, strategies for recording data, and data reliability and validity), researcher subjectivity, and data analysis procedures are discussed.

Method Selection

Although previous studies have focused on the religious and sexual identity development of Muslim American youth, the targeted population of those studies has typically been older adolescents. Because the current study focuses on younger Muslim adolescents, it is more exploratory in nature. Focus groups are ideal for exploratory studies given the ability to generate a large amount of data through group interaction on a topic that is not well defined in the literature (Morgan, 1997). According to Porcellato, Dughill, and Springett (2002), focus groups are also a "useful and appropriate technique" with which to explore children's thoughts and feelings. Given that students ages 10-14 may not be able to fully articulate thoughts about their

religious and sexual identity (Smith & Denton, 2005), the focus group format provides a sound research design that allows participants to more safely explore ideas by listening and sharing with their peers. Wright (1994) further suggests that incorporating a paper and pencil exercise into the research design may be helpful in validating verbal responses from children. By allowing students to complete the survey following the initial focus group, students should have a greater level of comfort in understanding and answering the questions being asked. Maxwell (2012) corroborates Wright's finding by noting that using multiple methods facilitates *triangulation* (different methods serving as a check on one another in arriving at conclusions) as well as *expansion* (broadening the range of aspects present in the phenomenon).

Sampling

Population. The population of interest in the study is that of Muslim early adolescents (ages 10-14) in the United States. Although estimates suggest that Muslims ages 0-14 make up only 13% of the current Muslim population in the United States, this number is expected to triple by 2030 (Pew, 2011). Approximately 65% of Muslims are foreign born immigrants, while 35% are born in the United States. As these Muslim immigrants settle down and continue to raise their families in the US, more and more Muslim children will be American born. Currently, the largest groups of Muslims nationally are South Central Asians (33%), African Americans (30%), and Arabs (25%) (Qaddoura, 2009). Of this population, only 1% currently attends Islamic schools, while the vast majority attends public schools. The current study will focus on the Muslim early adolescent in medium-sized city in the southern United States. There are an estimated 25,000 Muslims in this area (Smietana, 2010).

Setting. The project contrasts three particular school settings – public schools that have a large Muslim population (Pluribus Middle), public schools that have few Muslim students

(Minimus Middle), and an Islamic school (Muslim Middle). Lofland and Lofland (1994) note, in choosing a setting, the "overall goal is to collect the *richest possible data*" (p. 11). They propose three criteria for evaluating sites – appropriateness, access, and ethics. Logistically, for students to participate in a focus group, the site would have to be one where their parents were willing to bring them or where they already were in sufficient numbers. In addition, since school and peer relationships have an increasing impact on children during adolescence, contrasting different school settings can provide valuable insights. Although other school settings do exist (private schools, home schools), the vast majority of Muslim students attend public schools (Keyworth, 2008). Given the focus on religious identity development, an Islamic school provides a more meaningful comparison site than other school settings. Further, Islamic school attendance has been on the rise in the US, given Muslim parents' fears about exposing their children to discrimination and prejudice (Huus, 2011; Keyworth, 2008).

Access to the school settings was a more complicated matter. Because of a previous relationship with the local Islamic school, I was able to quickly obtain access to the school as a research site. To conduct research with public schools, however, was a more complicated matter. I was required to submit a separate research proposal for approval. Once approval was obtained, I worked with school district officials to define which public schools met the criteria for "large Muslim population" and "small Muslim population." Since religious affiliation is not part of the demographic information collected by public schools, language was used as a proxy for religion. Kurdish, Somali, Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Uzbek were used as the languages to determine which schools have high percentage of Muslim students and which have fewer Muslim students but still a sufficient number to participate in the study. However, using language as a proxy underestimates Muslim students whose primary language is English. In

addition, it can also include non-Muslim populations.[7] In working with the school officials, I was able to help determine which schools would fit each criterion, but I was unable to make the final selection of school. School officials chose the public schools included in the study and arranged for my access to these sites.

The third criterion for evaluating sites is ethics. I submitted an IRB application and obtained both the parents' official Consent to Participate in the study as well as the students' Assent to Participate (See Appendices C and D for copies of the Informed Consent and Assent Forms) before collecting data. In addition, at the beginning of each focus group, I let the students know about the purpose of the study and that I would be audio recording the focus group sessions. Since focus groups require face-to-face interaction with others, I also emphasized the importance of maintaining group confidentiality. Each student received a $15 gift card for participating in the study.

Recruitment. Once the two public schools were chosen, I used a purposive sampling method to allow for the comparison of certain subgroups of Muslim American youth in order to gain a fuller understanding of the Muslim American youth experience. I wanted to include youth from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and family backgrounds, as well as an equal numbers of boys and girls. In the public schools, students were recruited via guidance counselors per district guidelines. At the Islamic school, letters were sent to all eligible students, and I met with parents who had questions. Once eligible students were identified, letters were sent to parents to explain the study, to address issues of confidentiality, and to obtain consent for their child to participate in the project. At the beginning of each focus group, assent forms were given to

[7] This, in fact, happened at Minimus Middle, which had a sizable group of Egyptian Coptic Christians who spoke Arabic.

students. Students were given the opportunity to sign the assent forms or to leave if they choose not to participate; however all students recruited chose to participate.

Sample demographics. The data contrast three different school settings: Pluribus Middle, Minimus Middle, and Muslim Middle. The sample includes 34 students ages 10-14 in 5th-7th grades, with a mean age of 11.45 years. By school, there were 17 students from Pluribus Middle, 6 students from Minimus Middle, and 11 students from Muslim Middle. Table 1 provides a summary of participants by school and gender.

Table 1
Sample Counts of Participants

	Boys	Girls	Totals
Pluribus	7	10	17
Minimus	2	4	6
Muslim	6	5	11
Totals	15	19	34

Within the sample, the ethnic breakdown of students was: 25% Kurdish; 22% Somali/Ethiopian; 18.75% South Asian; 15.6% Arab; and 18.75% all other, which is consistent with the Muslim population in the city. The students were predominantly 1st and 2nd generation immigrants, and out of the 19 girls who participated, approximately 1/3 did not wear hijab.

Data Collection

To minimize barriers to participation, all focus groups were held in the chosen schools during non-instructional time in the spring of 2013. I conducted all the focus groups, to minimize the variability of having multiple moderators. For all focus groups, I took notes as well as audio recorded using the iPhone application Voice Record Pro to help ensure accuracy during transcription. Pre-coded surveys were distributed at the end of the initial focus group sessions, and students were given envelopes so that sealed responses could be returned to school.

Data reliability and validity

Concepts of reliability and validity help others evaluate study methods. Normatively, reliability is defined as the ability of a measure to obtain the same results over multiple trials, while validity refers to the ability of a method to accurately capture the phenomenon being studied. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that one way to think about the reliability of qualitative data is to think about it in terms of representativeness. One way to enhance representativeness is through sampling. As previously mentioned, I purposively sampled students for varied ethnic, racial, socio-economic, gender and school differences to have a representative sample of Muslim youth. Although the sample does seem to reflect a relatively high level of religiosity, I believe that it is still representative of many Muslim youth. I acknowledge, though, that the responses may not reflect the beliefs of all Muslim youth.

According to Kuzel (1992), the validity and meaningfulness of qualitative research comes not just from the information richness generated by the cases selected, but also from the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher. Thus, it is important to check for researcher effects. I do think that being a Muslim woman who wears the hijab influenced the way that the students interacted with me initially - that there was a sense of wanting to provide socially acceptable answers. However, Baca Zinn (2001) notes that students often perceive a female researcher as someone who will listen to them and who are less likely to criticize. As such, I did feel that participants were comfortable with my presence. Further, I think being able to go back for a second focus group helped engender trust with the students and mitigated my possible impact on study outcomes. I also believe that my previous experience as a teacher in an Islamic school and as an active part of the Muslim community enabled me to focus on relevant details of the Muslim youth experience, and to be a more competent researcher.

Researcher subjectivity

Finally, my standpoint as a researcher who is a Muslim, a teacher, and a mother, needs to be addressed as part of the research methodology. Each researcher enters a study with their own set of knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences. By adopting the qualities of a reflective-generative practitioner, I believe that my background enhances the research conducted. As described by Dokecki, Newborough, and O'Gorman (2001), reflective generative practice "is an ethically grounded form of relational practice through which one intends to develop community as a generative social group and, thus, to develop and empower people to be self-efficacious, socially competent, and active participants in social life, and to have a psychological sense of community" (p.503). I believe that my position as a member of the same religious community as the youth participants allowed me to more easily gain their trust, and helped empower them to be self-efficacious, socially competent, and active participants within the focus group. Knowledge of the targeted population also aided me in leading the focus group - since I have greater knowledge of the nuances inherent in being Muslim, I was in a better position to follow-up on comments made by participants. As Amer and Bagasra (2013) note, the increased interest and visibility of the Muslim community in post-9/11 America has also led to issues of surveillance and distrust. I believe that being a member of this community can help assuage these feelings.

Data Analysis Plan

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews and open-ended survey questions were transcribed then coded and analyzed using MaxQDA (a qualitative analysis software). Data were analyzed using a combination of content analysis and grounded theory. Initially, open coding was used as a technique to identify *in vivo* codes and recognize emergent themes from the data. Strauss (1987)

suggests that open coding requires that data be analyzed in great detail using a specific and consistent set of questions. During this process, definitions, properties, and boundaries for each code was established and coding frameworks developed. Next, axial coding was used to help understand the interrelationships between categories. Categories often overlap, and successive sorting of coding frames help establish the relationships between coding categories. Finally, selective coding of the qualitative data analyzed evidence of theories on religious and sexual identity formation for Muslim youth. During all stages of coding, memos were written to capture researcher reflections and questions that surface. Codes and memos were reviewed and categorized according to prevalent themes. Data from the follow-up focus group were used to refine and modify themes, as well as to generate new themes to integrate into the analysis.

In addition, given that the data were generated using focus groups, Morgan suggests that it is important to note "(a) all mentions of a given code, (b) whether each individual participant mentioned a given code, and (c) whether each group's discussion contained a given code" (p. 60). That is, two levels of analysis must be acknowledged – the individual level and the group level. It is important to know how many groups mentioned a topic, how many people within each group mentioned a topic, and how enthusiastically a topic was discussed. Given that one of the strengths of the focus group format is to allow individuals to respond to each other, analyzing group interactions was an important part of the data analysis.

Survey Data

Although the sample size is relatively small (N=33), quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS. In addition to descriptive statistics about the sample, Independent Samples T-tests and Oneway Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to determine whether any significant subgroup differences exist among Muslim youth in terms of self-reported

religiosity and experiences with discrimination. However, it is important to note that the sample size was based primarily upon the logistics necessary for focus group data analysis. Using Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang's (2009) G*Power 3.1 calculator, an *a prior* analysis of power for independent samples T-tests suggests that for a moderate effect size (d=0.5), a power of 0.8, and even groups, a sample of 128 participants would be required; a large effect size (d=0.8) would require a sample of 52 participant. Similarly, for a Oneway ANOVA with three groups (based on school settings), a moderate effect size (d=0.25) and a power of 0.8, a sample of 159 participants would be required; 42 participants would be required for a large effect size (d=0.5). In all scenarios, then, the current sample appears to be too small. Thus, *post hoc* analyses of power were conducted to determine actual effect sizes (using Becker's (2000) effect size calculator) and power for significant results (using G*Power 3.1).

Research Findings

In analyzing the data on the religious and sexual identity formation of Muslim American youth, several themes emerge. These themes can be categorized by research question, which include: beliefs about Islamic teachings, beliefs about peer expectations, the impact of context on identity development, and behaviors that reflect religious and sexual identity. First, however, I will discuss the significant findings from the survey data.

Survey Data

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for items within the survey, which includes data about student religiosity and experiences with discrimination. Questions about religiosity are coded on a four-point scale, with 1 indicating low levels of religiosity and 4 indicating high levels of religiosity. Similarly, experiences of being treated differently because they were Muslim is coded on a four-point scale, with 1 indicating no differential treatment and 4

indicating feelings of being treated differently all the time. Overall sample means and standard deviations are given, as well as means and standard deviations by school type and gender.

Table 2
Sample Means and Standard Deviations by School Setting and Gender

	Overall (N=33)		Pluribus (N=17)		Muslim (N=10)		Minimus (N=6)		Female (N=18)		Male (N=15)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	11.45	1.15	11.71	1.05	10.50	0.71	12.33	1.03	11.39	0.92	11.53	1.41
Grade	6.03	0.88	6.18	0.73	5.20	0.42	7.00	0.63	5.94	0.80	6.13	0.99
Religiosity	3.03	0.59	3.24*	0.56	2.80*	0.42	2.83	0.75	2.94	0.73	3.13	0.35
Parents' Religiosity	3.70	0.53	3.88*	0.33	3.70	0.48	3.17*	0.75	3.61	0.61	3.80	0.41
Mosque Attendance	3.00	0.75	3.00	0.71	3.10	0.88	2.83	0.75	3.00	0.77	3.00	0.76
Islamic Knowledge	3.15	0.51	3.06	0.56	3.30	0.48	3.17	0.41	3.11	0.58	3.20	0.41
Think Muslim	2.88	0.82	3.12*	0.78	2.90	0.88	2.17*	0.41	2.89	0.83	2.87	0.83
Teacher Treatment	1.39	0.70	1.59	0.87	1.10	0.32	1.33	0.52	1.50	0.79	1.27	0.59
Peer Treatment	1.61	0.70	1.71	0.77	1.30	0.48	1.83	0.75	1.83*	0.79	1.33*	0.49
Overall Treatment	1.79	0.65	1.82	0.73	1.60	0.52	2.00	0.63	2.00*	0.59	1.53*	0.64

* Indicates significance at $p<=0.05$.

Overall, 67% of students reported being "Religious" and 73% reported having "Very Religious" parents. Although many students discussed instances of discrimination, only 6% reported they were treated differently by teachers or classmates "most of the time" or "all of the time"; only12% reported that overall, they were treated differently "most of the time" for being Muslim.[8] However, from Table 2 we see that there are few significant differences between groups by school setting or gender. Oneway ANOVAs were used to test for significant differences between the three school types. Parents' religiosity was found to be significant F (2,

[8] No one reported "all of the time".

32) = 5.087, p=0.013, as was Thinking about Being Muslim F (2, 32) = 3.444, p=0.045, though both effect sizes were small (η=0.25 and η=0.19, respectively). Since there were three different school settings, independent samples T-tests were conducted to see exactly where the significant differences existed. The T-tests reveal that students at Pluribus have higher self-reported Religiosity (M = 3.24, SD = 0.56) than those at Muslim (M = 2.80, SD = 0.42), t (25) = 2.12, p = .044. Students at Pluribus also have higher Parents' Religiosity (M = 3.88, SD = 0.33) compared to Minimus (M = 3.17, SD = 0.75), t (21) = 3.22, p = .004; and higher reports of Thinking about Being Muslim (M = 3.12, SD = 0.78) compared to Minimus (M = 2.17, SD = 0.41), t (21) = 2.82, p = .010. Cohen's effect size values (d = 0.9, d = 1.22, and d = 1.52, respectively) suggest high practical significance. *Post hoc* analyses of power reveal low levels of power for the differences in Religiosity and Parents' Religiosity (0.57 and 0.69, respectively), though the difference in Thinking about Being Muslim appears to have an acceptable level of power (0.86). Figure 1 provides a graph of mean differences by school setting.

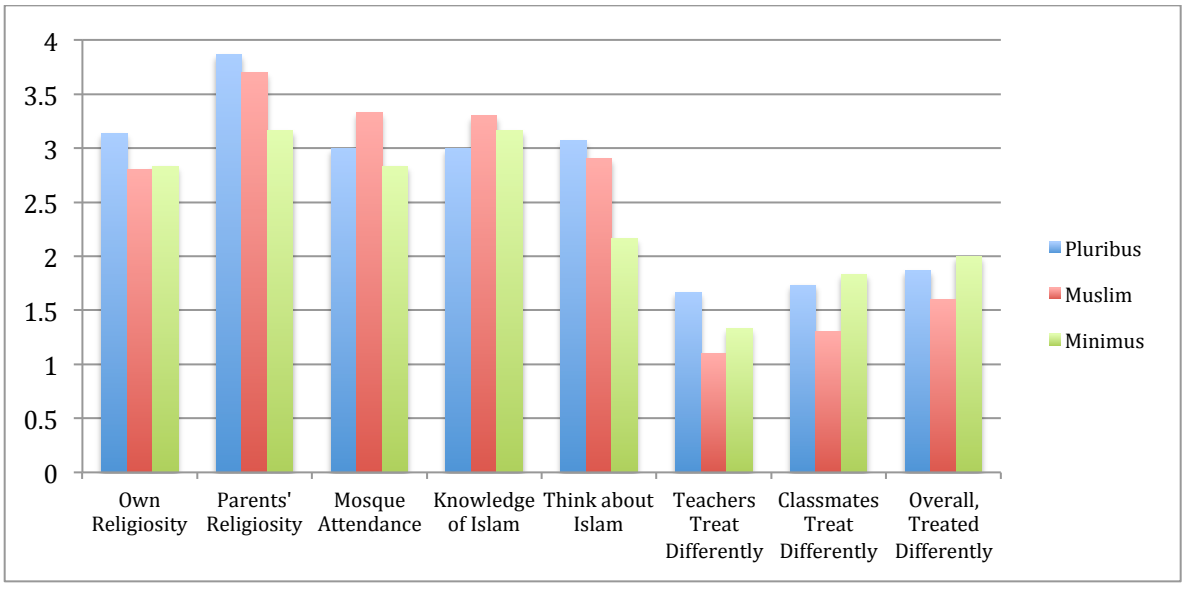

Figure 1. Perceptions of religiosity and discrimination by school setting.

T-tests were also run to test for differences by gender. The T-tests reveal that girls are more likely to feel that they are Treated Differently by Classmates (M = 1.83, SD = 0.79)

relative to boys (M = 1.33, SD = 0.49), t (31) = 2.141, p = .040. Girls are also more likely to feel that they receive different Overall Treatment (M = 2.00, SD = 0.59) compared to boys (M = 1.53, SD = 0.64), t (31) = 2.170, p = .038. Cohen's effect size values (d = 0.76 for both) suggest moderately high practical significance for these values. *Post hoc* analyses of power reveal low levels of power for both Treatment by Classmates and Overall Treatment (0.56 for both). Figure 2 illustrates the differences in religiosity and treatment by gender. Both of these results seem to support findings from Zaal, Salah, and Fine (2007) that suggests Muslim girls are quite aware of the surveillance that they face from others.

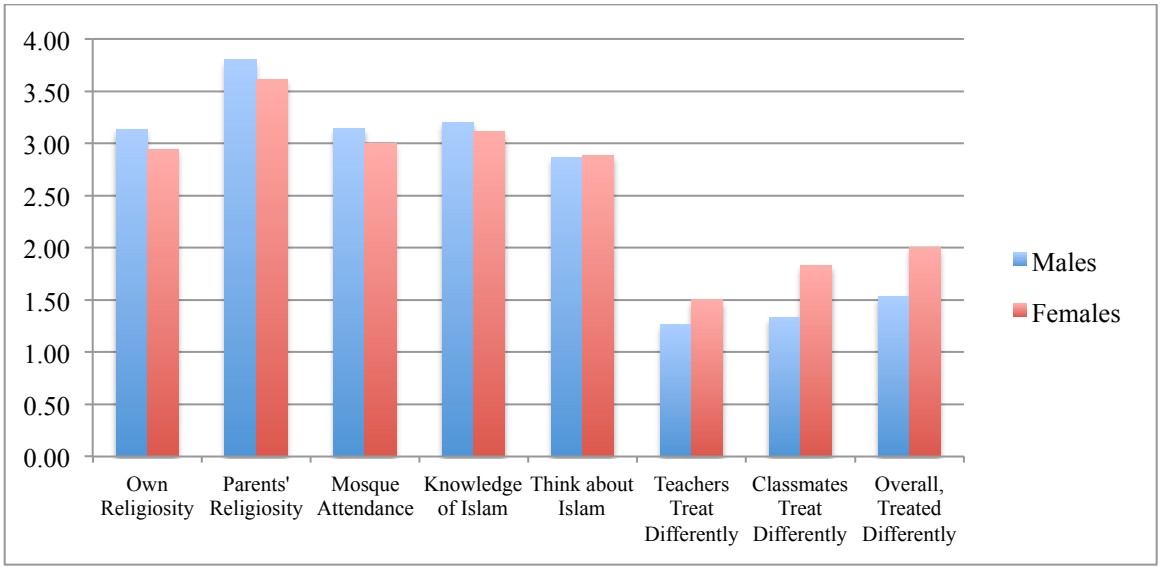

Figure 2. Perceptions of religiosity and discrimination by gender.

Focus Group Data

Beliefs about Islamic teachings. Students' beliefs about the Islamic teachings regarding gender and sexuality are, by and large, reflections of parental expectations. Indeed, like many other youth, Muslim participants reported that the majority of their religious beliefs were learned from their parents. Although they also reported using other sources of information available to them to learn about Islam (internet, religious leaders, weekend school programs, older siblings or

cousins, books or teachers in the case of Muslim Middle), students showed a marked preference for learning about Islam from their parents. Many reported close parental ties, feeling that they could speak openly and ask them questions. However, when asked about gender and sexuality, there seemed to be a distinct shift in the way that participants viewed their parents' teachings. Although issues of gender and sexuality can often make youth this age feel awkward or embarrassed, the shift in this case seem to allude to a greater discomfort in trying to reconcile parental expectations with conflicting contextual factors. Additionally, while many of the youth were able to cite religious references from the Qur'an or *hadith* in response to other questions, the religious teachings about gender and sexuality were attributed almost exclusively to parents. Parents can be sorted into three categories based on their expectations of their children's gender and sexual performances – those that expected complete gender segregation, those that allowed some mixed-gender contact within the bounds of friendship, and those that allowed dating.

There were students from all three schools who reported that their parents expected them to remain completely segregated from members of the opposite sex. Youth reported that they were admonished to "not talk to, sit next to, or even look at members of the opposite sex." Although students realized that these expectations were unrealistic, especially in public school settings, they reported trying to follow their parents' directions. However, they also realized that these warnings were often gendered - girls, in particular, were warned to stay away from boys. Fatima, a seventh grader from Minimus, says:

> But Muslim parents I feel personally are just more like - you can't do this and you can't do that, especially toward girls…Both of my brothers currently have a girlfriend and my mom is just like - oh, I don't care.

Other students report that their parents were more flexible, understanding that within school contexts, gender mixing is largely unavoidable. These parents typically warn youth against

flirting and touching. However, these expectations also created difficulties for Muslim youth as they tried to navigate interpersonal sexual scripts. Aiysha, a fifth grader from Pluribus notes:

> My mom, like, she says you can be friends with them. You can talk to them, just don't date them. Don't hug them. Don't like be as close as you would be with a girlfriend, and it's kinda hard because guys do like say, oh, you're pretty. You should do this and this and this. It's gonna be no, no matter what, so yeah.

Although Aiysha's parents allow boys as friends, and she says "it's gonna be no" with regard to sexual behavior, her quote exemplifies the complex nature of mixed-gender friendships at this age when boys and girls become increasingly aware of their own sexuality. Aisha not only has to know her own script on sexuality, but she also has to be able to negotiate interpersonal sexual scripts with others who may or may not share her own values and beliefs.

There were a few participants who reported that their parents allowed them to date; however, these participants were all boys. Anis, a sixth grader from Minimus, says: "Like I asked my mom - it's not wrong to have a girlfriend, just don't, like, make out with her every minute." As Fatima noted, both her brothers had girlfriends while she was restricted from dating. The implication is that dating typically involved non-Muslim peers. Interestingly, Khalid, a seventh grader at Pluribus, noted that if he were to date a Muslim girl, "her father and brothers were likely to beat [him] up" – a problem he would not have with a non-Muslim girl. Many of the boys in the group nodded or verbally agreed with his statement. His comment, though, highlights an implicit gender stereotype – that Muslim girls are "handed" from one male (father) to another (husband/boyfriend), reinforcing hierarchal (and therefore unequal) gender relations.

As Muslim youth negotiate the boundaries between acceptable religious performance and conflicting social norms, they often report confusion about the actual Islamic teachings on gender and sexuality. Part of the confusion can be attributed to the null curriculum of gender and

sexuality in Islam. As Mohamed, an eighth grader from Minimus notes, "I just wish there was someone who would make it more clear." However, although youth report close ties with parents in other domains, they often report feeling uncomfortable turning to their parents for advice on this particular topic – Layla, a sixth grader at Muslim Middle says, "I'm afraid to ask my parents about that." Because parents are often viewed as having unrealistic expectations, as well as seemingly advocating inequitable expectations with regard to gender, many youth also question the veracity of their advice. Fatima observes:

> It's just like a sense, we're younger and we might not know as much about the religion as our parents do. They think, especially with my parents, they think they can say things and trick me into thinking it so I won't do it but it's not actually a thing in the religion.

Beliefs about peer expectations. Muslim youth do believe that their peers' expectations about gender and sexuality are significantly different from their own religious beliefs. For instance, a common story reported about conflicting gender norms is about girls who take off their *hijab* when at school. Although some youth suggest that girls do so to avoid discrimination, others suggest that it is a gender performance related to sexuality. Khair, a fifth grader from Muslim Middle, reports:

> I know a girl who goes to school, takes off her *hijab*, comes back, wears it and put, puts on makeup at school without her parents knowing.

However, the prevalence of this "story" has led to parental scripts regarding hijab. Aiysha says,

> Like, my Dad says, like before, before I started wearing *hijab*, he was like it's your, it's your choice, and he said, "Remember. If you don't want to wear hijab, just don't wear it, and don't go cheat behind their backs and do that."

The majority of the differences that Muslim youth face, though, is in relation to sexual performances. Youth report that it is common for their peers to be in romantic relationships, and that they are aware of the presence of "kissing corners" in schools, as well as peers who engage

in sexual activity. For example, in the follow-up focus group with a mixed group of 6-8th grade boys at Pluribus, one of the younger students began to tell the story of a boy who allegedly paid a girl to have oral sex with him in a bathroom. The older students were quick to try to shush him, signifying the taboo of speaking about sex so plainly, perhaps more so because my own wearing of a *hijab* signified a perceived religious status. However, upon deeper probing, the students revealed real frustration with parental refusal to discuss sex openly while being confronted with such sexual situations at school.

In another example, Amina, a sixth grader at Pluribus, also discussed the pressure to she felt to "twerk"[9]. She had me shut off the recorder during this admission, signifying the taboo that she felt over this confession.[10] However, among her non-Muslim peers it was an accepted practice, and she felt that twerking was necessary to be popular. In her mind, twerking's sexual nature was a performance that was unacceptable for religious reasons, yet necessary for social ones. Other students reported similar situations where they felt the pressure to engage in sexual performances[11] by peers, though they believed those performances to be religiously prohibited.

Muslim youth also felt conflicted when dealing with Muslim peers of the opposite gender. Many reported feeling that Muslim youth of the opposite sex were more likely to pass judgment on them, questioning the appropriateness of their gender and sexual performances. Although participants acknowledge that opposite sex Muslim youth probably experience similar pressures from parents and non-Muslim peers, they remain unclear about how to interact with one another.

Impact of context. Gender and sexual performances were also moderated by school contexts. For instance, at Pluribus, there was a heightened sense of surveillance with regard to

[9] From the Urban Dictionary: The rhythmic gyrating of the lower fleshy extremities in a lascivious manner with the intent to elicit sexual arousal or laughter in ones intended audience.
[10] She agreed that I could report the story, she just didn't want me to record her telling it.
[11] I do not mean intercourse here, rather sexual performances such as dancing, flirting, etc.

gender and sexual performances. Since many of the Muslim youth were members of the same community, if not the same family, other Muslim youth could report their behavior to parents. Such surveillance pressures youth to act in socially acceptable ways in order to avoid censure. However, youth also perceived that such surveillance is often unjust - the result of imagined rather than actual transgressions. Iman, a sixth grader at Pluribus, notes:

> She would tell that, she would tell my mom, but she would tell them the wrong way like I'm doing it bad, like I'm keeping, spending most of my time with boys, when they're actually just coming out to talk to me, so she'd tell them like that and I would get in trouble. And then they don't trust me as much as her because she's the one who keeps on telling her things.

Similarly, students at Pluribus also reported feeling that some of their Muslim peers were trying to entrap them by asking leading questions. If they answered, then they would be subject to rumors that could potentially lead back to their parents. Aiysha reports that,

> Yeah, sometimes in my class, like, or somewhere else, my friends here ask me, like, hey, who do you like? Do you think he's cute? … So I would say, like, I would think that somebody's cute but keep it to myself….just keep to yourself or they might start rumors and say, hey, did you know that she, did you know she asked him out or he asked her out, you know, this and that, so it'll start rumors.

Although surveillance is typically undertaken by same sex Muslim peers, it also impacts relationships with opposite sex Muslim peers. If both participants in a relationship are Muslim, there is greater likelihood that they will be "caught."

By contrast, youth at Muslim Middle reported feeling "protected" in their school context with regard to gender and sexuality. Although they report concern about what they will do when they enter public school spaces, they do feel that the Islamic environment at their school allows them to adopt gender and sexual performances that are consistent with their religious beliefs. However, while gender segregation creates a feeling of safety, it also creates gender competition. For example, both girls and boys want to be able to access the basketball court during recess.

Boys often use gender stereotypes to assert their claim over this "masculine" space, while girls deny the masculinity and demand equal playing time. Although teachers promote equality, this contested space and others like it often lead to hostile feelings between boys and girls at Muslim Middle, and questions about "masculine" versus "feminine" spaces. Suraya notes, "Muslim boys, they fight with you like over… everything," while Bilal simply states, "Girls are the enemy."

At Minimus, students are not hampered by questions of surveillance or contested spaces. Although they exhibit confusion with regard to Islamic teachings about gender and sexuality, they also exhibited a high degree of autonomy with regard to the choices they make – not having many Muslim peers appears to provide room for greater choice with regard to gender and sexual performances. Similarly, context is also important in considering "backstage" spaces. In all three schools, students reported positive impacts from the focus group itself, highlighting the importance of being able to discuss issues with supportive adults and peers. As Layla states:

> I think it's [the focus group] important because I just feel happy to know that an adult and my Muslim sisters know how it feels when people call us stuff and that it's not just me. If it happens again, I know they will help me.

How sexuality is moderated by religious beliefs. Although Muslim youth report confusion regarding Islamic teachings on gender and sexuality, the impact of having a religious script can still be agentic for Muslim youth. Muslim youth utilize religious scripts on Islam as a protective barrier from having to deal with sexuality before they are ready. Many participants expressed the belief that engaging in romantic or sexual relationships at their age is not healthy. Fatima, for instance, noted (in reference to peers in a romantic relationships), "You don't know him. You don't know the guy. You don't love him. You're *12*, now give it up!" By invoking Islam, then, Muslim youth can "opt out" of premature sexual activity. As Jamal, a seventh grader from Pluribus, stated, "It's our childhood, you know, I wanna live it to be fun…girls are

drama." Because he has opted out of the sexual expectations that his peers face, Mohamed adds, "It's like I can see outside the box…I actually help my friends with their relationship problems."

Similarly, the *hijab* can provide an agentic Islamic script. However, considerations of the hijab are often quite complicated. As the story of the Muslim girl who wears the hijab at home only to secretly take off in school illustrates, the *hijab* can be viewed as a gender performance dictated by parental expectations. That is not to say that Muslim youth cannot authentically have different gender performances with regard to the *hijab* in different social contexts. For example, Suraya, a sixth grader from Muslim Middle, wears the *hijab* at school, but not at home. The difference, though, is in the secretive nature of the first example – she is deliberately hiding her gender performance from significant others in her life.

Within this particular sample, though, the overwhelming discourse on the *hijab* is that wearing it is a matter of choice. This belief was echoed in all school settings, among boys and girls, and those that covered as well as those that did not. *Hijab* helps preserve modesty, but more importantly, it is a marker of identity and a way to symbolize faith in Allah. As such, it can provide an agentic Islamic script. For example, the *hijab* is a signal to others about one's religiosity. Nadine, a sixth grader from Pluribus, says,

> Cause I think if I wore a *hijab* they'll think I'm more Muslim now and they don't think, they think I will do like the right things and I don't like them (boys) anymore.

Similarly, Jamila, a sixth grader from Muslim Middle, notes, "But the thing about boys is they won't look at the girls if they have a *hijab*" – both referring to the interaction with boys as well as the religious protection she believes the *hijab* provides. However, Muslim youth also believe in the values that the deeper values that the *hijab* represents – Zeinab, a seventh grader from Pluribus, says, "I think it's good to wear a scarf cause a guy sees the inner beauty and like your

personality more than appearance." Her comment ties her performance of the *hijab* to deeper values and beliefs about romantic relationships – that personality should play a role in attraction.

Muslim youth do, though, question some Islamic teachings on sexuality. Specifically, Muslim youth challenge ideas of arranged marriage. Although many participants express (tacit) acceptance of teachings that suggest sexuality should be confined to marriage, they often do not accept the idea that they will have to marry a stranger. As Aiysha relates:

> I really don't like the tradition how you have to pick, like, your dad picks out your husband, cause I think you should fall in love with somebody first and marry them because you're not going to marry somebody you don't like that your dad picked out, so yeah.

Mohamed adds, "It's just wrong to go up to a person you don't know and you just, like, you've got to marry her." Although youth recognize that dating at their age will not lead to marriage, they do believe that there is a need to know the person you will marry before the actual wedding. Zied, a sixth grader from Pluribus, questions, "Isn't it okay if you're doing it [dating] as long as you're gonna marry them? Like you're trying to marry them later or something?" In this way, Muslim youth critique parental norms and exert their agency to create sexual scripts that tie their Islamic values to their lived experiences as Muslim Americans.

In summary, focus group data reveal that many participants have questions regarding the actual teachings on gender and sexuality in Islam given unrealistic and gendered instructions from parents. However, because issues of gender and sexuality are especially taboo in Islam, Muslim youth are often afraid to ask parents for additional information. Further, Muslim youth perceive significant difference in expected gender and sexual performances in relation to their non-Muslim peers, though expected performances with opposite sex Muslim peers can be complex as well. Findings also suggest that context can create stricter restrictions on behavior, promote feelings of safety, and/or provide Muslim youth the space needed to explore issues of

gender and sexuality. Finally, religious scripts, including the wearing of *hijab*, can be agentic for Muslim youth, allowing them to "opt out" of early sexual activity. However, Muslim youth also challenge certain religious scripts, such as those related to arranged marriage.

Discussion

Adolescence is a time of intense physical, cognitive and social change. These changes motivate youth to begin exploring issues of identity – ways to define themselves and who they are in relation to the world around them. For Muslim American youth, dealing with the intersection of religious and sexual identity formation, in particular, may present a challenge. Conflicting norms, peer pressure, questions about authority, and threats of surveillance can lead to what Erikson refers to as an "identity crisis" with regards to religion and gender/sexual identity. Moreover, because gender and sexuality are often part of the "null curriculum" in Islam, confusion over "actual" religious teachings on gender and sexuality may diminish sexual agency for these youth (Sanjakdar, 2011). However, using theories of performativity (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1959) can help us analyze ways in which Muslim youth can be agentic, as well as provide implications for potential policies or interventions.

In this study, Muslim youth are aware that parents value modesty and believe that sexual activity should stay within the bonds of marriage, and generally agree with these values and beliefs as religious individuals themselves. Thus, they are more likely to delay sexual activity when compared with less religious peers, as suggested in studies by Smith and Denton (2005) and Hardy and Raffaeli (2003). However, Muslim youth still question the gender and sexual performances that their parents deem appropriate. There is a widespread sentiment that the expected gender and sexual performances that parents expect do not completely align with the values and beliefs that they espouse. In particular, youth express distrust of parental scripts that

seem unrealistic given their social contexts and those that place unfair restrictions on girls. Both of these phenomena are seen in a number of studies, including Naber (2005), Talbani and Hasanali (2000), and Smerecnik, Schaalma, Gerjo, Meijer, and Poelman (2010). One implication is that while religious scripts may delay sexual activity for girls, it is less likely to affect boys, supporting findings from Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, and Randall (2004) and Carpenter (2010) as well.

Yet, Muslim youth feel unable to reach out to their parents about gender and sexuality because it is considered a taboo subject. As Sanjakdar (2011) noted, such null curriculums can inhibit sexual agency for Muslim youth. It may be, as Orgocka (2004) posits, that parents themselves do not have good religious scripts on gender and sexuality, and are thus unable to provide such information to their children. At the same time, though, Muslim youth report close and supportive ties with parents in other areas. As Tseng et al. (2002) note, it is the existence of these ties along with cognitive and social growth that make this age an ideal turning point. As such, greater clarity and alignment with values in parental religious scripts on gender and sexuality can provide Muslim youth with more agentic scripts on gender and sexuality.

Muslim youth also actively critique the dominant culture of their peers. Like other religious youth, participants report the belief that romantic and sexual relationships at their age are often not healthy (Hardy & Raffaeli, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Yet, participants recognize that certain gender and sexual performances are associated with popularity and peer acceptance, as Amina reported with the pressure to twerk. Further, peers also impact interpersonal sexual scripts (Carpenter, 2010) - where values about sexuality are negotiated - as illustrated by Aiysha's quote on talking with a boy who was a friend. However, religious scripts can be agentic for Muslim youth – as exemplified by Muslim youth who resist peer scripts on

gender and sexual performance, choosing to opt out of such behavior instead. Additionally, these scripts may not only reflect the immediate desire to opt out, but may also reflect "deeper education rehearsals" (O'Brien, 2011) regarding relationships; that is, beliefs that physical attraction should not overshadow the importance of personality and "inner beauty" in romantic relationships.

Additionally, although religious scripts are often used to resist dominant culture, Muslim youth also appropriate the religious scripts given to them to challenge the culture of their parents. Graham (1996) posits that a critical aspect of agency with regards to religious scripts is questioning sources of authority in determining norms. For instance, although Muslim youth agree with values of modesty and chastity, they actively resist and critique notions of arranged marriages. In their own (re)formulation of Muslim American identity, values of modesty and chastity can and should exist without notions of arranged marriage. Thus Muslim youth interpret their religious values in ways that make sense for them in their own social environment.

Further, in a discussion on gender and sexuality among Muslim youth, it is essential to pay attention to the complexities inherent in the gender performance of the hijab. It is imbued with so much meaning, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, that teasing apart its impact is often challenging. Within the context of this sample, the predominant discourse on the hijab was as the it was a choice – one that related to social acceptability, as a signal to others about religiosity, and as a sign of faith. However, participants acknowledged that it was also as a control mechanism – as stories of Muslim girls who took off their hijab in school could attest. However, it was also a religious script that allowed Muslim girls to opt out of sexual activity. As a gender performance, then, it both subverts and re-creates gender norms. But perhaps, most importantly, it is understood in the lived experience of Muslim girls and women (Mahmood, 2006).

Context also moderates how Muslim youth express their gender and sexual performances. Youth at Pluribus report feeling the impact of surveillance, youth at Muslim report feeling protected, and youth at Minimus appear to be independent of other controlling structures. In addition, context also plays a role in how Muslim youth interact with Muslim peers of the opposite sex. For instance, issues of surveillance may hinder the development of relationships, while gender segregation may actively engender antagonistic ones. While this may not seem like a problem while Muslim youth early adolescents, it may create significant feelings of resentment as youth approach marriage age (Smerecnik, Schaalma, Gerjo, Meijer, & Poelman, 2010). Therefore, Islamic scripts on gender and sexuality should also address issues of how to deal with Muslim peers of the opposite sex.

Additionally, the focus group format, especially the second member check focus group, highlighted the importance of backstage performances for Muslim youth (Goffman. 1959); O'Brien, 2011) Although initial reactions to questions about gender and sexuality were feelings of embarrassment or awkwardness, the participants ultimately showed appreciation for being able to discuss this topic with others. Realizing that they were not the only ones who had issues with gender and sexuality empowered students to share their own hidden transcripts. The participants responded to statements from other focus group members, adding their own stories, and raising their own questions. Thus, creating safe spaces and accessible curricula for Muslim youth to explore gender and sexuality in Islam can benefit Muslim youth, and highlights the importance of supportive Muslim adults and peer modeling.

Finally, although we focus on the intersection between religious and sexual identity, we know that these are only two of the multiple identities that Muslim youth must negotiate. For instance, in issues of surveillance and monitoring, ethnicity may have impacted which students

were most likely to be targets of surveillance. As Britto and Amer (2007) find, ethnic immigrant communities often police Muslim youth behavior. Further, Muslim youth utilized religious scripts to opt out of sexual behavior they felt inappropriate for their age – but what is the impact, then, of religious scripts for older adolescents? It will be important to consider ways to discuss the multiple religious/cultural/social scripts that Muslim youth must negotiate, as well as their impacts on conflicting ideas of performance, in finding ways to promote agency.

To me, the primary implication of the study is that greater knowledge can promote greater agency. For Muslim youth and parents, there are strong existing bonds that can facilitate the creation of agentic scripts on gender and sexuality. Parents need to realize that unrealistic and gendered religious scripts produce distrust in youth, and may also lead to unhealthy relationships with Muslim peers of the opposite sex. Additionally, parents and educators need to address issues of context for Muslim youth, and consider the affect that it may have on the sexual scripts. Creating spaces for backstage rehearsals with supportive peers and adults may also enable Muslim youth to practice agentic religious scripts, as well as allow them to engage in deeper educational rehearsals that go beyond opting out strategies and promote value-based scripts on sexuality.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample size, the findings presented here are not meant to provide generalizable data. Rather, the findings are meant to reveal a breadth of Muslim youth experiences with respect to religious and sexual identity formation. To evaluate the findings, though, it is important to consider the limitations of the study. Specifically, I will address issues of sampling, location, and methodology.

In terms of sampling, my attempt to reach less religious, more secular Muslim youth through public school settings was largely unsuccessful. One reason may be the recruitment process – students had to be willing to disclose their Muslim identity within a public school setting in order to be eligible for the study. Perhaps utilizing ethnic organizations, snowball sampling or online forums may enable researchers to access this understudied population. However, there is unquestionably the need to include the voices of more marginalized Muslim youth in future research studies (Amer and Bagasra, p.137-138). Additionally, I just focus on a sample of Muslim youth. There is no comparison group of non-Muslim students who are also religious minorities, such as Jews or Hindus, or a group of religious majority Christians, or more secular youth. Future studies may compare the religious and sexual identity development of Muslim youth with comparison groups to provide a deeper understanding of which issues are common to all adolescents and those that are unique to Muslim students.

Logistically, it was necessary to focus on a single geographic location. Although there are certainly differences between the community in the study and those found nationwide, the range of Muslim youth experiences presented here may still provide insight to those of Muslim youth found in other places and spaces. Another limitation in terms of location is focusing on only two public schools and one Islamic school. However, recruiting students from a variety of schools and holding focus groups after school hours would require parents to transport their children to and from the focus group. In such a case, it would be very difficult to guarantee how many students would show up to participate. By holding the focus groups within the school, students who have consented to the study are much more likely to attend the session.

Finally, although the mixed-method design provides rich data on the intersection between religious and sexual identity formation of Muslim youth, additional data from parents, schools,

and peers may provide important insights. Further, increasing the sample size for the survey instrument could improve current findings. Indeed, the survey data reveal few significant group differences, with low levels of power for those results. Future studies may include, for example, interviews or focus groups with parents or educators, ethnographic observation of students, additional student surveys, or analyses of curricular materials that schools might use to discuss gender and sexuality.

Conclusion

In exploring the impact of religious scripts on the gender and sexual performances of Muslim youth, I find evidence that support Sanjakdar's assertion that gender and sexuality are often part of a null curriculum. Although Muslim youth report believing in the values and beliefs their parents teach them, they also report feeling that parental scripts on gender and sexuality are often unrealistic or unfair. However, Muslim youth are often unwilling to discuss these issues with their parents. This suggests that improving parental scripts on gender and sexuality can have a positive impact on the sexual identity formation of Muslim American youth.

Additionally, Muslim youth are able to utilize religious scripts to make agentic choices about their sexual identity and performance. These include using general religious scripts as well as the hijab as a way to opt out of peer expectations on sexual behavior, as well as deeper scripts that tie values to relationship choices. Muslim youth also critique parental expectations of arranged marriages, voicing the belief that they can be true to Islamic values without engaging in this practice. Further research on this topic can provide greater insight into ways that youth can make agentic choices about gender and sexuality that integrate both their religious beliefs and their lived experiences as Muslim Americans. Finally, it is also important to understand that Islamically, there is no subject that should be part of a "null curriculum" - including sexuality.

As the Prophet Mohammed said: “Indeed, you should not be ashamed. The best of you are those who ask about what concerns them.”

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

1. What does it mean to you to be Muslim?
   Possible Probes:
   - Do you feel you know a lot about being Muslim/Islam?
   - Is being Muslim important to you?

2. Have you ever been treated badly for being a Muslim?
   Possible Probes:
   - Have you heard stories about Muslim kids being harassed?
   - Do you think the way Muslims are seen by others (in the media) is fair?

3. What does your family say about being Muslim/Islam?
   Possible Probes:
   - Do your parents practice Islam very strictly?
   - Do you have older brothers/sisters/cousins you talk to about being Muslim/Islam?

4. What do you think your teachers think about Muslims?
   Possible Probes:
   - Do you think they know a lot about being Muslim/Islam?
   - Do you think it affects the way you are treated?

5. What do your friends think about Muslims?
   Possible Probes:
   - Are most of your friends Muslim or non-Muslim?
   - Have you ever had to talk about being Muslim to them? What did you say?
   - Do you have different friends in school and out of school? Is it different being Muslim with these two groups?

6. Do you think it is different being a Muslim boy/girl?
   Possible Probes:
   - Do you feel members of the opposite sex look at you differently? How does that make you feel?
   - *For girls*: What are your thoughts on hijab? Why did you choose to/not to wear hijab? Do you think you will change your mind about hijab in the future?

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

Study Identification Number:_____ Age:_____

School:_____ Grade: _____

Do you attend a mosque? If so, which one?_____

Do you attend any weekend school programs? If so, which one? _____

_____

What is your ethnic background? _____

Who do you live with? _____

_____

How would you describe yourself?

Not Religious Somewhat Religious Religious Very Religious

How would you describe your parents/guardians?

Not Religious Somewhat Religious Religious Very Religious

How often do you attend a mosque?

Never Once in awhile/ for Eid Somewhat regularly Very regularly

How much do you feel you know about Islam?

Nothing A little bit A good amount A great deal

How often do you think about being Muslim?

Not at all Sometimes Most of the time All of the time

How often do you think you are treated differently because you are a Muslim?

Not at all Sometimes Most of the time All of the time

What was the most important part of today's focus group for you?

_____

_____

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What was NOT discussed today that you think is very important in understanding what it is like to be a Muslim?

_____

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Would you like to participate in a follow-up focus group? _____

APPENDIX C
Consent for Child's Participation in Research Study

Dear Parent,

I would like your child to take part in a research study. The goal of the study is to understand what Muslim children think about being Muslim. The study will also look at how families, schools, and classmates can effect the way a child thinks about being Muslim.

I am sending you this letter to tell you about the study. I am also asking permission for your child to participate. After reading the letter, please sign below if it is okay for your child to take part in the study.

What will my child be asked to do?

There are two parts of the study. Both parts will take place at your child's school. For the first part of the study:

1. Your child will be asked to be part of a focus group with 6 to 8 other students from their school. The focus group will take about one hour. During the focus group, children will answer questions about being a Muslim. They will also be asked about how their families, schools, and classmates effect the way they think about being a Muslim. The focus group will be audio taped to so that answers are recorded correctly.
2. Your child will also be asked to fill out a survey. The survey will ask about background information and information related to religion. It will take about half an hour to complete. Each student will be given an envelope to seal their answers before returning them to their guidance counselors.

Approximately 6-8 weeks after the first part of the study, I will ask your child to be part of another group activity. During this activity, I will share (unidentified) findings from the study with your child. I will ask your child to respond to the findings and provide feedback. This activity will also take about an hour and will be audio taped.

Does my child have to do this?

No, your child does not have take part in the study. Taking part in the research is voluntary. Nothing bad will happen if your child does not participate. Your child can leave the study at anytime. If your child leaves the study, all of their information will be deleted.

Does it cost my child or me anything to participate?

No, there is no cost to you or your child for participating. As a way of thanking your child for participating in the focus group and filling out the survey, I will give a $15 gift card to Wal-Mart.

Who will hear the audiotapes of the interview?

All children who take part in the study will be audio taped during the group sessions. Only I will

be able to hear the audiotapes. A code will be used in place of your child's name to protect their identity and privacy. I will keep the tapes and any written notes in locked storage at the end of the study. If you do not give your permission for audiotaping, your child will not be included in the study.

Will others know that my child is taking part in this research?

Only the school guidance counselor, your child's teacher, and I will know your child is taking part in this study. I will keep any comments made by your child during the research project private. Only I will have access to information that could identify a child with audio files and written materials. But because part of this study includes a group interview, other students will hear your child's answers. Therefore, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality for this part of the study.

What are the benefits of taking part in this research?

There may not be a directly benefit to you from the research. However, I hope that the study will help us understand how young Muslims think about their religion. By doing so, I hope to help create resources for families and schools to better support Muslim students.

What are the risks of taking part in this research?

Some students may be uncomfortable answering questions about religion or how others treat them. However, I will make sure students know that they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to. The other risk in the study is the possible loss of confidentiality during the group interviews. I will do my best to make sure all the children understand the need to maintain confidentiality. I will also store your child's information in a secure location to protect their privacy. All efforts within reason will be made to keep your child's research record private, but I cannot promise total privacy. For example, if there is immediate danger to your child or others, I am required to report it to the appropriate authorities. Children who tell me about serious problems may be referred to their guidance counselor or given a list of community resources.

If I want my child to participate, what do I have to do?

Please sign this form and give it to your child to return to a guidance counselor or teacher at your child's school. Please keep the second copy of the consent form.

Note on privacy: No one, including you, will have access to your child's specific responses to the study's questions. However, your child's information may be shared if you, your child, or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions, please contact me, Hasina Mohyuddin. I can be reached at 615-594-1507 or by e-mail at Hasina.a.mohyuddin.1@vanderbilt.edu. If you have other questions about this research, please call my advisor Paul Dokecki, at (615) 322-8418. You may also contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board at 322-2918 or toll free at 866-224-8273.

Thank you very much!

STATEMENT BY PARENT AGREEING TO CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH: I have read this informed consent letter. All my questions have been answered. I freely and voluntarily choose to allow my child to participate in this research. I agree to allow my child to be audio taped for research purposes. I agree to allow the researchers to listen to these tapes. I understand that this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

_____ **Printed name of child**

_____ **Printed name of Parent**

_____ **Signature of Parent**

_____ **Child's Birth date**

_____ **Today's date**

_____ **Parent's Phone Number**

APPENDIX D
Assent for Child/Youth Participation in Muslim American Youth Study
(This assent document applies to children aged 10-14)

Name of participant: _____ Age: _____

Below are the answers to some questions you may have. If you do not understand what is written below or have any other questions about this study, please ask them. You will be given a copy of this form.

1. Why are you doing this research?

The goal of the study is to understand what Muslim children think about being Muslim. The study will also look at how families, schools, and classmates can effect the way a child thinks about being Muslim.

2. What will I do and how long will it take?

There are two parts of the study. Both parts will take place at your school. For the first part of the study:

1. You will be asked to be part of a focus group with 6 to 8 other students from your school. The focus group will take about one hour. During the focus group, you will answer questions about being a Muslim. You will also be asked about how your families, schools, and classmates effect the way you think about being a Muslim. The focus group will be audio taped to so that your answers are recorded correctly.
2. You will also be asked to fill out a survey. The survey will ask about background information and information related to religion. It will take about half an hour to complete. You will be given an envelope to seal your answers before returning them to your guidance counselors.

Approximately 6-8 weeks after the first part of the study, I will ask you to be part of another group activity. During this activity, I will share (unidentified) findings from the study with you. I will ask you to respond to the findings and provide feedback. This activity will also take about an hour and will be audio taped.

3. Do I have to be in this research study and can I stop if I want to?

No, you do not have take part in the study. Taking part in the research is voluntary. Nothing bad will happen if you do not participate. You can leave the study at anytime. If you leaves the study, all of your information will be deleted.

4. Will anyone know that I am in this research study?

Your parents, guidance counselor, teacher, and I will know you are part of this study. But I will keep any comments you make during the research project private. Only I will have access to information that could identify you on the audio files and written materials. But because part of this study includes a group interview, other students will hear your answers. Therefore, I cannot

guarantee complete confidentiality for this part of the study.

Again, any comments you make during any part of the research process will be kept confidential. That means that nobody but the researcher will have access to your answers. Not even your parents will be told what you say during the study. The only exception is if you give any information that suggests that a person is being abused or neglected. Then I will have to tell the appropriate authority.

5. How will this research help me or other people or are there any risks involved with my participation?

There may not be a directly benefit to you from the research. However, I hope that the study will help us understand how young Muslims think about their religion. By doing so, I hope to help create resources for families and schools to better support you and other Muslim students.

You may be uncomfortable answering questions about religion or how others treat you. However, you do not have to answer any questions they do not want to. The other risk in the study is the possible loss of confidentiality during the group interviews. You will be speaking about personal issues in front of your classmates. That is why it is so important that you and your classmates respect each other and not talk about each other outside the focus group. I will also store your information in a secure location to protect your privacy. All efforts within reason will be made to keep your research record private, but I cannot promise total privacy.

6. Will I receive anything if I participate in this research?

As a way of thanking you for participating in the focus group and filling out the survey, I will give you a $15 gift card to Wal-Mart. It will be given to you once the completed survey is turned in to Hasina or your school guidance counselor.

7. Who do I talk to if I have questions?

If you have any questions, please contact me, Hasina Mohyuddin. I can be reached at 615-594-1507 or by e-mail at Hasina.a.mohyuddin.1@vanderbilt.edu. If you have other questions about this research, please call my advisor Paul Dokecki, at (615) 322-8418. You may also contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board at 322-2918 or toll free at 866-224-8273.

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Date**

_____ _____

Assent obtained by **Date**

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