The Formation of Arab-American Identity in a Public School in Post-9/11 America: The Case of Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan

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Abstract

In present-day America, the issue of whether or not Arab immigrants and communities will assimilate into mainstream American culture is at the forefront of political discussions and media presentations. By using the school setting of Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan—where the student population consists of 95% Arabs of American descent (ArDs) and 90% Muslims—to analyze identity formation in terms of Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion, the answer to this encompassing question begins to be understood. Using interviews and participant observation, this study analyzes the complexity of an Arab-American identity within a post-9/11 America, drawing attention to the intricacies of how ArDs identify specific attributes, actions, and values and how the school communities shapes these in this post-9/11 era. From this information, I analyzed how Fordson acts both actively and passively to influence the identities of its students and staff.

Acknowledgements

"What can I do for you?" and "Whom can I connect you with?" were the most common questions interviewees asked me at the end of each interview. After forty-five minutes to even two hours with an interviewee when I was exhausted and ready to close my notebook, my interviewees stayed longer ready to help my research beyond the interview. Many asked questions on how they could better my research either through their connections or through their knowledge of the area. As I texted the president of the Muslim Student Association at the University of Michigan – Dearborn whom I could not interview because she did not fit into my demographic but who wanted to help me as much as possible in my research, she explained, "You are a guest in my town. It's my responsibility to make sure that you find everything you need. It's an Arab hospitality thing." Arab hospitality can profoundly be found throughout my time in Dearborn. Interviewees invited me into their homes where I was consistently offered food and drinks. Organizations and clubs welcomed me to explain my research and look for interviewees while also attending meetings and events. Though I had not been to the community before I started my fieldwork, I found that once I started making connections, people would go above and beyond my expectations to help me as much as possible. Without the help of my interviewees and other people who I had connected with and their desire to make me feel welcomed into the community, none of my research would have been possible. For that, I thank them all greatly.

Of course, my thesis could not have come together from the interviews alone. A special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Welmoet Boender, for all of the hours spent in her office going over all of the background work that made this thesis what it is. Also one to my father for finding time to help me edit all of these pages.

Lastly, my cheerleaders, Connor Dixon, Katya Swarts, Shelby Scanlon, Amira Millette, and Amy Kelly, for listening to the same conversations over and over again as I whined about my thesis.

Foreword

Foremost, as this is an ethnographical and historical analysis of an Arab-American population, my positionality is essential for understanding my own biases in the epistemology. Understanding a researcher's positionality places her voice behind the analysis and theorization of their work. As someone with formal training in both cultural anthropology and history with a bachelors of arts in global studies and another in history, I have attempted to best analyze the voices of the interviewees and provide the most accurate story of my interviewees while also remaining within theoretical frameworks. Nonetheless, any work has the biases of the researcher so it is best to explain mine straightforwardly so to allow the reader to even better critique my research.

As a Brazilian-American, with an immigrant mother and native father whose family has been in America for generations, I myself have a hyphenated identity. I am able to understand the difficulties of articulating my identity to others as I feel both Brazilian and American at times, and I have personally experienced the shifting borders of my own identity. Leaving my home to live in Pittsburgh for my undergraduate education, I first encountered the confusion of attempting to understand one's ethnic identity. In my hometown—namely due to my light skin-color—living as a white person amongst all white people came easily. However, as I entered a university with a far more diverse population and formally studied ethnic and racial identities more, I began to reevaluate my own. I realized that not all parts of my identity belong strictly to American or Brazilian culture but instead elements of my identity can be traced to both of the cultures. At first, this became difficult for me as I found myself feeling as though I did not belong with either Americans or Brazilians since I was neither fully one nor the other. Complicating matters was how others identified me. Americans would tell me that I was not Brazilian despite my having been heavily influenced by my mother's culture. Brazilians rejected me as too Americanized. This led to my research in understanding what this third identity—my identity—was.

I do not comprehend the identities of all Brazilian-Americans. Even looking towards my own siblings, I am not able to grasp all of the complexities of their identities. This further leads to complications when discussing Arab-American identities. While I am able to understand some of the difficulties my interviewees have faced, I cannot comprehend all of them nor do I have any personal insight as to what it means to live as an Arab-American. Furthermore, my parents did not raise me in a community where I was part of a majority Latino-American population, unlike my interviewees who all grew up in Dearborn. In my

hometown, I was not only part of the minority, but we were the only Brazilian-American family within the community. Therefore, I also do not personally understand what it is like to grow up in an ethnic enclave.

Despite these differences, I wish to best understand Arab-American hyphenated and hybrid identity within a predominately Arab community. My positionality does affect how I perceive others. Growing up in a rural community without any Arabs, my original interactions came from the media, which presents a very stereotypical and often negative perception of the community. Nonetheless, through much of my research and personal relationships, I have combatted this original understanding. Therefore, by accepting my personal bias, I can take a relatively subjective stance to best give agency to my interviewees.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Arabs, Representation, and Ethnography

As a child of an immigrant, greater discussions of assimilation never made sense to me as a child. Since English is my mother's fourth language, I had difficulty in my adolescence understanding why other immigrants had such difficulty learning the dominant language and why they could not just assimilate into the dominant culture. For most Americans, this revolved around Mexican immigrants. However, with the events of September 11, 2001, an immigrant group I knew nothing about—Arabs—soon entered the public arena.

Despite their long history in America, Arab immigrants and Arabs of American descent (ArDs) were relatively invisible until after the September 11 terrorist attacks. During these attacks an extremist Islamic Arab group, al Qaeda, targeted symbolic landmarks in eastern America—the World Trade Center buildings, the Pentagon, and potentially the White House, though the plane crashed in Pennsylvania—causing a heightened fear of Muslim and Arabs within and outside America.[1] This fear that I felt, yet did not understand as an eight-year old, resonated within me throughout most of my childhood.

These attacks not only brought Muslims and Arabs to the forefront of public discussions, but also led to the conflation of Arab and Muslim into one, indistinguishable identity.[2] Though there have also been positive consequences of this, such as Arab-American poetry, art, and literature flourishing as non-Arab Americans wanted to learn more about Arab culture, the negative consequences seemingly far out-weighed these. A once relatively quiet ethnic group became center-stage for the general public as people attempted to understand the new "terrorists" on home soil.[3] Places such as Metro Detroit, "The capital of Arab America," soon changed from an "immigrant success story" to a scene of threat.[4] This event not only influenced many Americans' perceptions of ArDs, but also solidified their status as the "other."

Though the majority of the ArD people I interviewed[5] expressed a lessening of tension just a few years after 9/11, each found the current political rhetoric of anti-Arab and

1 Revathy Kumar, Jeffery H. Warnke, and Stuart A. Karabenick, "Arab-American Male Identity Negotiations: Caught in the Crossroads of Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, and Current Contexts," *Social Identities* 20, no. 1, (2014): 23.
2 Randa B. Serhan, "Muslim Immigration to America," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Islam,* ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith, (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29.
3 Hosam Aboul-Ela, "Edward Said's Out of Place: Criticism, Polemic, and Arab American Identity," *MELUS* 31, no. 4 (2006): 21.
4 Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, "Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's 'War on Terror."' *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 443.

anti-Islam to have heightened Arab immigrants' and ArDs' place in the public eye once again. A major cause of this increase of apprehension were recent major world events in the Arab world such as with the beginnings of the Arab Spring/Democracy Spring (2011), the Syrian Civil War (2011), and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS, 2014). Tensions further increased as domestic terrorist attacks linked to Islam and ISIS— the San Bernardino Shooting (2015) and Orlando Nightclub Shooting (2016)—questioned the safety of Americans on American soil. For example, interviewee Karam, a newspaper reporter, at the *Arab American News* of Dearborn, Michigan recounted the controversy over the building of a mosque in nearby city, Sterling Heights, citing that protesters aligned all Muslims with ISIS. Sentiments throughout America began again to question Arab immigrants and ArDs role in the American nation.

Political rhetoric with the recent 2016 presidential elections further pushed ArDs into the American spotlight as recently elected President Donald J. Trump and Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton debated topics such as solutions to Syrian refugees and immigration from the Middle East. Furthermore, campaign promises and resulting executive orders relating to refugees and immigrants from Arab nations in the first weeks of Trump's presidency have also brought attention to Muslim Americans and ArDs as protesters marched and supporters backed his actions. Events in the Arab world and America are changing drastically and will continue to change. Therefore, understanding the tensions within America is a long and detailed topic worthy of its own thesis. Though this is relevant to my thesis, I am focusing on only the most basic points to better give my topic context. Furthermore, as my fieldwork period ended in December 2016, Trump's presidency will not encompass any of my analysis.

Tensions—and possibly a growing fear of Muslim-Americans and ArDs for many non-ArD Americans—have largely led to increased Islamophobia and xenophobia within America. A Gallup poll (2009) found that 43% of Americans self-report to harboring prejudice against Muslims, the largest percentage of any religious group tested.[6] Nearly half of all religious groups also agree to the statement, "Most Americans are prejudiced toward Muslim Americans."[7] Gallup polls further look at beliefs of Muslim loyalty to America as an indicator of Islamophobia as it may connect to beliefs that Muslims cannot be trusted or that

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5 I will go into greater detail about my interviews later in this thesis. The interviewees specifically discuss discrimination in section 3.6.

6 Gallup, Inc. "Perceptions of Muslims in the United States: A Review." *Gallup.com.* December 11, 2015. Accessed January 29, 2017.

7 Ibid.

one should fear Muslims.[8] With the conflation of Arab and Muslim, these beliefs allude to tensions towards ArDs as well.

With current events in America, once again many Americans have turned towards Arab immigrants and ArDs focusing on the question of whether or not they will—or should—assimilate into American culture. Because I have some understanding of varying perspectives, I have likewise become attentive to Arab immigrant and ArD assimilation. To reflect on my own biases in this research, here it is important to note that I currently hold the belief that total assimilation into Anglo-Saxon American culture is not necessary to be American or to be welcomed into America.

Since assimilation is such an encompassing topic, I decided on conducting an analysis of a school, Fordson High School and parts of the community around it. As Fordson is comprised of an ArD majority population (with estimations at 95%), Fordson represents a unique arena of identity formation, an essential part in understanding the assimilation-separation spectrum. Schools not only act as "contact zones" amongst cultures, but also help formulate identities either through school politics or simply as a place of experiences and peers.

Therefore, with this thesis (which I also call research and study throughout), I use greater discussions of assimilation and identity formation to focus on a setting where a typically minority population is the majority. This research concentrates primarily on the "forms of representation" employed by ArDs to fit within mainstream American culture. Forms of representation have three major categories—attributes, actions, or values—that an individual conducts to embody aspects of a culture. For example, an apparent form of representation would be the hijab, which can fall into the attribute category. One can further consider pledging to the American flag or singing the national anthem as fitting into the values category. Though categorizing forms of representation is not essential for understanding my thesis, they can provide better insight into comprehending the terminology. With this in mind, I asked my main research question and sub-questions:

<u>Research Question:</u>

> How does a dominantly American of Arab descent (ArD) public school community identify and shape specific forms (attributes, actions, values) of representation as citizens of America in the post-9/11 era?

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8 Gallup, Inc. "Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West." *Gallup.com.* December 29, 2016. Accessed January 29, 2017.

Sub-Questions:

1. What do ArDs identify as forms of representation as mainstream American culture in the context of the school?
2. What do ArDs identify as forms of representation as the Arab-American subculture in the context of the school?
3. What are Americanist (patriotic), ethnic/racial, gender, and religious aspects of forms of representation?

Case Study:

1. How do ArDs of Fordson High School form their identity within this complicated context?
2. How does Fordson High School embody the specified forms of representation?

In my research questions, I categorize two different methods (identify and shape) that the ArD community may address forms of representation. As I use them, identify means the ways that the interviewees name or point to certain aspects while shape considers the materializing of specific forms in actions, symbols, and experiences. There is not always a clear distinction between the two methods. Similarly, the research questions focus greatly on identity and identity formation. I define the word identity as describing an individual's (or a group's) selfhood based on the uniqueness that differentiates the individual from others as well the sameness the individual shares with specific groups.[9] Identity formation is the creation of these identities and can come in numerous forms, such as cultural, ethnic, or gender, which I discuss in later sections of this chapter.

1.1 **The Arab-American People: Theories and Literature**

To best grasp how identity formation and assimilation function within societies, numerous scholars have constructed theories pertaining to the topics, such as Victor Lee on assimilation and Stuart Hall on the 'other.' My thesis focuses on eight themes: 1) Orientalism and the "other," 2) Assimilation, 3) Transnationalism, 4) Hyphenated identity, 5) Racial and ethnic identity formation, 6) Identity formation within contact zones, 7) Arab, Arab-ness, and Americanism and 8) whiteness.[10] Scholars can employ these themes to various topics; however, I will primarily focus on them on their relation to identity formation within a public school setting where ArDs are the majority.

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9 *Oxford Bibliographies*, last modified 29 June 2015, s.v. "identity."

10 I will elaborate why I chose these themes in section 1.2 after first defining them.

1.1.1 *Orientalism*

Unquestionably, Edward Said is essential to understanding research on Arab-American groups. His theory of "orientalism," presented in his 1978 book of the same name, is one of the most influential and groundbreaking social science theories during the postcolonial context because he analyzes Western scholarship's patronizing perceptions and fictional depictions of Middle Eastern nations and people. He argues how the very construction of knowledge operates as a form of power by Western academics in controlling the epistemology of "the Orient" and how orientalism works to create a self-affirming Western identity, which is not an objective inquiry of Eastern cultures. Said's theory extends beyond the Middle East, as many scholars have used it to apply to any population or culture that can be considered "the East" or non-Western.

Stuart Hall expands on Said's theory by critiquing the very idea of the West and the Western creation of the "other." Hall opens his article, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" (1994), by forcing the reader to question what and where the "West" actually is. "West" and "western" in reality are shorthand generalizations for very complex ideas. They apply not only to geography, but also to a type of society and level of development. As Hall argues, these words no longer just represent the original meaning, but instead, "'the West' is no longer only in Europe, and not all of Europe is in 'the West.'" In turn, the West became "the West" by creating the "other" by discursive power.

Understanding orientalism and the "other" are essential for my thesis as they both work to comprehend Western treatment of non-Western people. For members of Fordson High School, they remain a non-Western group acclimating to American society. They are, therefore, exposed to "othering" and Orientalism often in media and similar outlets. Furthermore, for myself as a non-Muslim and non-Arab, these theories also act as a check to verify that I am not conducting Orientalist research, and instead, using a more objective approach to my analysis. With these theories, I am better equipped to provide a thorough thesis capturing their voices.

1.1.2 *Assimilation*

As America is both a nation of immigrants and an immigration nation, immigrants and Americans alike face complications of assimilation as they attempt to negotiate past and present cultural identities. Assimilation refers to the process by which individuals or communities—typically in reference to immigrants—resembles another group. Therefore, in America, this relates to immigrants conforming to mainstream American society and culture.

Fundamental indicators of assimilation are often education, community involvement, language skills, and intermarriage. Numerous studies that I reference in my thesis focus on these indicators such as Kristine Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal's study, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans" (2007), Kumar, Revathy, Jeffery H. Warnke, and Stuart A. Karabenick's "Arab-American Male Identity Negotiations: Caught in the Crossroads of Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, and Current Contexts" (2014), and Yossi Shain's "Arab-Americans at a Crossroads" (1996).

In Milton M. Gordon's article, "Assimilation in America" (1961), he expands on early discussions of assimilation by differentiating between structural and behavioral assimilation. In structural assimilation, immigrant families mix within the new culture and the dominant social and ethnic class through education, the workplace, intermarriage, and similar ways. For an immigrant, this would mean that they assimilate to institutions of the host society, but this does not mean that they personally assimilate. For example, an Irish immigrant may work for the post office, marry an American, and send his children to public school; however, he may still keep all of the customs and beliefs of his home country without adapting any of his host. However, in behavioral assimilation, they go through a process of acculturation or the "absorption" of behavior patterns of the host society.

Richard Alba and Victor Nee in *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (2003) further analyze assimilation within contemporary immigration (1965-present), citing how historical contexts influence assimilation. Foremost, they assert that assimilation is fluid and evolves with American society. They argue that contemporary assimilation—that is Anglo-conformity—is less likely to happen within the current climate. One main argument they make against this is that the two World Wars strongly affected past assimilation, which pushed many immigrants, especially German and Japanese, to become "100% American" by removing their identity as a hyphenated individual, e.g., by changing their name and/or not visiting their home country. Since there has not been an equivalent in contemporary times, Alba and Nee do not believe that there will be such a strong assimilation push in America again. They further argue that key to assimilation is three boundary processes. First is boundary crossing where an individual or group moves into another group without keeping past cultural beliefs. Next is boundary blurring where there is a movement into a new group and the lines between the groups blur. Last is boundary shifting where there was a complete change of boundary; for example, with the boundary shifting to include the Irish in mainstream American culture.

Gordon's and Alba and Nee's theories are essential for understanding the fluid nature of assimilation in America as well as understanding how individual experiences may differ. Gordon's differentiation of structural and behavioral assimilation is necessary for my thesis as it better grasps how individuals may approach their movement into a host country. Similarly, Alba and Nee's theories on boundary shifting add to this discussion by deliberating on various modes groups may use to assimilate into another society and the ways the host society may allow for it. As Alba and Nee argue that assimilation is not static, their theory adds a more contemporary understanding of assimilation than Gordon's theory.

1.1.3 *Transnationalism*

With the rise of technology and accessibility throughout the world, transnationalism, marked by multiple identities and shared roots, has become predominant. Transnationalism is the social phenomenon of the interconnectivity between people across national borders and the receding economic and social significance of borders.[11] Not all contemporary immigrants are transnational migrants though there may still be some form of contact with their home country. But specifically while researching the Arab-American population of Dearborn, the majority interviewed has been transnational in some way, whether through shared cuisines or journeys back to their country of origin.

1.1.4 *Hybrid Culture and Hyphenated Identity*

Post-colonial scholar, Homi Bhabha, theorized the concept of a "third space," where an individual's cultural identity results from colliding cultures that create a new, third culture. In this space, individuals form new identities that are constantly changing and shifting with the contexts.[12] For Arab-Americans, this concept highlights how cultural identity is fluid and how it changes with the context. Therefore, it shows how Arab-Americans may have different cultural identities according to their location, such as Dearborn, the University of Michigan, or Lebanon. Furthermore, it emphasizes the creation of a unique identity that forms when cultures interact.

Alongside cultural hybridity is the theory of hyphenated identity, which is a dual identity that consists of two cultural identities existing separately, but also at the same time. Amal Abdelrazek is one of many scholars to relate the theory of hyphenated identity into the

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11 Steven, Vertovec, *Transnationalism,* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), 12.
12 Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha." In Jonathan Rutherford, ed. *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990): 207-21.

larger picture of contemporary immigrants. Arab-American identity is far more complex than the idea that they are either segregated from society or they assimilate into society. As Abdelrazek argues, Arab-Americans live at constantly shifting borders within a very diverse population from the twenty-two Arab nations. Many, especially the second generation, identify themselves as both Arab and American at once.[13] Furthermore, considering the political climate in America with the rise of ISIS and the events of September 11, 2001, tensions in mainstream American culture are pushing Arab-Americans to assimilate to the dominant culture. Abdelrazek's analysis of hyphenated identity is also essential for understanding my research as I use it to understand how Arab-Americans negotiate their Americanist, ethnic/racial, religious, and gender identities in relation to both Arab and American cultures in a post-9/11 America.

1.1.5 *Race and Ethnic Identity Formation*

Like assimilation, race and ethnic identity formation are complex topics contextualized through their historical functions. In *White on Arrival* (2000), Thomas Guglielmo discusses the concept of "race" with his analysis of early Italian immigrants. Guglielmo argues that there is an important distinction between "race" and "color," though many people often equate them. For example, for Italians in the twentieth century, the race would be either a Southern or Northern Italian while the color would be white. This led to benefits for being white, while segregation for being Southern or Northern Italian. These categories were the two ways people considered others, though they were not absolute.[14] This distinction is also essential for understanding why Arabs argued historically for a white categorization despite having darker skin tones than white Europeans.

Stephen Cornell adds to race and ethnic conversations in his analysis of ethnic identity formation in "The Variable Ties That Bind: Content and Circumstance in Ethnic Processes" (1996). Cornell defines ethnicity as a form of identification, distinguished by its emphasis on bonds of kinship. Therefore, Ethnic groups are social groups distinguished by a claim to a common heritage and/or an assertion of a shared history or culture. Cornell further asserts that one defines ethnic identity by contrast and varies along three dimensions: interests, institutions, and culture. There are also symbolic communities, but Cornell finds

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13 Amal Abdelrazek, "Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab-American Women Writers and the Resisting, Healing, and Connecting Power of their Storytelling," in *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* (2005): 150.

14 Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

that these have little effect on daily life and behavior.[15] Lastly, Cornell emphasizes that ethnicities can change over time because they are not static, and ethnic identity can mean different things to different individuals. Cornell, importantly for my thesis, provides the definition of ethnicity that I employ.

Also in regards to ethnic identity formation, Frantz Fanton's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) discusses the impact the inferiority complex of marginalized groups has on their desire to imitate the dominant culture and group. Fanton argues that because the Black Subject lost his native culture, the Black Subject has an inferiority complex that leads him to try to emulate the new culture. This behavior is linked to upward mobility, and subjects who do so then wear a "white mask" as they master the language and integrate into the new culture.[16] Though ArDs were not forced to move to America in the same way as many African Americans—though some may argue that events in their home countries caused a similar push—Fanton's work is important for understanding the complexity of ethnic identity formation in a dominantly white, Anglo-Saxon society.

Throughout my thesis, I use the concept of "race/ethnicity" or some related form. As there is a distinction between the two terms, I attempt to avoid conflating the two ideas throughout my interviews by asking questions distinctly related to either race or ethnicity. However, this is not to assert that there is not some overlap between the two terms that the interviewees addressed. Therefore, with this theory section and throughout my essay, I acknowledge the differences despite using the terms together.

1.1.6 *Identity Formation within Schools*

Identity formation is fluid, changes throughout one's lifetime, and emerges from an interaction between the self and the context. Various scholars have used the term "contact zones"—which are social spaces where two cultures can meet that are often polarized by religion, nationalism, and political and cultural ideologies—to discuss the arena of identity formation. Having coined the term "contact zone," Mary Louise Pratt's article, "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1991), refers to schools as places "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power."[17] Though she refers to the negotiation of language, schools act as social spaces where individuals negotiate

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15 Stephen Cornell, "The Variable Ties That Bind: Content and Circumstance in Ethnic Processes." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19 (April 1996): 265-289.
16 Frantz Fanton, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952, translated by Richard Philcox, (New York City: Grove Press, 2008).
17 Mary Louise Pratt "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, (1991): 34.

all of their identities. These spaces do not have to always be physical spaces, such as a class or lunchroom, but can also be processes or events. Contact zones are continuously shifting alongside identities. Within school settings, students often of different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds learn to understand their own placement in society. For my thesis, I rely on both Pratt's article in my discussions on "contact zones" and the importance of the school setting on identity formation.

1.1.7 *Understanding "Arab," "Arab-ness," and "Americanism"*

As race is a social construct more than a biological one, understanding the differences between "Arab" and "whiteness" are essential for comprehending discussions, arguments, and interviewee responses. There are three specific terms related to "Arab" that I consider in my thesis: Arab immigrants, Americans of Arab decent, and Arab-American. "Arab immigrants" refers to any member of the pan-ethnic group whose native language is Arabic and/or who comes from an Arab nation, one of the 22 nation-states of the Arab World, to America to live there at least semi-permanently. This term becomes complicated as not all groups of people from Arab nations may identify with the original Arab tribes, e.g., the Chaldeans. For my research, I have excluded these groups.

Specifically, "Americans of Arab descent (ArD)" is a concise term for any American citizens or residents who can trace their genealogies to an Arab nation. ArDs may not always identify as "Arab" for any reason. Therefore, the third term "Arab-American" consists of any ArD who identifies specifically as Arab. This is a political or cultural label that an ArD may choose to call him or herself. So, it is best to understand that all Arab-Americans are ArDs, but all ArDs are not Arab-American. Lastly, for the sake of removing repetitive phrases within my thesis, for the remainder of my thesis, I use the term of "Arab" to include all Arab immigrants, ArDs, and Arab-Americans. Likewise, as I am focusing this research on Arab-American identity, I will specify when an interviewee labels himself or herself as Arab-American.

The very term "Arab" does come with its problems. As a heavily politicalized term related towards pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism throughout the twentieth century and events of Palestine and Israel, the question of who is an Arab is difficult to answer. However, as all of my interviewees expressed that they belong to an Arab identity and none had mentioned political issues related to the term, I chose to exclude these discussions in my thesis.

Related to Arab comes the parallel terms “Americanism” and “Arab-ness.” “Americanism” is an attachment to America’s values, institutions, traditions, and patriotic beliefs. This includes pledging to the flag, believing in freedom of speech, and celebrating holidays like the Fourth of July. With this term, I am describing individuals’ conviction that they belong in America and that they have pride in America. This includes both elements of citizenship and patriotism. Parallel to Americanism, I use the term “Arab-ness,” which is then an attachment to beliefs, ideals, and customs of Arab cultures. It is important to note that these terms do not stand at opposite ends, but also can come together to form an Arab-American identity where the individual may feel attachment to both America and their home Arab nation.

1.1.8 *Understanding “Whiteness”*

Like Arab, whiteness is a complex term rising more from societal and cultural experiences than from skin tone. Often when discussing “white people,” individuals are in actuality deliberating on whiteness. Whiteness goes beyond the racial category of white to also include privileges and tangible effects. Key features of whiteness include that it is a position of power, it is fluid and relational, and it is socially and politically constructed. It is, therefore, a learned practice. As a state of unconsciousness, white people often do not view whiteness as existent, which further leads to oppression because the invisibility of whiteness perpetuates an awareness of difference.[18]

Each of these eight themes adds to my thesis by providing a critical lens by which I self-evaluate my work as well as definitions to many of the more abstract concepts. As I wanted to understand the empirical reality through the theories and vice versa, I used operationalization to connect them with the main concepts within my methodology.

1.2 **Methodology**

In this study, I applied different types of methods to maintain an objective viewpoint while preserving a critical lens. I used participant observation in various settings, such as with the Lebanese Student Association of the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. I conducted fourteen interviews with members of the Fordson community and greater Dearborn area. I further did historical analysis to best consider the long-term context of Arabs in America.

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18 Calgary Anti-Racism Education. "Understanding Whiteness." *Understanding Whiteness*. University of Calgary, 2015. Web.

With this methodology, I guided my work as well as allowed participants to guide me to best analyze and answer my research questions.

For the interviews, I chose four concepts that best reflect various aspects of one's identity: Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion. I chose these four concepts because I could trace them to either tangible or internal parts of one's everyday life. These concepts relate to the theories I employ by reflecting on more specific aspects of them. For example, one may go through behavioral assimilation by converting to Christianity to better fit into the American mainstream or by changing her views on gender relations to adapt to cultural differences. Similarly, as a theoretical concept, orientalism refocuses me to observe gender and religion through the perceptive of someone who does not come from a Western country.

Exploration of these concepts led to a case study of Fordson High School as school settings reflect an area of constant identity negotiation and creation. Psychologist Pia Rebello Britto argues that ethnic identity materializes in schools because of potential discrimination and bullying.[19] I extend upon her work to focus on other potential ways schools create ethnic identities as well as Americanist, gender, and religious. Fordson acts as a case study of identity within an ethnic enclave, as I analyze not only aspects of identity in terms of peers, but also in terms of how the school allows/denies identities to flourish. By analyzing what my interviewees identify as forms of representation and what I view as the shaping these forms, I am able to better understand the creation of an Arab-American identity within a public school setting.

1.2.1 *The Ethnographic Site*

Fordson High School is a secondary high school in Dearborn, Michigan in the Greater Detroit Area. In recent years, Dearborn has become the site of many researchers as it has the largest Arab community outside of the Middle East and North African region with 40% of the residents—about 40,000 people—coming from the Middle East.[20] For Dearborn specifically,

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19 Britto, Pia Rebello, "Who Am I? Ethnic Identity Formation of Arab Muslim Children in Contemporary U.S. Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 47, iss. 8 (2008): 853-857.

20 I detail the long immigration history of Arabs to America in Chapter 2: The 'White' Arab.

the first Arab immigrants to the city were Lebanese Maronites in early-to-mid twentieth century because of the Ford Motor Company and automotive industry. Other Middle Easterners and Arabs immigrated to Dearborn, including Muslims and other Christians; however, Lebanese Americans are still the largest population in the city. In 2005, Muslim immigrants built the Islamic Center of America, which is the largest mosque in America. There is also a large European immigrant population in Dearborn with many Polish, German, and Irish immigrants. Neighboring cities include Sterling Heights, Dearborn Heights, and Detroit.

Dearborn School District has three high schools: Dearborn, Fordson, and Edsel Ford. Fordson (founded 1922) is located in East Dearborn, often considered "the ghetto" of Dearborn because of the lower socio-economic classes. Fordson imitates Dearborn's Arab population with 95% of the roughly 2,700 students to be of Arab descent with Lebanese-Americans and Muslims as the largest populations.[21] By 2009, Fordson was the eleventh largest high school in Michigan and has only increased in population.[22] Interviewee and past principal at Fordson, Mr. Imad Fadlallah emphasized the school's population shifts by citing how Fordson in 1981 had only 12% of the population as Arabs, while by 2004, the Arab population increased to 90% of the school where it remains ranging from 90% to 95%. This came from an increase in Arab immigrants to America in the early 2000s.[23]

Upon first entering the halls of Fordson, the sheer size of both the school and the appearance of the population struck me. Clothing styles of the female students shifted with each student with many donning hijabs but an equal number not. Some wore abayas while others dressed in shorts. Teachers and staff were similarly clothed with many also wearing hijabs. But outside of clothing and ethnic differences, Fordson had many similarities with my high school where the majority population is of European descent. Posters for clubs, events, and charities drives covered walls in the hallways. A ticket sale for the homecoming dance took place in a main entryway with students in line to buy them. Some students held hands with their partners, while others walked in groups of their friends. Football players wore their jerseys and others wore club shirts. In many ways, I found myself comparing Fordson to my

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21 Abhijeet Chavan, "Dearborn, Michigan: America's Muslim Capital," *Planetizen: The Independent Resource for People Passionate about Planning and Related Fields*, October 13, 2003, Accessed October 30, 2016.

22 Rashid Ghazi, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football*, Documentary, Directed/Performed by Rashid Ghazi (2011; Glenview, IL: North Shore Films LLC, 2011.), Video.

23 Mr. Imad Fadlallah. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 10 Sept 2016.

high school experience because there were so many similarities. This importantly helped me understand that despite the Arab population, American culture was also strongly present.

Entering the Dearborn community for my research proved to be very difficult at first because originally I was not involved in any way. Therefore, to become linked to Fordson I found myself calling and emailing any number or address I could find online through directories until I got responses. This led to my largest network of faculty and staff at Fordson. As I wanted to also expand to students—though I could not interview current students because of American ethical regulations following standards of the Institutional Review Board—I found alumni via networks I created during my studies at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. Only speaking to alumni, however, causes problems as the interviewees are continuously reflecting on their time at Fordson as opposed to experiencing it in the moment; therefore, I analyzed such interviewees with the understanding that memories can change. In light of this, I chose students who had graduated in recent years.

1.2.2 *Interviewees*

I interviewed 14 individuals.[24] Fahim,[25] living in Connecticut, was my first interviewee who I found because he was a graduate student of my father's in Connecticut. He was twenty-four, an alumnus from 2010. His family left Iraq in 2002 because of the war and immigrated to American shortly after. From Fordson, he studied at Wayne State in Detroit before beginning his masters at the University of Bridgeport. He considered himself to be a lenient Shi'ite Muslim. His interview did not lead to a network.

Mr. Imad Fadlallah opened my first network after responding to an email. He was fifty-six and a retired principal of Fordson High School (2005-2010). He emigrated from Lebanon in 1978 to pursue an education in America. From there, he did his bachelors and masters at Eastern Michigan University in education and administration. He considered himself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim as long as devout was not seen negatively.[26] I interviewed his daughter, Rima, as well. She graduated from Fordson in 2010 and was twenty-four. She attended the University of Michigan and then went into Teach for America, a program that places teachers into low-income schools.

24 Look at the appendix (page 100) for a brief summary of the interviewee and the date of the interview of each of the interviewees.

25 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.

26 Mr. Fadlallah passed away at fifty-seven on 13 March 2017. He left behind four children and his wife and was buried on 15 March in Southern Lebanon. Mr. Fadlallah's willingness to invite me into his home and help with my research is largely the reason my thesis came together.

Next, I interviewed Karam[27] from the *Arab American News* where he was working as a journalist. His interview came from responding to a phone call I made to the office. He also went to Fordson, though this was not a main part of the interview. He was born in Lebanon and moved to America in 1990 to escape the political climate. He was twenty-nine and a non-practicing Shi'ite Muslim.

Another network that I found was through student clubs at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. Nour[28] was my first interviewee from this. She graduated from Fordson in 2015, was born near Dearborn, and was nineteen. Her family came from Lebanon because of the civil war. She considered herself to be a lenient Shi'ite Muslim.

Second from the Lebanese Student Association (LSA) was Omar,[29] who graduated from Fordson in 2016. He was eighteen and studied at Ann Arbor. His mother was from Lebanon and his father was from Saudi Arabia. Both moved to America in the 1970s because of conflicts in the Middle East. He considered himself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim.

From my network with Mr. Fadlallah first came Ms. Z.[30] Middle-aged, she joked that her age was "18 and holding, no longer 19." She graduated from Fordson in the early 2000s before attending University of Michigan – Dearborn for education. She later graduated from Wayne State with her masters in bilingual education and broadcasting. At the time of the interview, she was single with two children who studied in the Dearborn school district. She was born in Dearborn and her family emigrated from Lebanon in 1975 because of the Civil War. She considered herself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim and wore a headscarf. She taught Language Arts at Fordson.

Second came Mr. Fouad Zaban,[31] who was a gym teacher and the head coach of the football team. He was forty-six and married with four children who all attended schools in the Fordson school district. He was born in Lebanon and moved to America in 1976 because of the Civil War. He graduated from Fordson in 1988 and completed up to his masters from Wayne State. He considered himself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim.

Hakim[32] came from the LSA network. He was nineteen and graduated from Fordson in 2015. He studied neuroscience at the Ann Arbor and planned to go to medical school. He

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27 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
28 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
29 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
30 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
31 As Mr. Zaban is a public figure in the Dearborn community because of his role as a football coach and because of his work with the documentary, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football*, I use his real name.
32 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.

was born in Dearborn and both of his parents were from Iraq. They came to America in 1993 as refugees under Saddam Hussein. He was a non-practicing Shi'ite Muslim.

Idris[33] also was from LSA. He graduated from Fordson in 2016 and was eighteen. He was pre-med studying neuroscience at Ann Arbor. He was born in Dearborn and both of his parents are from Lebanon. His father came in the 1970s for school and then returned to Lebanon where he met his wife and they both moved back to America. He considered himself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim.

Ms. Z gave me Miss R's[34] information for an interview. She was twenty-eight and graduated from Fordson in 2005. She had a bachelors from University of Michigan – Dearborn and a masters in conflict resolution from Wayne State. She was born in Sierra Leone, but her family originated from Lebanon. Her family moved to America in 1987. She taught social studies at Fordson. She considered herself to be a devout Shi'ite Muslim.

Ms. Z also gave me the information of Mrs. E[35] for an interview. Mrs. E was fifty-two, married, and has three children, who all went to Fordson. She has some college education. She worked on the Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) for twenty years before becoming the school-parent liaison. She came from Jordan with her family when she was three because of opportunities and the auto industry. She considered herself to be a lenient Christian (raised Greek Orthodox) because, while attending church regularly, she finds that she is not a perfect Christian.

Lastly, I interviewed two members of the community to get a better picture of the position of the school in the wider context of the Dearborn area. First was Abdul[36] who I found through the University of Michigan – Dearborn Muslim Student Association. Abdul, despite growing up in East Dearborn, went to a private Islamic school where he graduated in 2016. He studies software engineering at the University of Michigan – Dearborn. He was born in Brooklyn, New York before his family moved to Dearborn. His mother was Palestinian-American and his father emigrated from Palestine in 1989 to work. He considered himself to be a devout Sunni Muslim.

Mrs. E gave me the name of her reverend to also interview. Reverend A[37] preached at a Lutheran Church in East Dearborn with sermons both in English and in Arabic. This church consisted of a congregation that is mostly Middle Eastern Christians. He also preached at a

33 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
34 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
35 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
36 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.
37 Pseudonym for confidentiality reasons.

Lutheran Church in Dearborn Heights but only in English. He was in his forties, married, and had children. He was born in Jerusalem and grew up Roman Catholic. He moved to America twenty-five years ago because of education and stayed because he found work. He considered himself to be a devout Christian and finds his Christian identity to be the most important part of his life.

To summarize the numbers of my interviewees:

Gender

Female	5
Male	9

Ages

Fifties	2
Forties	2
Thirties	1
Twenties	4
Teens	5

Occupations

Retired principal	1
Newspaper Journalist[38]	1
Faculty Member	1
Former Students	7
Reverend	1
Teachers	3

Countries of Origin/Countries of Familial Origin

Lebanon	8
Lebanon and Saudi Arabia	1
Iraq	2
Palestine/Israel[39]	2
Jordan	1

Immigration Generation

First	2
1.5[40]	5
Second	7
Third	0

38 Also an alum; however, conversation namely around newspaper work.
39 One interviewee claimed Palestine while the other did not chose and said he was from Jerusalem. Therefore, for the remainder of my thesis, I will refer to the interviewees specific selections of either Palestine or Jerusalem, not Israel.
40 Moved to America before age 12.

Religion

Christian	2
Muslim	12

While the majority of my work is through the interviews I conducted, in the documentary, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football* (2011), the director interviews both Mr. Fadlallah and Mr. Zaban in 2007. I do use parts of these interviews in my analysis and highlight which interview I am using.

1.3 **Chapter Summaries**

To best analyze identity formation at Fordson High School, I split my thesis into five chapters beginning with Chapter 1, the introduction. In Chapter 2, I analyze the long history of Arabs in America because this history of the "white" Arab further highlights how whiteness affects different Arabs individually. This chapter considers the three waves of Arab immigration alongside the court battles of Arabs for naturalization, which is essential for understanding the Dearborn community's context in this larger immigration story. This chapter emphasizes not only the fluidity of whiteness, but also how Arab immigrants' initial struggle for a white identity has silenced many modern-day Arab voices because they are invisible minorities within the majority.

Chapter 3 is the presentation of my fieldwork data, which I categorized into seven divisions: Arab-American Identity, School Role, College, Modesty, Football, Discrimination, and Community Influence. In this chapter, I highlight both questions I asked my interviewees as well as subjects that they brought up.

In Chapter 4, I analyze my data to answer how my interviewees identify forms of representation and how the public school community shapes these forms. Though I divided my four themes—Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion—into subsections of these chapters, the interviewees' answers emphasize the intersectionality of these topics. Analyzing the school specifically, I detail how Fordson acts both actively and passively to shape forms of representation of mainstream American culture and the Arab-American subculture. With these, I analyze the assimilation-separation spectrum and identity formation of my interviewees. I further consider the role of the Dearborn community on these elements.

I end my thesis with my conclusion, Chapter 5. In this chapter, I first summarize the previous chapters before focusing on my placement in the research and my objectivity.

Chapter 2: The "White" Arab: The Waves of Immigration

As a trained historian, learning about the history of Arabs in America was an obvious part of my research. Foremost, the history places Arabs into a larger context of American history. Next, the history draws attention to the fluidity of whiteness and white identity. As I detail the court cases and popular arguments of white identity, one can observe the importance of whiteness in society and the lengths various groups went to achieve this. Moreover, in later chapters of this thesis, I show Arabs' shift away from a white identity further emphasizing the fluidity of racial categorizations. Lastly, this history gives context to the different nationalities and cultures of Arab immigrants through the three waves of immigration. The diversity of the waves further accentuates the difference in treatment of the Arab groups. For example, a light-skinned Lebanese Christian (similar to the first wave) may benefit far more from whiteness than a dark-skinner Iraqi Muslim (similar to the third wave) because of differences in religion, skin-color, and assimilation, though the government

categorizes both as "white".[41] While none of my interviewees have ancestors from the first wave, these benefits still remain, which I will highlight in chapters 3 and 4. For these reasons, I begin with a shortened version of Arab immigrants history in America as they battle for whiteness.

2.1 **The First Wave of Immigration (1870-1924)**

Arab immigrants came to America in three waves: the first wave (1870-1924), second wave (1924-1965), and third wave (1965-present).[42] The first wave is legislatively and judicially the most complex of the three, as many of the immigration and citizenship laws frequently changed during it. Within this movement, the majority of Arabs—often lumped together and referred to as Syrians—came from the Greater Syria region of the Ottoman Empire, which included modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and parts of Jordan. The majority was Christian with only around 5-10% as Muslim.[43] While most were single, young men, women also immigrated in substantial numbers with one woman to every three men by the later period of this wave.[44] About 200,000 of the 20 million total immigrants by 1924 were from Arab nations.[45] Finding exact numbers and demographics of Arab immigrants proves to be extraordinarily difficult as a result of their phenotype. Since Arab immigrants did not fit into an easily distinguishable racial category, and because Arab nations are both in Africa and Asia, immigrant officers categorized them belonging to many different ethnicities including Armenian, Ottoman, Asian, African, and even white or European. Furthermore, a fire in 1897 destroyed many of the records at Castle Garden, a precursor to Ellis Island, resulting in the loss of many immigration records that included Arab immigrants.[46]

Though some scholars have argued that much of this movement was from political tensions provoked by sectarianism within the region, the largest cause of immigration was economic.[47] This notably happened within Lebanon because of the substantial financial losses

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41 Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans." *The International Migration Review,* vol. 41, no.4, (2007): 860-879

42 Scholars consider the third wave to continue to the present. However, I would argue that its end might be soon changed to 2016 because of immigration restrictions of Donald Trump's presidency in 2017..

43 Arab American National Museum, "Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society" AANM Educational Series. Accessed 1 Dec. 2016, 8.

44 Evelyn Shakir, "Women Immigrants," "Peddlers," and "Mill Girls, Factory Hands, and Entrepreneurs" in *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States*. (1997): 28-31.

45 "Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society," 8.

46 Ibid., 9.

47 Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2009), 26.

of the country's major industry, textile and silk, simultaneously as Lebanon doubled in population. Originally forcing women into the workforce in mass numbers, the final solution to this economic crisis was the immigration of thousands of young men and women to America by the 1890s.[48]

Likewise, the need for labor in an increasingly industrializing society attracted Arab immigrants to America where they worked together as automotive factory workers, shopkeepers, and garment workers.[49] The largest amount of immigrants settled in Boston, New York, Detroit, and Pittsburgh where they could easily find work.[50] However, the peddler was the stereotypical Arab immigrant occupation. Peddling proved to be a lucrative career for Arab immigrants as they could begin with little capital and could use their connection to the Holy Land for sales.[51] Peddling further worked even better for women than their male counterparts as they had more access into American homes because of their gender. This contributed to the general stereotype of Arab men being "lazy," while their women worked.[52] Nonetheless, as Arab immigrants found their way in America, they increasingly assimilated into the mainstream culture and the middle-class American lifestyle.[53]

During this period, as immigrants came in substantial numbers to America, legislation passed to handle immigrants and their path to citizenship. For my thesis, four major acts are the most relevant. The first article of legislation, the 1790 Naturalization Act, came soon after the finalization of the Constitution in 1790 stating that an individual can become a citizen if he was a "free white male" of good character and had lived in America at least two years.[54] The Naturalization Act of 1870, created during the Reconstruction Period, extended this to include free men of African descent.[55] While some details changed with the process with other acts, these two naturalization laws concluded that one must be either white or black to become an American citizen.

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48 Akram Khater, "Like Pure Gold: Sexuality and Honour Amongst Lebanese Emigrants, 1890-1920" in *Sexuality in the Arab World* (2006), 87.
49 "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience," Arab American Institute, *AAIUSA*, Posted 9 Sept 2010, Accessed 15 Oct 2016. And Evelyn Shakir, "Women Immigrants," "Peddlers," and "Mill Girls, Factory Hands, and Entrepreneurs," 36.
50 "Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society"
51 Ibid., 33.
52 Akram Khater, "Like Pure Gold: Sexuality and Honour Amongst Lebanese Emigrants, 1890-1920," 88.
53 Ibid., 94.
54 United States Congress, *1790 Naturalization Act,* Sess. II, Chap. 3; 1 stat 103. 1st Congress; March 26, 1790.
55 United States Congress, *1870 Naturalization Act,* Sess. II, 16 stat. 254, 41st Congress; July 14, 1870.

With the increase of Chinese and Japanese immigrants and laborers to America, Congress had to consider how the "yellow" race affected the white/black binary that the government had established. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which the 1902 Scott Act extended indefinitely, excluded all Chinese people from migrating to America because the government viewed them as a threat to American workers.[56] The Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907, an informal agreement between the American and Japanese governments, similarly halted Japanese immigration. I would argue that the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the Gentlemen's Agreement not only highlight the racism directed towards different Asian groups, but also show the inability for non-white and non-black immigrants to achieve naturalized citizenship. This becomes important in the court cases of Arab immigrants, as their countries of origin are mainly within the Asian continent.

Anti-immigration sentiments throughout America affected the treatment of immigrants greatly. Mobilizations, such as the Immigrant Restriction League in 1893 Boston, reflect these anti-immigrant sentiments by their opposition to non-North European identities. The shift in 1880 from North European immigrants to more Southern and Eastern European immigrants, as well as ones from other nations, created increased hostility towards non-assimilated immigrants. The movement 100% Americanism,[57] a result of increasing nativism, created Americanization programs to assimilate new immigrants into mainstream American culture.[58] Furthermore, race scientists increasingly began to analyze the differences of the races by dividing humans all into subspecies that reflected the different groups' innate behaviors and abilities. Previous to 1909, courts often granted Arabs naturalized citizenship under the "white" categorization. However, because of this increase of nativism, Arabs soon found themselves alongside Eastern European Jews, Italians, and numerous other groups trying to fit within this white/black binary.[59]

As Thomas A. Guglielmo argues, race not only acts as a form of identity, but also heavily influences one's socio-economic standing in society. It has power over housing,

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56 United States Congress, *1882 Chinese Exclusion Act,* Sess. I, Chap. 126; 22 Stat. 58. 47th Congress; May 6, 1882.And United States Congress, *1902 Scott Act*, Sess. I Chap. 641; 32 Stat. 176. 57th Congress; April 29, 1902.

57 100% Americanism is a movement in the early twentieth century that emphasized American ideals, practices, and traditions above all others and asserted that people needed to leave cultural practices back in their countries of origin.

58 "Not Quite White"

59 Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming "White": Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States." Journal of American Ethnic History 20, no. 4 (2001): 31.

occupations, relationships, and educational opportunities.[60] The story of Arabs' fight for naturalization under the white categorization reflects the power of race and highlights the ambiguities of race and color. There were fifty-two cases of Arabs arguing for citizenship between 1909 and 1952.[61] However, I will only focus on three major ones in 1909, 1910, and 1915 because they shifted beliefs on Arabs' naturalization.

2.1.1 *Arab Beliefs of Whiteness*

In the Arab struggle for citizenship and white classification, it is important first to note how both sides (the Arab side and the non-Arab side) needed to agree on the categorization of Arabs. Without this, there either would not be a struggle for a white identity nor a legal acceptance of this identity.

As Arab immigrants fought for naturalization through the white avenue, the naturalization cases generated significant, and often contradictory, understandings of whiteness. The Arab men arguing for this categorization turned to numerous sources, such as dictionaries, ethnology articles, and even Middle Eastern discourse.[62] Articles in an immensely popular Cairo-based journal, *al-Hilal*, thoroughly discussed human classification drawn from editor Jurji Zaydan's book *Tabaqat al-umam* (Classes of People, 1912). In this, Zaydan argued that the world consisted of four, ranked races. At the bottom were blacks (Africans), then yellows (Asians), next reds (American Indians), and lastly whites (Europeans and Arabs/Jews/Aryans).[63] Zaydan's work highlights a growing linkage of Arabs with a white race. Though it is unclear of the influence of European race ideas on Zaydan's work, I would argue that since Egypt was a protectorate of Britain during this period there is a high possibility of British race ideas existing in Zaydan's work.

Furthermore, while it is unclear if Arab immigrants wanted a white classification just for naturalization or because they believed that they were superior to blacks, Zaydan's work may indicate a larger Arab belief of racial superiority. Whether this is a result directly because of colonization or if these sentiments existed previously, I would argue that European and Ottoman control of the Arab nations must have influenced Arab racial ideas. Arab immigrants in America similarly express feelings of belonging to the white category by rejecting an

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60 Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

61 In 1952, Harry S. Truman's presidency changed the naturalization laws to remove race as a restriction for citizenship.

62 *Between Arab and White*, 64.

63 Ibid., 65.

Asiatic category. A newspaper article, "Syrians Object to Yellow Brand," in *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia, 31 October 1909) highlights this belief, as it emphasizes the Arab protest of the yellow label despite their origin on the Asia continent.[64] Again, it is unclear if they rejected this because they wanted to naturalize or because they believed themselves superior, but as I argued before, there is a high chance that both sentiments were involved as colonization affected race relations.

Historian Sarah Gualteiri argues that Arabs had to claim their own whiteness and then have the law confirm it to become white in American society.[65] This raises the question of why Arabs argued for white naturalization over the black avenue. Scholar John Tehranian asserts in *Whitewashed* (2009), this happened simply because whiteness was necessary for fundamental political rights, especially voting rights as they would not be subjected to the many taxes and laws in the South used to hinder blacks from voting.[66] Historian Noel Ignatiev, further emphasizes, "To enter the white race was a strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society."[67] Therefore, to be white was to be a full citizen of America.

2.1.2 *The Court Cases*

Like the Arab beliefs on whiteness, the naturalization court cases in the early twentieth century accentuate the fluidity of whiteness in America. Government officials and judges found themselves often disagreeing on the categorization of Arabs. The head of naturalization in the government, Richard Campbell, argued that Arab immigrants were not white and that judges should agree with him that Arabs were yellow.[68] US Attorney Charles Beattle, however, disagreed with Campbell asserting that there was some ambiguity in the law as Arabs can claim to be either Caucasian or Aryan, both of which the law considers as "white."[69] These arguments highlight the ambiguity of whiteness as the government began dealing systematically with Arab people for the first time.[70] Judges also relied on different

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64 "Syrians Object to Yellow Brand: Decline to Be Classed as Inferior Race." *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)*, Oct 31, 1909, Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Global and Mail.
65 "Becoming White," 30.
66 John Tehranian, *Whitewashed: America's Invisible Middle Eastern Minority,* (New York City: New York University Press, 2009).
67 "Becoming White," 30.
68 "Syrians Object to Yellow Brand."
69 "Asiatic Immigrants Cannot Become Citizens. Naturalization Bureau So Decides, But the Matter May Be Tested." *Times-Picayune*, published as *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), Aug. 15, 1909.
70 *Whitewashed*, 39.

pieces of evidence, such as scientific evidence or congressional intent, which led to different conclusions for similar cases. This is the cause for multiple cases on Arab naturalization.

Costa Najour, a Syrian immigrant, was one of the earliest to argue in the courts for naturalization. In his court case in Atlanta, Georgia (1909), the presiding judge, Judge William T. Newman, argued that skin color was not enough in deciding a person's whiteness, asserting that one could not decide a person's race on "ocular inspection alone," which meant that whiteness was not just skin color.[71] Instead the person needed to abide by specific customs and beliefs to be white.[72] Newman, furthermore, looked at ethnological research to decide Najour's categorization. Since the law stated that one must be "Caucasian or white" for citizenship, Newman decided that Najour could be naturalized since he was Caucasian.[73]

Despite arguments of "science," many judges still disagreed with the decision that Caucasian is the same as white, which led to many arguing over Congress's intent of the 1870 Law. Therefore, Arab cases for naturalization still persisted. In 1910, Tom Ellis, another Syrian immigrant, fought for citizenship as a white man in Oregon. The district court system found that it could not argue against Ellis' whiteness, because by this time numerous studies had concluded that Arabs were white. The presiding judge, Judge Wolverton, argued, "no contention is made by the naturalization officers…that Syrians do not belong to the white race."[74] He pulled this information from studies by the Immigration Commission, a bipartisan special committee formed in February 1907 by the United States Congress that had conducted numerous studies between 1907 and 1910 focusing on the consequences of recent immigration on America. During these studies, the Immigration Commission researched Arabs to decide whether or not they were white. This commission concluded that Arabs, specifically on their study of Syrians, were part of the Semitic branch of whiteness.[75] The emphasis on Ellis' case, therefore, was on whether or not he was the "right kind" of white. To decide if Ellis was the right kind of white, the court analyzed his conduct as a resident, which included his religion as a Christian. In the end, Wolverton decided that Ellis was white and could be a citizen.[76]

It was not until 1915 with George Dow's case, however, that this matter largely settled throughout America. In 1915, George Dow presented his case of citizenship to the United

71 "Becoming White," 33.
72 *Whitewashed*, 49.
73 "Becoming White," 34.
74 *The Federal Reporter: Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit and District Courts of the United States, Volumes 179-180*, (West Publishing Company, Minnesota, 1910), 1003.
75 *Between Arab and White*, 63.
76 Ibid., 65.

States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit through the white avenue. Dow had a much larger mobilization behind him with the Syrian American Association, a no-longer existent ethnic organization, supporting him, as this group was working to finalize Arabs' place in the white categorization. To argue his case, the Syrian American Association gave five points that are worth listing in full:

1) "That the term 'white persons' in the statute means persons of the 'Caucasian race,' and persons white in color.

2) That he is a Semite or a member of one of the Semitic nations.

3) That the Semitic nations are all members of the 'Caucasian' or white race.

4) That the matter has been settled in their favor as the European Jews have been admitted without question since the passage of the statute [1790 Naturalization Law] and that the Jews are one of the Semitic peoples.

5) That the history and position of the Syrians, their connection through all time with the peoples to whom the Jewish and Christian peoples owe their religion, make it inconceivable that the statute could have intended to exclude them."[77]

With this argument, the Court of Appeals decided that Arabs were white under American law and could be naturalized. Therefore, individual Arabs could make sense of their identity by placing themselves into the white category and "othering" non-whites.[78] They became white in the "popular sense of the term," or, common-knowledge understanding.[79]

However, *Dow vs. United States* (1915) did not conclude that all Caucasians were white. Notably, in *Thind vs. United States* (1923), the Supreme Court of the United States, with Justice George Sutherland's written decision, decided that Bhagat Singh Thind, a Southeast Asian Hindu, was not white despite being Caucasian. This led to the "common-knowledge standard" in naturalization arguments. This standard made it necessary in all naturalization cases that one needed to fit into popular notions of whiteness to be considered white. Likewise, Caucasian was necessary, but not sufficient in deciding one's whiteness.[80] For Arabs, their struggle continued into the second wave of immigration.

This first wave of immigration, starting in the 1870s, where Arab immigrants had to negotiate their identities for naturalization ended with the 1924 Immigration Act that put

77 "Becoming White," 42.
78 Ibid., 47.
79 Ibid., 42.
80 *Whitewashed*, 41.

strict caps on quotas.[81] After this, there was a brief second wave of immigration between 1924 and 1965.

2.2 **The Second Wave (1924-1965)**

During this wave the American government instilled the quota system. A few Arab countries did have quotas while all other Asian nations were barred from immigrating. The first instilled quota system (1925-1927) granted Palestine, Syria, and Egypt each with 100 people allowed to immigrate. These numbers halted Arab immigration greatly and completely excluded all other Arabs from immigrating.[82] Numbers did not increase substantially until the borders opened again in 1965. Therefore, the total number of Arabs in America stayed around 200,000 during the second wave.

Many Arabs continued to apply for naturalization with only one Arab denied naturalization since *Dow vs. the United States*. In 1942, the US District Court for Eastern District of Michigan decided that an Arab, Muslim male, Ahmed Hassan, did not fit into the white category because he was neither Christian nor truly assimilated into white ideals. The court argued that he was not assimilated because of clashes in Islamic and European cultures asserting, "It cannot be expected that [Muslims] would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization."[83] It was not until the naturalization laws changed under Harry Truman's presidency in 1952—where they removed the race requirement from naturalization laws—that all Arabs could naturalize.

The argument against Ahmed Hassan's naturalization highlights the significant consideration of assimilation in these naturalization cases. Because being white is more than a skin color, Arabs' ability to assimilate into white standards and ideals was a common argument for naturalization. Historian Akram Khater asserts that immigrants threatened middle-class notions of honor and morality by working in public spaces. Therefore, immigrants, who sought to assimilate and become "American," began to adopt dominant middle-class ideologies of gender roles, sexuality, and family.[84] Guglielmo highlights a similar encounter with Italians, who society persecuted at times because of their darker skin, but largely accepted because of their ability to assimilate.[85]

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81 "Not Quite White"
82 George Mason University. "Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925-1927." Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925-1927. Accessed December 01, 2016.
83 Eastern District of Michigan vs. Ahmed Hassan, 1942, App. 48 F. Supp. 843.
84 "Like Pure Gold," 94.
85 *White on Arrival*, 6.

H.A. Elkourie, a twentieth-century scholar, emphasized Arab compatibility with the "West" focusing namely on religion as the key part of their ability to assimilate.[86] Notions of religion were essential for whiteness. For Ellis (1910) and Dow (1915), Christianity was a main point in both arguments for their whiteness just as Ahmed Hassan's religion was a main reason for not accepting him as white. Tehranian asserts that the divisions on society on religious grounds meshes with the prevalent view during this period that one could become lighter by becoming Christian.[87] Because many of the Arabs migrating to America were Christian, they were already considered "lighter" by society, which further links religion to race.

Though religion was a major factor in Arabs' assimilation, it was not the only. As mentioned previously, Arabs often accepted middle class notions of gender and sexuality to assimilate. So while many of the women worked when first arriving, as they moved up in society, they became housewives to better fit into mainstream society. Similarly, the ability to intermarry played a large role in assimilating. Therefore, because Arabs had the ability to assimilate into mainstream American society, they fit into popular notions of whiteness.

2.3 **The Third Wave (1965-2016)**

In 1965 the Hart-Cellar Act on immigration to America abolished many of the regulations and caps, which opened the borders to immigrants again and led to the third wave of Arab immigration.[88] The third wave differed from the first greatly in terms of national origin and religion. First, this period had a shift in country of origin. Immigrants were no longer coming mostly from Syria but now also from other areas of the Middle East and North African region (MENA), including a substantial increase in Iraqi and Palestinian immigrants due to wars.[89] Secondly, as opposed to the chiefly economic reasons from the first wave, this migration happened for a multitude of reasons, including refugee from political tensions.[90] The largest movement to the Detroit area was a direct result of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) because many fled for refuge.[91]

86 "Becoming White," 41.
87 *Whitewashed*, 29.This view came about because of the story of Cain and Abel where God "cursed" Cain leading to him having darker children.

88 George Mason University. "Who Was Shut Out?: Immigration Quotas, 1925-1927."
89 Kenneth D. Wald, "The Diaspora Project of Arab Americans: Assessing the Magnitude and Determinants of Politicized Ethnic Identity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 8, (2009): 1307.
90 "The Diaspora Project of Arab Americans," 1307.
91 Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, "Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's "War on Terror."' *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 446.

This wave also had the largest numbers of immigrants with about 800,000 coming between 1965 and 2003. The US Census recorded in 2010 that there are about 1.5 million Arabs in America. However, given the inherent problem from a lack of proper categorization of Arabs, the Arab American Institute's (AAI) research finds the number of Arabs in 2010 to be much closer to 3.5 million. Currently, Arabs reside in all fifty states with one-third in California, Michigan, and New York. Ninety-four percent live in metropolitan areas, with the largest city to be Detroit, Michigan. Lebanese Americans are the highest percentage of Arabs in each state, except in New Jersey where it is Egyptian-Americans. Lebanese-Americans are also the largest sub-group of Arabs. Between 2000 and 2010, AAI found that the Arab population has grown about 75%.[92] As this data is seven years old, it is only a close approximation to what the numbers are today.

Because of the large population of immigrants from Greater Syria in the first stage of Arab immigration, Christianity is still the largest religion among ArD groups. Sixty-three percent of all ArDs are Christian, with 35% percent Catholic, 18% Orthodox, and 10% Protestant. Only 24% are Muslim, and the remaining have classified themselves as "other."[93]

These vast changes affected Arab-Americans greatly as many began to reject the white categorization. Sociologist Kristine J. Ajrouch analyzed modern perceptions of whiteness finding that Arabs in America often consider themselves as minorities despite their white categorization. By analyzing immigrant status, national origin, religious affiliation, and acceptance of an Arab-American identity, Ajrouch details predictors of accepting a white identity. One notable difference is that Muslims often do not consider themselves white, while Arab Christians do, because Christians find that they can assimilate into mainstream American culture better by sharing religious beliefs.[94] I discuss this study to a greater extent in Chapter 4 with my discussion on ethnic and racial identity formation.

2.4 **Conclusion**

I begin my thesis with the immigration history of Arabs into America because it is essential for understanding my research questions. Most prominent is the question of governmental racial and ethnic categorization that places Arabs into the white category, while

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92 "Demographics," *Arab American Institute, AAIUSA*, Created 2010, Accessed 6 Nov 2015.
93 Gabriel Habib, "What About Christian Arabs?" Lecture at Al-Hewar Center, (Vienna, Virginia) 17 March 2004.
94 Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, "Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans."

mainstream discourse of the media situates them into the “other” category. This, in turn, has silenced many Arabs’ voices in America, as they have become minorities that belong to the majority, leading to their struggles being often ignored in public and political discussions on race. Furthermore, the history of immigration also accentuates the long history of Arabs in America. As a group that only became hyper-visible because of the events of September 11, 2001, many Americans never consider their long history in America.

Chapter 3: Four Concepts of Identity: The Fordson Perspective

Though my interviews have provided me more data than I hoped, two experiences as a participant observer—both only within a few days of each other—during the Halloween season best encapsulate my research as I attempted to understand the Arab experience at Fordson and in Dearborn. The first that comes to mind is my visit to the Arab American National Museum. Though I originally went to the museum for another purpose, coming on the day of the Halloween party showed seemingly contradictory Arab and American cultures in concord. A hijabi witch and a skeleton escorted children dressed in Superman, princess, and animal costumes around exhibits depicting the journey of Arabs to America and famous Arabs in popular culture, science, and politics. Cobwebs and other Halloween decorations covered mosaic tiles. At this, the two cultures smoothly came together.

The Lebanese Student Association (LSA) Halloween Party—*Haflaween* (*Hafla* (party) + Halloween)—also represented the seamlessness of Arab and American cultures in forming another hybrid culture. At this party, some of my interviewees attended so I had the opportunity to see them outside of the structured setting of an interview. The party was not just a “typical” American party with sprinkles of Arab culture thrown into it. Throughout, the DJ mixed popular American songs with Arabic instrumentals and contemporary songs.

Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love* would include instrumental parts and voices from Fairuz's classics. More risqué American-style dances would shift without hesitation to a Lebanese-style *dubka.* Attendants drank or did not drink alcoholic beverages and wore conservative costumes or more revealing ones; yet, I observed no judgment. I found none of the participants questioning the third, hybrid culture as it monopolized this space. These two instances represented two of the themes I found within my studies: hybrid cultures and hyphenated identities. The existence of spaces where both cultures come together to form a third was prevalent throughout my fieldwork.

In this chapter, I highlight important data points from my fieldwork. I categorized them into seven divisions: Arab-American Identity, School Role, College, Clothing and Modesty, Football, Discrimination, and Community Influence. In the next chapter, I analyze these points in terms of the four facets of identity formation: Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender and religion.

3.1 **Arab-American Identity**

One of the largest themes throughout my fieldwork is Arab-American identity. Asking all fourteen of my interviewees about their Arab-American identity, twelve identified themselves as Arab-American. Of the remaining two, Fahim identifies as Iraqi, while Rima holds a Lebanese-American identity over the pan-Arab one. Though I did not ask questions specific towards the white categorization of Arabs in America, five brought up either filling out official forms as white or as the vague category of "other." Interviewee Mr. Imad Fadlallah simply acknowledged this struggle saying, "[We] can't identify [as an ethnicity] because we don't have a category."[95] In this quote, Mr. Fadlallah explains that there is not Arab category in the official census so Arabs have to identify under "white." Second-generation interviewee, Hakim further discussed Arab-Americanism by differentiating between his parents' generation and his own saying, "[I] would say my parents' culture for sure is Arab culture. Then, us—who have parents strictly of Arab culture—we grew up with their culture and American culture than I say that we are more Arab-American than our parents are."[96] Hakim's comments consider the important difference between first- and second-generation, something many of the second-generation interviewees expressed.

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95 Mr. Imad Fadlallah, Interview, 10 Sept 2016.

96 Hakim. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 22 Sept 2016.

As an earlier interviewee, Rima brought my attention to the phrase “acting Arab,” which she described as someone “having a chip on his shoulder” or acting defensive. They similarly spoke English with Arabic, had a specific sense of humor, and would always help people.[97] When asking other second-generation interviewees about the term “acting Arab,” many first joked about it before explaining that it was a difficult term to define. They found it easier to explain through descriptions of actions. Omar depicted those acting Arab as smoking hookah while driving, eating Middle Eastern food, and making large exaggerations. Like Rima, he also emphasized the closeness of those who act Arab with how he could discuss anything with his friends.[98] Idris continued this description saying:

> [Describing acting Arab] is really hard. I can see someone here and tell you if he’s Arab, if he’s from Dearborn. It’s just a certain persona. It’s the way they walk. The way they talk. It’s just like certain things, like walking around with flip-flops and socks. That’s a thing Arabs do. It’s like phrases that they’ll say like “yalla, walla.” That’s Arab. That’s Dearborn. Jordan, Nike, those sweats. I don’t know how to put it into words. You can spot it. It’s like this cockiness to their attitude.[99]

In this quote, Idris covers a wide range of “acting Arab” stereotypes from clothing to speaking and movement. He also explains how it is difficult to explain, yet easy to point to once seen. Hakim similarly brought attention to humor and language in his definition saying, “The parts of the culture [Arab] that we picked up on as Arab-Americans is usually the funnier aspects of the culture. Usually we have our own phrases that we use that don’t translate well. Well [acting Arab] is anyone who epitomizes those phrases.” In describing acting Arab, the interviewees brought to my attention Arab stereotypes in Dearborn. While none of them looked badly towards those who acted Arab, they felt that when individuals fulfill these stereotypes they act more Arab than American.

As an earlier interviewee, Rima also brought my attention to Dearborn-specific Arab identity illustrating it as:

> [My dad] came here with a core of his identity so he can see which parts of his identity were enriched by American culture. For me, it’s been a really unique experience growing up in a community that’s mostly [Arab-American]. Being from Dearborn really shaped my Arab-ness, shaped

97 Rima. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 10 Sept 2016.
98 Omar. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 16 Sept 2016.
99 Idris. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 23 Sept 2016.

> how I am comfortable being Arab. How am I am supposed to know which parts are coming from my [American] culture and his [Arab] culture? It's hard to separate the two. But I am proud of my Arab-ness and I didn't realize that until I left the area.[100]

In this quote, Rima describes the difficulty to separate Arab and American culture as she grew up in a city where both cultures come together to form a hybrid culture.

Hakim further discussed Dearborn as affecting his identity disclosing, "If have to pick [my ethnicity], I would say Arab-American, otherwise I would say that I'm just me. Because [I'm] Iraqi in a Lebanese city…[I] feel like a mix of everything but at the same time don't feel like I fall into any category."[101] In this, Hakim explains how Dearborn has led to his pan-Arab identity because of large mixture of different Arab cultures. Later in the interview, he continued discussing the Dearborn-specific Arab-American identity by noting his struggle to educate his parents into understanding the blended culture of Arab-Americans. In section 3.8, I continue with Dearborn's role on interviewees' identities.

When specifically asked, eleven of the interviewees also agreed that they have a closer, special relationship with other Arabs, typically citing an understanding of their culture. Fahim's response summed up many of sentiments of the other interviewees' answers with "No duh," which highlights the obviousness he felt towards this closer relationship with other Arabs. Nine interviewees went further to say that they predominantly socialize with other Arabs, though they found the reasons of this to be either because of the Dearborn demographic or simply because it "just happens."

Nour emphasizes the differences she feels with other Americans after leaving Dearborn to attend the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, saying:

> I don't feel like I'm understood by other Americans as much. When I was in the dorm, I was around a lot of people who were the same and I was different. When I was around in conversations, they would discuss things I had never really been a part of. That's also because my socio-economic status, but I also think that relates to my race in a way. They would discuss holidays I've never participated in. They'd be part of country clubs, or they would do things with their families like drink that I would never do with my family.[102]

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100 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
101 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.
102 Nour. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 16 Sept 2016.

In Dearborn, Nour recalls that she did not interact with many different cultures so she felt a part of her surroundings; however, once leaving she felt disconnected from other non-Arab Americans. In this quote, Nour tries to analyze two causes of this disconnection: her class and her race.

3.1.1 *Americanism*

When asked about their American identity, identifying as Arab or Arab-American did not influence many of the interviewees' feelings towards their American identity. Thirteen answered that anyone could be American and that they felt American. Mr. Fouad Zaban (later interviewed by me) in an interview in the documentary *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, and Football* (2011) emphasized his American identity saying, "I eat pretty much the same foods. I coach football. I love watching sports…I went to college and got educated. Isn't that what most Americans do? So is there a difference? I don't feel that there is a difference aside from me practicing my religion as I practice it. That's the only difference there is."[103] Like Mr. Zaban, many of the other interviewees felt similarly that if someone came to America and went through behavioral or structural assimilation then they are American.

Only Fahim felt disconnected from an American identity. Instead, he argued that being American is more than just the official document and only third-generations are truly Americans because other Americans accept them.[104] He further recounted a lost identity that he felt because he came from Iraq at a very early age. Nour and Hakim also mentioned feeling that they lost part of their identity growing up in Dearborn.

One of the questions that I emphasized in each interview was what the interviewee viewed to be a true American. Three mentioned voting and seven discussed following laws and believing in the Constitution. Hakim focused on the laws aspect saying:

> To me, a true American [believes in] the values the country was founded on…when we say equality, freedom for all, it's very hard to say that given the people who signed the Declaration of Independence clearly didn't support that given that they had slaves, so on and so forth. The values that are written in writing are probably the values that an American should hold, but not with the intentions they were written.[105]

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103 Rashid Ghazi, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football*, 2011.
104 Fahim. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Phone. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 5 Sept 2016.
105 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.

Hakim specifies the important difference of context and values in his definition of a true American by noting negative aspects of American's founding figures. Only Fahim specifically brought up nationality and citizenship because he felt that being American went beyond that.[106]

Eight considered those who express themselves fully are true Americans. To these interviewees, it meant that true Americans do not hide or feel ashamed of any part of their identity. Nour specifically highlighted people needing to be "proud of your heritage no matter what" as part of her definition.[107] Rima simply answered, "[I'm a true American because] I speak my mind and I have an opinion."[108] Rima argued that true Americans were unapologetically themselves, something she tried to follow always.

Though many interviewees brought up their belief that anyone can be American, only eight answered that Arab-ness fits easily within American culture. Others either felt that Arab-ness can fit after some negotiation or that they are two contradictory cultures. Karam highlighted the latter belief in his interview responding:

> Arab and American are two contradicting things in my mind...For example, in the Middle East, there is just so much sectarianism, like sects of religions clash. You're Sunni, you're Shi'ite. You're Christian or you're Chaldean. That's why there's so much divide in the Middle East and so many civil wars. When you come [to America], all of that should be thrown out.[109]

Karam in this quote emphasized the differences between Arab and American cultures. He provides a different perspective of Arab nations by focusing on more negative aspects of Arab cultures. Because of his unfavorable feelings towards Arab nations, Karam argues that Arab immigrants need to adapt to American customs by removing sectarian beliefs.

3.1.2 *Assimilating to the Host Culture*

To understand the lives of my interviewees further, another significant focus of my interview was on their assimilation into American society. Six of the interviewees answered that they did not use anything to fit better into American society. Six, however, cited how they either have to silence their Arab identity or change it within different contexts. Nour highlighted this latter practice answering, "I have trained—for lack of a better word—myself

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106 Fahim was the only to explicitly bring up citizenship. Others alluded to it when mentioning voting rights.
107 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.
108 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
109 Karam. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 12 Sept 2016.

around other Americans to act differently. I won't bring up [certain things] because people honestly wouldn't understand and then it becomes an explanation thing and sometimes I don't want to do that. I don't have the energy to explain everything."[110] Thirteen interviewees along with Nour emphasized educating non-Arabs about their culture. Two interviewees also highlighted how they change their name so that non-Arabs can pronounce it. In *Fordson,* Big Joe (Youssef) also mentioned name-changing by recalling how his son wanted to name his grandson after him, but changed the name to Joseph so that the grandson could have an easier life.[111]

3.1.3 *Language*

Another important aspect of Arab-American identity is language. When asked about their language usage, eleven interviewees said that they speak Arabic roughly the same amount as they speak English. Twelve speak Arabic in the home, either completely or with some English, and five speak Arabic in public. Using both Arabic and English is also an essential part of many of the interviewees' jobs. Karam of the *Arab American News* mentioned how interviews and articles can either be in Arabic or English and how they always need to be translated to the other. Though there is some loss of meaning in translation, each version covers the same points and views.[112] Reverend A similarly has both sermons in English and Arabic. In East Dearborn, he exclusively does Arabic sermons, while in Dearborn Heights he does them in English.[113] Because Dearborn has such a large Arab population, both Karam and Reverend A. use English and Arabic to reach as much of the population as possible.

Many of the second-generation interviewees found that their parents nudged them into Arabic school and classes as a means to keep part of their culture. Three of the seven second-generation interviewees also mentioned attending Arabic school. Idris highlights his experience responding, "[I went to] Arabic school…[My parents] wanted me to learn. I know how to speak it, but they wanted me to learn reading and writing."[114] In this quote, Idris emphasized how his parents not only wanted him to speak Arabic but also be literate.

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110 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.
111 Rashid Ghazi, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football,* 2011.
112 Karam. Interview. 12 Sept 2016.
113 Reverend A. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Phone. Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan. 9 Oct 2016.
114 Idris. Interview. 23 Sept 2016.

3.2 **Role of Fordson High School**

"Fordson is a public high school in Dearborn, Michigan, in the United States of America that has the same issues, the same problems, the same ideas as any other high school in the United States," Mr. Fadlallah opened his interview in *Fordson* emphasizing how Fordson is similar to every public high school in America.[115] Throughout my interviews, numerous staff members, teachers, and even alumni echoed this sentiment. Six of the related eleven interviews,[116] when asked about the types of classes at Fordson, further emphasized how the classes were general, American-school classes. Ms. Z, a language arts teacher, spoke about teaching reading strategies, analyzing books, and other related practices with general textbooks.[117] Miss R, a social studies teacher, cited the very structured curriculum that she needed to follow noting how she personally did not incorporate Arab history, Arab-American identity, or similar topics into her classes.[118]

However, as I progressed throughout each interview, many interviewees also included ways in which Fordson acted as either a hub or as a proponent of identity formation. Rima first uses the term "hub" in her interview responding, "School [is] really a hub to explore [students own] identity more than any other identity because they were more influenced by their peers than their families or their parents. [The school] really plays an instrumental role in how one envisions their identity." In this quote, Rima alludes to why schools play such a fundamental role in identity formation noting how peers surround students and influence them far more than at home. Parent-teacher liaison, Mrs. E, described the school as allowing students to be their identities as long as expression remained within the confines of school policy.[119] In this next section of the chapter, I detail the data I collected that relates to the school role in identity formation in terms of Americanism, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

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115 Rashid Ghazi, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football*, 2011.

116 When discussing my data, in this chapter I often discuss "related interviews." Related interviews consist of individuals directly involved within the school. This includes all but three: Karam, Abdul, and Reverend A. I choose to include these three interviews because they give further insight into the Dearborn community. Karam, however, has an interesting role as he is alumnus of Fordson High School, but most of his interview revolved around his work at the *Arab American News*, therefore, I indicate his inclusion into the "related interviews" by switching the number from eleven to twelve. To summarize, fourteen means I am discussing every interview, twelve means ones related directly to Fordson including Karam, and eleven means only those related directly to Fordson.

117 Ms. Z. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Phone. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 19 Sept 2016.

118 Miss R. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Phone. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 26 Sept 2016.

119 Mrs. E. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 30 Sept 2016.

3.2.1 *Americanism*

All of the seven asked interviewees agreed that the school setting should play a role in forming Americanism and that Fordson specifically did play a role in this. Many interviewees focused on the school creating patriotism and citizenship, both elements of Americanism. As a social studies teacher, Miss R discussed this part of the interview longer than my other interviewees as this is her area of concentration. Miss R argued that Fordson should especially teach about citizenship and patriotism because it is a public school. She further mentioned the active role the Dearborn school district plays in Americanist identity formation because elementary schools work to teach this. Also discussing government classes, Miss R emphasized the role of Fordson in instilling good citizens and inspiring patriotism. Ms. Z and Mr. Zaban both included history and social studies classes as ways that Fordson teaches Americanism. Omar, Mrs. E, and Idris focused more on how Fordson plays the anthem before major events and how each morning starts with the pledge of allegiance.

I do not have data on the four other related interviews, Fahim, Mr. Fadlallah, Rima, and Hakim. I did not ask Rima or Mr. Fadlallah because their interviews focused on different subjects. I did not ask Hakim and Fahim at the time because when asked about their personal patriotism they said that they were not patriotic. Of the fourteen interviews, they were the only two to express that they are not patriotic.

Interviewees also concentrated on the patriotic aspect of Americanism. When asking Rima about patriotism, she showed some hesitation to answering whether or not she believed she was patriotic. At first she answered no; however, after some consideration, she changed her answer to yes because she does criticize as much as love America and does uphold America's values, which she believes makes one patriotic. Miss R and other first- and 1.5 generation immigrants expressed how they are patriotic because they have so many more opportunities in America that they did not have in their home country. Karam, Mrs. E, and Mr. Fadlallah each spoke about needing to not be flashy or over-the-top with their patriotism. Mrs. E recounted a story at Fordson where patriotism at the school came into question:

> It's almost like the Arab-American Muslim today feels like they have to go above and beyond with their patriotism. I don't think we should. Is that going to stop the nay-sayers? Absolutely not. We've had that here. We've dealt with that. Best example I give all of the time with Mr. [Imad] Fadlallah. The flagpole had broken outside. The pulley and string had broken and the engineer had to order the parts and it took time to get in. While there was no

> flag hung, the accusation of media crazies out there was that he took the flag down because he wants to turn it into an Islamic school.[120]

This notorious story coined "Hezbollah High" emphasizes many of the struggles administration faces as a dominantly Arab high school. Because of Mr. Imad Fadlallah's shared name with Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, Mr. Imad Fadlallah's years as principal also created controversy as some people assumed a relationship between the two.

3.2.2 *Ethnicity and Race*

Ten of the eleven related interviews agreed that Fordson plays a role in ethnic and racial identity formation with only Ms. Z disagreeing. Many of the interviews with the alumni gave great insight into this. Idris highlighted the role of the school acting as a hub for Arab identity, "It's not something you think about because it's so dominant there. But obviously as I identify as Arab-American. Conversations we had and everything. I never thought of myself as anything other. I know for sure that if I went to a different school, it would have changed."[121] Nour expressed a similar idea, "School played a big role [in ethnic and racial identity formation] because it's not in your face but it's all around you so that made it easier for me to identify as Arab-American because everyone around me was also Arab-American. It wasn't even a question. It was more like a 'This is the culture here. This is how I identify with where I come from.'"[122] In these quotes, second-generation alumni, Nour and Idris, discuss the omnipresent nature of Arab-American identity throughout Fordson. By having Arabs all around them, both felt comfortable in identifying as Arab.

Seven of the eleven related interviews also mentioned ethnic clubs, such as the Arab Student Union, as a way Fordson allows for ethnic and racial identity formation. Miss R emphasized how these clubs must apply to the school administration, and so, the school plays an active role in allowing ethnic and racial clubs to exist.

Though many of the interviewees specified how the classes follow a typical, American curriculum. Miss R discussed how other teachers in the social studies department did work to include more about Arab history and identity. She mentioned how in junior and senior year sociology courses have units on culture and how government classes sometimes use current events to discuss news related directly to the Arab World and to Arab-Americans.

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120 Mrs. E. Interview. 30 Sept 2016.
121 Idris. Interview. 23 Sept 2016.
122 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.

Furthermore, world history courses cover the Ottoman Empire and Islamic World where teachers can choose to teach about Islam as a religion.[123] Rima, however, believed that the curriculum could involve Arabs more arguing, "Some teachers made a conscious effort to include some culture. When you have a school that's 90% Arab-American, that should be reflected in your curriculum. I taught in the school that was 90% African American and we were told to teach a curriculum that was culturally responsive."[124] With this quote, Rima objects to the "general" curriculum at Fordson arguing that it possible to reflect more Arab elements into the classrooms. Nonetheless, according to the majority of the interviewees, Fordson does play a role in ethnic and racial identity formation.

3.2.3 *Gender*

Foremost, I think it is essential for me to explain what I meant when asking about gender identity formation. For this section, I was not referring to whether one identifies as male or female, which I made clear to the interviewees. Instead, I asked more about the school's role in masculinity and femininity identity formation and sexuality identity formation. Of my interviews, six of the eleven agreed that Fordson plays a role in gender identity formation. Only Mrs. E specifically mentioned masculinity, and only Mrs. E, Nour, and Rima brought up feminism.

Another topic I specifically addressed was the dress code. Seven of the nine asked interviews believed the dress code was appropriate. In this sample, I did not ask Mr. Fadlallah or Fahim about their opinion on the dress code because I did not feel that our interview steered in that direction. Of the two dissenters, Omar felt that the dress code was too conservative and Mr. Zaban felt that it was not conservative enough. As a gym teacher, Mr. Zaban described the dress code for gym class citing how it allowed abayas and how he felt that feel it was appropriate. Though Nour believed that the dress code was acceptable, she felt that a few of the teachers handled it inappropriately saying, "[They would] kind of bring it back to like 'Oh you're a girl, how could you wear that?' or 'How could your mom let you wear that.' Not all of them but some of them were pushy on their views with what they personally thought was okay."[125] For Nour, some of the teachers' treatment towards the dress code became an issue as they attempted to push their religious and conservative ideals onto

123 Miss R. Interview. 26 Sept 2016.
124 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
125 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.

students who did not follow them. Moreover, these teachers used the closeness of the community to shame students they found dressed inappropriately by asking about how their parents felt.

Of the interviewees, both Muslim teachers wore hijabs while the two second-generation Muslim women did not. Seven of the twelve related interviews brought up the hijab specifically mentioning the acceptance of hijabs in the school. Idris very shortly spoke about the normalization of the hijab responding, “No issues with a hijab. It was not even talked about.” In this quote, Idris explains how the hijab is not a discussed subject at Fordson—though an Internet search shows newspaper articles where it is in other cities[126]—because of its commonness and acceptance.

3.2.4 *Religion*

When asked, nine of the eleven related interviews expressed that Fordson played a role in religious identity formation. Five of the eleven related interviews mentioned religious clubs as a way that Fordson helps identity formation. Though Mr. Fadlallah also reflected on religious clubs, he explains, “Ethnicity maybe [can flourish] but I did not see a very strong presence of religion in the high school. 2500 kids. We did have a Christian club; we did have a Muslim club. But, the number of kids who participated in either club does not exceed two hands.” In this quote, Mr. Fadlallah describes the religious clubs that, while present, did not have strong participation. The alumni interviewees did mention that the clubs are larger than during Mr. Fadlallah’s time as principal, which can signify an increase in both participation and in religious identity.

As before, Ms. Z emphasized how Fordson does not actively place one religion over another. Fahim similarly did not find that religious discussions arose often enough to influence his beliefs. Fahim, however, did express common debates over Sunni and Shi’ite beliefs. Only Hakim and Fahim mentioned a Sunni/Shi’ite difference in the school, though they did not find that this affected friendships or beliefs. Mr. Fadlallah brought up how Fordson as a public school needs to fulfill guidelines by answering, “Fordson is still a public high school,” which highlights the importance that Fordson does not emphasize one religion over the other and that Fordson is supposed to remain in coherence with governmental policies.

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126 For just one example of this problem: Smith, Jennifer. "Muslim Teacher, 24, Told to Hang Herself with Her Headscarf because It 'Isn't Allowed' in Trump's America." *Daily Mail Online.* November 12, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2017.

Some of the second-generation interviewees voiced peer influence in religious beliefs. Rima specifically highlighted this part of her life saying, “I didn’t think that I was Muslim. What I was doing at that age was attributing other people’s behaviors of what they considered to be Islam with the religion. I was associating people’s false practices with the religion instead of informing myself what the religion actually is.”[127] Though Rima still questioned her Islamic identity at the time of the interview, her experiences after high school when leaving this environment further led to her reflection on this high school period. Nour also felt similarly discussing how at times she felt pressured to be more outwardly Muslim. She found that because 90%[128] of the Muslim population at the school fasted for Ramadan, many of the girls wore hijabs, and a large majority celebrated Muslim holidays that she also needed to do these things.[129]

Despite Nour and Rima’s descriptions, eight of the eleven interviews mentioned how most of their religious influence comes from the home. Mr. Fouad Zaban, a gym teacher and head football coach, specifically mentioned how the school only played a role by getting more Muslim kids to attend because they wanted to go there because of Muslim connections and that it had no effect on his children’s faith.[130]

3.2.5 *Multiculturalism*

Seven of the twelve related interviews responded that schools need to be multicultural place and that Fordson worked to achieve this. Miss R further brought up how because of demographics at Fordson, multiculturalism does not function as properly as it should; however, the school board pushes diversity and multiculturalism within all district schools. Hakim reiterated this point by also saying, “School tries its best to make sure people are fine…I don’t necessarily think that people rejected [different identities] with malicious intent but there was a lack of understanding. A lot of ‘these are my values, this is what I know, I don’t want to open my mind’…Open-minded students, to me, seemed to be in the minority.” In this quote, Hakim does acknowledge that Fordson attempted to be a more multicultural environment; however, as Miss R mentioned, this did not work well in practice because people seemed to reject other cultures through ignorance.

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127 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
128 Her estimation
129 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.
130 Mr. Fouad Zaban. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 19 Sept 2016.

Second-generation alumni, Nour and Hakim, however, gave a different perspective. Nour discussed the lack of knowing cultures outside of Dearborn's for many of the students, stressing: "A lot of [other students] only know their culture. [They are] very big on their own culture, but are not into other cultures. Either because they're not aware or just don't know much about other cultures…[Students are] okay with their ethnic and religious identities, just not others."[131] Hakim related a similar sentiment saying, "I don't think we had a strong enough voice for any identity [other than Arab or Muslim] to be able to come out and say 'we're just as equal as you are' because [they were] significantly in the minority. Maybe they could express who they are, but at the same time could not raise as much awareness."[132] Moreover, Idris connected multiculturalism to Islam highlighting how Islam could be found everywhere at Fordson, but students seemed to lack much knowledge in any other religion.[133]

3.2.6 *Adjustments*

In answering a question about the treatment of Islam and religion at Fordson, Rima highlighted adjustments teachers and administrators at Fordson made. "I don't think the school actively supports [religion]," she began, "but does what is required by the student population." I found that the concept of adjustments reiterated by the majority of interviewees with ten of the eleven related interviewees responding that adjustments happened to benefit Fordson. During the beginning of my interview with Mrs. E, a colleague interrupted us, as they needed to create the outgoing message to all Fordson parents. When I asked about the PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association) message in both Arabic and English, Mrs. E replied with the common answer that I found with Fordson staff of how it was simply something that they needed to do. If they wanted all parents to attend, they needed to work in both English and Arabic so to not leave out any new-arriving families. Mrs. E continued this discussion later in her interview mentioning how she was pushing for faculty to adjust more by working with FOBs (fresh-off-the boat or newly-arrived families) to make them more comfortable within the school system because American schools are different than most Arab ones.[134]

Mr. Fadlallah also brought up numerous points of adjusting to the student population. As the first Arab principal at Fordson, he mentioned many initiatives to improve the school

131 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.
132 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.
133 Idris. Interview. 23 Sept 2016.
134 Mrs. E. Interview. 30 Sept 2016.

by focusing on these adjustments. Mr. Fadlallah cited an elective musical course where he suggested using Arabic music and instruments as a way to get more students to sign up for it. “If you offer a class that has all Christmas songs in it, that is not culturally associated with these kids. You are not going to have any kids taking that class. You have to adjust to that. And if you have to offer music, add some cultural music in it in order for that class to stay alive.” Mr. Fadlallah continued emphasizing the important point of necessity, “There are two ways at looking at this. You have one side saying, “You are, you are, you are.” And you have somebody with intellect sees that in order to stay afloat, I have to do these things.”[135] Mr. Fadlallah not only reiterated necessity but also how these adjustments led to some possible controversies as outsiders might not understand the reasons behind removing Christmas songs.

Interviews with Miss R and Mr. Zaban also related these adjustments to the classes they taught. Miss R noted how she accommodated for many of female students who could not sit next to male ones by making certain to organize her seating chart so that her students sat in a way that was sensitive to their beliefs. Mr. Zaban and other gym teachers have separate classes for ninth-grade female and male students because of swimming lessons that year. Mr. Zaban believed this was not only a benefit because of sensitivity to religious beliefs, but also because classes worked much smoother. As I interviewed him at the football field, he pointed out members of his class where only one girl of the twelve in his class was playing soccer with his male students while the rest of the female students walked around the field. “Participation is better when separate,” he asserted. Like with ethnicity, adjustments in relation to gender better classroom experiences.

Adjustments related to religion also happened throughout the school. Mr. Fadlallah highlighted another adjustment he needed to make with the cafeteria orders:

> When you have a school, 95% Arabic, 90% Muslim, they don’t eat meat unless it is halal. And you sell a pizza that has pepperoni on it and that pepperoni is not halal, you are not going to sell that pizza. So, when you make a pizza that is cheese only, you have a better chance of selling that pizza. You need to adjust in order to continue. So you have a talk with the cafeteria manager, ‘Look don’t put pepperoni on that pizza and you’ll have a better chance of selling it. And if you have to buy a hotdog, buy a hotdog from a place that is halal.’

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135 Mr. Fadlallah. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.

With these adjustments, Mr. Fadlallah helped keep the school in order. Similarly, Hakim, Idris, and Omar each brought up different examples of teachers including religion within their lessons. To clarify, teachers did not preach to the students but instead allowed an environment where religion was not rejected. Hakim spoke of English classes and specifically his Chemistry teacher saying:

> Probably not on the agenda, but teachers [were] incorporating [religion] in their lessons. English teachers talk about "what do you think about Islam, what do you think about this, this, and that." And they would try really hard to get us to present a non-bias perspective…My chemistry teacher was very Christian, and he would talk about his Christian values, and he would try to make it a point for the students to understand that he wasn't trying to force us into Christianity but trying to get us to understand the message he was trying to send. Somehow he made it tie into chemistry. It always worked. We didn't take it negatively.[136]

He also continued with discussing his Language Arts teacher saying:

> Because the school was primarily Arab, I said 97% Arab…I feel, I don't know if it's the school who did this or probably more so the teachers…I know my Language Arts teacher, she's aware of culture differences…no, she's an old white lady…very aware of social differences from her end and adjust so that students can understand her and she can understand the students…. really understood that they needed to approach things differently.

In these quotes, Hakim highlights how his various teachers, even if not Arab or Muslim, explained their own beliefs to open discussion while also allowing for other identities into the environment. He also alludes to the idea that these adjustments do not only take place at the administrative level—which Mr. Fadlallah speaks about—but also the class level with teachers personally making the decision to adjust to the student population.

Omar had a similar example, "In biology class, we had a debate about evolution and I know another student brought the Quran to school and brought up phrases and quotes from that. And that was his way of explaining that evolution is not just biological."[137] In this quote, Omar explains that in biology class, the teacher allowed students to include discussions of religion so that the environment included different arguments. Like with Hakim' examples,

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136 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.
137 Omar. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.

Omar points to how teachers also personally adjusted to allow different identities to come forth in classrooms.

Halal, holidays, and prayers were all significant topics throughout many of the interviews. Four of eleven related interviews mentioned halal, five brought up fasting, nine included prayers, and eight cited holidays as part of Fordson. Idris recalled his experience with praying saying, "People could get a pass to go to Friday prayers to get exempt from class…I know some teachers in their classroom had an extra back room. Sometimes students would go there to pray. They would allow that."[138] Similarly, Omar mentioned how the school allowed the ten days of mourning for Ashura. Miss R included how the school accommodates for Ramadan by having less physical activities. With a final point on adjustments, Mr. Fadlallah during his interview in *Fordson* emphasized the necessity of it through his example of Eid where he argued that taking off Eid is necessary because, if not, not enough students attend class that day and then the school does not get paid. Therefore, the school had to adapt because it could not afford to not get paid one day.[139]

3.3 **College**

Mrs. E, as the parent-teacher liaison, spoke about the importance of changing gender perceptions in relation to furthering education:

> "If you had asked me years ago, "Where are girls going away to college?" I might have said, it's a struggle. About 2007 [with Mr. Fadlallah's time as principal], the door sort of opened up for these kids. The school—the principal and people here at the time as well as myself—pushed kids to believe in themselves and go beyond their expectations. [Now], we have ten kids at Harvard, numerous at [University of Michigan] Ann Arbor, and even Michigan State. Michigan State is a problem [for girls] because it is so far away. But now, you look at it and see that it's been shifting. A lot more girls are going away to college…We started having after-school mini sessions for parents of kids who got accepted to colleges that would have them going away, and we brought these parents in and talked to them. We opened dialogue and concerns they might have. And we asked questions of parents of girls who had went away to college."[140]

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138 Idris. Interview. 23 Sept 2016.
139 Rashid Ghazi. *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football*, 2011.
140 Mrs. E. Interview. 30 Sept 2016.

In this quote, Mrs. E introduces difficulties Fordson had in relation to gender and cultural beliefs of moving away.

Hakim also included complications with attending college in his interview when mentioning, “My parents are a lot more conservative to the point where my mom didn’t want me coming to this university because of how far it was. It’s not even that far, only about 30 to 40 minutes away. Because back at home, my dad’s side and my mom’s side all lived together and they’re not used to the breaking away.” Hakim extends Mrs. E’s conversation on gendered reasons for the fear of him personally going away to college. But as Hakim points out, he considers his parents to be a lot more conservative than the average Fordson parent, so he may be more of an exception to this discussion with the dominant problems still remaining for women.

Mrs. E’s quote also alludes to Mr. Fadlallah and Rima’s interviews where they discussed expectations of Arab students, which I also find essential to analyze though they were the only three to mention it. Mr. Fadlallah’s explanation is worth including in full:

> It had to do with expectations. Because [for example], Kristine, you are a white American, I think you should take French as an elective. Rima [who is also sitting in the room], you are an Arab-American, I think you should go into a cooking class. Those were the type of things I faced when I first started. In 2004, a young lady came to me and she said, this man would like to meet you, William Graham. William was the assistant secretary of defense for a couple of administrations until he went out on his own and made his own company and he became a multi-billionaire. He graduated from Fordson in 1947 and he came back to Fordson and said, “I want to give you a scholarship. A bunch of scholarships, but I have to ask you a question. How is a school that graduates 750 to 800 kids every year only one gets accepted to [University of Michigan] Ann Arbor?” That was my first wake-up call I received a month into the job. So I started looking to answer that question. And I realized that we had a major issue with expectations. When I went and asked my counseling staff, “Do we offer ACT (American College Testing) at Fordson?” And the answer I got was, “No, we don’t need ACT because all of our kids go to Henry Ford [Community College] and Henry Ford doesn’t require ACT so we don’t offer it.” The issue with expectations, you can look at it with several different lenses. You have the racist lens that people in positions of power look at you as an inferior race and therefore you should or you cannot achieve. You

> have the other soft lens. They love you but they look at you with pity that you can't achieve so they want to coach you and guide you in a direction of a skilled trade so that you can earn a living. Those were one of the issues that we also faced. In order for things to move forward, you must change expectations…So when I started in 2004, one student went to Ann Arbor. When I left in 2008, I had over 80 attending Ann Arbor. I had a handful going to Harvard. What changed? The expectations. The kids were the same.[141]

With this statement, Mr. Fadlallah addresses the importance of expectations and his work to change them to open opportunities for his Arab students by highlighting how Fordson administration previously would have treated me (as a white Latina)[142] in comparison to his daughter (an Arab) by placing us on different education paths. He also notes that this was entirely because of racism.

Mr. Fadlallah furthermore cited having fired over forty teachers, which was incredibly controversial at the time. The reason he gave was that the teachers did not fix their standards or do their jobs as well as they should. The fired teachers often sued him claiming discrimination, as they were not Muslim or Arab. However, to Mr. Fadlallah, this was a crucial change as the teachers refused to make the necessary adjustments and raise expectations for the Arab students. By changing the expectations, Mr. Fadlallah allowed his Arab students to also excel, which one can note by observing the universities they were then attending.

3.4 **Modesty**

"We both have the same word modesty but we have two different definitions of them. In Arab culture, modest is very specific. You dress appropriately. Long-sleeve everything. You don't show much skin. Even in the way you act, you don't give out a lot of information…Over [in America], we think of modesty more as a personality."[143] In this quote, Hakim highlights differences between modesty in Arab and in American cultures. Of the twelve related interviews, when asked about modesty clashing in Arab and American cultures, eight agreed that modesty did clash in some form. However, these interviewees often disagreed in how it clashed. Ms. Z believes that media played a role in creating this

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141 Mr. Fadlallah. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
142 We had discussed my identity before this moment.
143 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.

confliction by hyper-sexualizing people, and that there is an assumption that modest equals oppressed. Mr. Zaban supposes that it is actually not Arab but Islamic modesty clashing with American. On the other hand, Mrs. E argues they only clash for people who do not understand the cultures. Rima brought up a similar point saying,

> [There is a] fear in [Dearborn specific culture] of parents that we will move to a country and lose our values. So they instill values that might not even be real "Arab" values. And what I've noticed growing up here is that there's a lot of taboo around how a woman should express herself and what it means to be a girl. I don't see this when I go overseas. Even in the most conservative parts of Lebanon, I don't see it expressed in a way that it is here.

With this statement, Rima argues that Dearborn has a specific modesty culture that is much more conservative than her experiences with Lebanese modesty cultures, and therefore, this may create a belief that Arab modesty culture clashes with American.

In relation to modesty, five of the twelve related interviewees brought up dating. As a topic very close to him, Hakim spoke for a long time about his experiences with dating. Having conservative, Muslim parents, he struggled with his identity saying:

> Even right now, my mom would see guy-girl out together in public. Very wrong. That's something that would really bother her. Have to hide this whole aspect of my life to my parents and even to my friends. Me specifically because I have a harder time with my parents than most of my friends…. I would have to put girls in my phone under male names. Like my friend Mariam would have to be "Mo" and then I would need to remember who was who.[144]

He continued with another personal example:

> I remember one time I had a girlfriend back in high school. Everything about it was completely bad—not the relationship but how my parents would have seen it. I'm Iraqi Shi'ite. She was half-Yemeni, half white Shi'ite. One day, I talked about a hypothetical situation just with a Yemeni girl and it reached nearly all war. She got my dad into it. We had this whole conversation about why I shouldn't be, let alone dating, we weren't talking about dating, we were talking about marriage, because you know in Arabic culture there is not dating, they didn't realize that I was talking about dating. They were like, you can't marry a girl who is Yemeni because most likely she's Sunni. She doesn't

144 Hakim. Interview. 22 Sept 2016.

> fall in line with your religious perspectives. And little did they know that I don't identify Islam. And in my mind, I was just like, this is just Yemeni. Could you imagine if I told them she was Yemeni and white? That would have been a whole other debacle.[145]

For Hakim, he blamed much of his experience on his conservative, Muslim parents. In these quotes, he specifically mentions how he faced a separation of genders because of his parents' conservatism and had to behave a specific way to align with their beliefs of modesty. He very specifically refers to how modesty relates to religion. However, Mrs. E brought up a different example from an Arab Christian background:

> A couple of years ago there was a fundraiser that was done here and it was a dating service fundraiser…And basically what it was, it was a fundraiser and boys and girls filled out a survey and if you wanted that survey passed on to this company in Ohio and paid a dollar to be matched up with somebody in the building. And parents had an uproar and it led to a school board meeting. And we were all at the meeting and the assumption was that parents got upset because they're Muslim. It was related negatively to a Muslim issue. I told all the parents to let me be the last one. And when I got up there, it was more that I'm not an Arab Muslim and I had an issue with it. And, it was more about parents upset with personal information being sent to some guy in Ohio and we're sending our children to school. The conversation of my daughter dating or not dating is between me and my daughter. The school shouldn't be involved in that. It was more of a parent thing and the right of a parent to decide for their sons and daughters.[146]

For Mrs. E, the issue of the dating service was not a religious problem as she highlights by having spoken last after the Muslim parents. Instead, it was more of a privacy issue and a parental issue than one of the school. In her quote, she importantly argues how the school should not be involved in her daughter's dating life because it is the role of the parent.

As dating was a close topic for some interviewees, they also included other aspects of it. Rima also spoke about the treatment of sex in Dearborn culture and its disapproval:

> People are having sex in high school. That's just how it is. I'm not trying to normalize it. But I feel like a lot less people are having it here than in Lebanon just because of how much of a taboo it is. Girls are raised here to

145 Ibid.
146 Mrs. E. Interview. 30 Sept 2016.

> think that that's the last thing you should think about doing. We don't even discuss how you should protect yourself. Sex ed courses, our perspectives are a lot different, so didn't think that it applied to us at the time.[147]

Rima discusses in her quote how peers were having sex; yet, because it is a taboo, many parents opted out of sex education, which led to peers not knowing how to be protected. She also differentiates between Lebanese and Fordson cultures by again alluding to the hyper-conservatism that comes from immigration as she did in an earlier quote (3.1). Rima also mentions sex education, which only Mr. Zaban and Mrs. E also brought up. All three of the interviewees specifically explained that parents can opt out of their children having sex education and that this did happen. Mrs. E explained how many parents felt that the conversation was more important to have at home where it would be more comfortable for the students.

Mrs. E was also the only interviewee to mention the gay community within Fordson. Fahim and Karam both mentioned the existence of homosexuality; however, neither spoke about it specifically within the school. Mrs. E explains, "Well, we have kids here that are gay and they express themselves. They're allowed to be who they are. The culture here is very respectful of each other. I'm not saying that it's exactly perfect and we have those little moments and issues. We come at it from a very compassionate and understanding discussion." In this quote, Mrs. E discusses the acceptance of gay students by emphasizing the respectful culture of Fordson students that allowed gay students to be their identity.

3.5 **Football**

Like the hot dog, the hamburger, and apple pie, one of the most stereotypical features of America is American football. One of the most interesting parts of coming to Fordson was seeing this similar love for the sport. Even the Arab American National Museum had an exhibit dedicated to Fordson's football team, The Tractors. University of Michigan – Dearborn professor, Ron Stockton, gave a short history of Fordson football in *Fordson.* He argued that when Arab immigrants began moving to Dearborn many people in the city believed that this could lead to the best soccer team in North America because soccer is such a popular sport in Arab countries. However, the soccer team ended up very average because most of the athletic students played football instead, which Stockton argues is because one could become a local hero in American towns by playing great football.[148] This tradition of

147 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
148 Rashid Ghazi, *Fordson: Faith, Fasting, Football,* 2011.

football continued to my interviews. Of the twelve related interviews, seven spoke about football.

As a majority Arab and Muslim school, the seven interviewees who spoke about Fordson football argued that it needs to function differently than many American schools where the majority population is white and Christian. Mr. Fadlallah and Mrs. E mentioned frequent poor calls by referees made against Fordson, which they believed were because Fordson is a poorer, more Arab school. Idris, during his experience as a football player, spoke about opposing team often calling the varsity teams "terrorists" and "camel jockeys." Yet, Mr. Zaban reiterated his point from the documentary in my interview that he always pushed his team to play above the discrimination and to not give anyone "ammunition" to react against Fordson. By Mr. Zaban pushing his team to play above this, he emphasizes both the point that referees and other teams treated them differently and that they needed to them work differently to obtain equal treatment.

Faith also plays a significant role in Fordson football. In *Fordson*, the director focuses heavily on fasting revolving the documentary around Fordson's game with rival team, Dearborn Heights, during Ramadan. "Ramadan," Mr. Zaban explains "teaches discipline and that discipline obviously plays a role in football."[149] Scenes show players swishing water around their mouths and spitting it out as they continue to practice three to four hours a day in preparation for this game. To empathize, the non-Muslim offensive coach also fasted to make sure he does not press the team too much. Despite the majority of team not eating or drinking when the sun is out, they continue to play their hardest.

Prayer becomes a difficult topic for the coaches and administration. In his interview, Mr. Zaban discussed the need to separate from the players while they pray so to not bring attention to the team. He further believed that if the prayers were Christian, this would not be a problem because many schools allow for Christian prayers without controversy. Nonetheless, he emphasized this as the importance of separating church and state. In the documentary, he clarified, "I try to separate church and state as much as possible. As soon as they're getting ready to [pray], I walk out of the locker-room and I say [the prayer] to myself."[150] Mr. Fadlallah, likewise, discussed the team prayer in the documentary recalling a newspaper interviewer asking him what the players were doing on the field to which he

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.

responded that he did not know to accentuate that he has no way of stopping or promoting what was happening as long as the coach does not promote the prayers.[151]

3.6 **Discrimination**

Of the fourteen interviewees, eleven expressed that they had experienced racism and nine brought up discrimination in some other form. These instances most often happened outside of Dearborn. For many of the interviewees, discrimination happened through various outlets, though many agreed that most often it was subtle. Four told stories about people outside of Dearborn yelling at them or their friends to "go back home" despite America being their home. Each of these experiences happened to women in hijabs. Nour spoke of subtle discrimination with people often responding, "that's too weird" when she described her cultural norms or when people question her acceptance to the University of Michigan. Ms. Z spoke of a friend, who everyone believed to be fully American until they saw her (as a brown woman in a hijab). Rima mentioned how white teachers at Fordson, previous to her father's work with fixing expectations of Arab students, viewed her through a limited lens saying that she could know her own culture but not apply it. Each of the interviewees spoke of how discrimination happens most often when they leave Dearborn.

Discrimination not only happened from non-Arab-Americans to Arabs, but also from Arabs to other Arabs. Nour spoke about sexism at Fordson:

> Personally, felt like it was a sexist environment. Women were underappreciated. Definitely because of the male dominance there was like, originally in our culture way years back, men were the bread-winners and stuff like that and those roles carried on through present day. Not necessarily. I don't want to make it seem like it's only that way, because it's not. A lot of women are doing great things. But it's still lingering to where like men think that they have more dominance, they have more ability to speak over you and have their right and what they want.[152]

In this quote, Nour explains that sexism happened because of Arab gender roles. And while she found that it has lessened, there is still the lingering presence of these roles at Fordson. Of my interviewees, only Nour and Rima spoke about sexism. As they were the two youngest women interviewed, it is possible that other interviewees viewed the treatment as fair, while Nour and Rima may have picked up on more subtle sexism.

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151 Ibid.

152 Nour. Interview. 16 Sept 2016.

The conflation of Arab and Muslim identities also created a lot of tension between Arab Muslims and Christians. I did not consider asking about this conflation early into my research until Idris shortly mentioned how religion plays a role in Arab identity and how one must be Muslim to be a true Arab. Three of the five remaining interviews agreed with this sentiment. As an Arab Christian, Mrs. E discussed her experiences thoroughly:

> I've seen discrimination as an Arab-American Christian. I've seen discrimination as an Arab-American Muslim. And both discriminating against each other…I think that's just lack of education and fear of the unknown. People that I know say things like, "How do you live in Dearborn? How do you live amongst those people?" They're good friends of mine so unfortunately, a lot of things that have happened in this country and around the world. Some staunch Christians look at Muslims in a completely different way than they would [with other religions]. And then I've also seen where Christians feel like they have no voice. Arab-American Christians really feel like they don't belong anywhere. With the Arab-American Muslim community you're a Christian. Or with the Americans that you're an Arab but not a part of them either.

For Mrs. E, this conflation has caused numerous problems because she did not feel as though she belongs in any area because American Christians and Arab Muslims rejected her. She also mentioned discrimination her son experienced while wrestling at Fordson. He encountered a lot of terrible calls, which she asserted happened because that referees and others thought he was an Arab Muslim. Karam also provided an example of discrimination he faced by Arab Christians when one approached him to say, "I don't like your kind." In his example, Karam pointed out that discrimination happens both ways between Arab Muslim and Arab Christians.

To help restore relations, Reverend A emphasizes the importance to teaching and reminding people that Christians are from the Middle East, and that Christianity belongs in the Middle East just as Islam does. In many ways, he worked to improve Muslim and Christian tensions during his sermons by reminding his congregation that Christians are to love all faiths. Because of this, he keeps good relationships with all of his Muslim neighbors to best serve the Dearborn community.

3.7 **Community Role and Involvement**

Because East Dearborn is an ethnic enclave, numerous interviewees expressed how there is a unique, strictly Dearborn culture. Idris disclosed how Dearborn is a very close community, which is something all of the second-generation alumni interviewees similarly mentioned. He explained:

> [Dearborn] is an area where everyone knows everyone. It's a very small village but at the same time, it's large. There are a lot of people in there. I walk into the grocery store and I have to say hi to like thirty people because everyone knows like me or my mom. That's a bad thing and a good thing. Word gets around if anything happens. If you go out to a movie with a friend—she's a girl, you're a guy—even if it's not a date, your mom will know about that right away. And all of the sudden it gets blown 'Oh my God, he's dating this girl.'…When something happens within the community, everyone comes together, and that's something that's really great. Like, you know if somebody passes away, even if you don't know that person, the community will help [the family]. Our mosque will hold a prayer for them. I remember my sophomore year; we had like hundreds from the community outside Fordson lighting candles [for a student who died]. It was very emotional and cool to see your whole community together.[153]

In this quote, Idris addresses two examples of the closeness of Dearborn by highlighting both positive and negative aspects of it. First, he describes how everyone seems to know everyone and how gossip happens. This example highlights how he needs to be weary of his relationships because public interactions can very easily result in gossip. Second, he describes how the community comes together to support each other in times of tragedy. With these examples, he explains how Dearborn can be both a large city and a small community at once.

Rima continues the discussion by describing the Dearborn-specific cultural identity. "Fordson kids come up with own culture and strongly identify with it without realizing it," she shares, "I was in Lebanon once at a waterpark and some kid came up to me from Florida and said that I was a Dearborn girl. And I responded in the most Dearborn girl way possible, all defensive like 'What are you talking about? You don't know me.' And he was just like,

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153 Idris. Interview. 23 Sept 2016.Idris is discussing the death of Ali Hachem, who died at 15 of a heart attack 20 February 2013.

'See? You didn't even have to say yes.'"[154] In this quote, Rima illustrates how Fordson has a reputation as a unique culture that differs from other Arab communities.

Though many agreed that Dearborn played a significant role in ethnic identity formation, for Abdul, Dearborn also had one in the formation of his male identity. "[The community] has formed how I feel about a man and what a man needs to be," he opens, "And has also formed how I am supposed to be as a male. And be as a male in the community. Being taught how you're supposed to act around women, around other men, around older people, with younger people. You're folded and molded into a certain type of men from that regard."[155] Abdul details in his quote how Dearborn shaped his masculinity by teaching him how to behave with different generations, genders, and other men.

However, while both Nour and Idris were grateful for the closeness of the community, they also expressed how this conversely led to a lack of understanding of other areas and cultures. Nour explains, "I love Dearborn, but the community is really lacking in the knowledge of other identities, other cultures, and are not very accepting of others. I think it's a defense mechanism because they're not accepted. Most of the city is very loving, generous, and open, but a lot are very pushy with their views." Nour alludes to what she identifies as the defense mechanisms of many Dearborn people because their community is widely not accepted by mainstream American culture. This has led to many people of the community being overly assertive in their views. While she loves her community, Nour importantly addresses that this does not mean that it is a perfect community.

In some form, every interviewee took pride in the Dearborn community. Because of this, many remained involved. Thirteen are still involved in the community with only Fahim claiming that he was not because he is currently living in Connecticut. Twelve volunteer to better the community, and eight follow the local news either through newspapers or social media. Five also admitted that a main news-source is gossip.

Five of the interviewees brought up reputation as something dominant in Dearborn culture. Rima and Hakim spoke mostly about reputation in relation to dating, while Karam, Mrs. E, and Idris spoke about mental health. Karam best summarizes how reputation affects mental health:

> There has been a string of suicides and drug overdoses particularly among young Arab men in their early twenties. And we had to report about it, just

154 Rima. Interview. 10 Sept 2016.
155 Abdul. Interviewed by Kristine Swarts. Tape Recording. Dearborn, Michigan. 30 Sept 2016.

> because it's such a taboo topic. Like in our community, when you have issues of drugs and suicides, but parents don't like to acknowledge it, parents and family members [will] sweep it under the rug. So whenever there will someone committing suicide, the family will put out a false story saying, "Oh he got shot in an argument with a friend." One family told us their son got into a car accident. That's why he died. And we called Dearborn police and they said, "Car accident? That was a suicide." So we had originally reported it as a car accident because that's what [the family] told us and now we have to correct it. We know the truth that [the] son committed suicide and as sad and as unfortunate as that is—our condolences to the family—[we] have to report the truth. And I know suicide is a private matter, but not when it becomes a trend. And it has. In the last two years, there has been at least a dozen suicides. [The family lying] is a cultural thing, because in the Arab community, the number one thing people care about is how they can protect their image.[156]

In his statement, Karam describes in detail issues he has faced with the Dearborn community in relation to mental health. He addresses how reputation outweighs honesty with the reports and the problematic nature of it becoming a trend in the past few years. Mrs. E furthered the discussion on mental health by discussing Fordson's work in addressing this issue with counselors for both parents and students.

3.8 **Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented my data by organizing it into different themes: Arab-American Identity, School Role, College, Clothing and Modesty, Football, Discrimination, and Community Influence. Each of these themes expresses elements of the assimilation-separation spectrum and of identity formation in terms of Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion. These themes answer how Arabs within a dominantly Arab-American public school community identify forms of representation, assimilation, and their specific identities. In the next chapter, I analyze these themes to answer how the interviewees reflect on these aspects as how they view themselves within an increasingly anti-Arab United States and how they form their identities within this complicated context.

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156 Karam. Interview. 12 Sept 2016.

Chapter 4: Identity Formation in Fordson and the Dearborn Community

In the last chapter, my interviewees' experiences and my involvement as a participant observer address aspects of assimilation and identify formation and begin to unfold the larger story of the Arab experiences in post-9/11 America. These events begin to explain how a dominantly Arab public school community identifies and shapes specific forms of representation. In this chapter, I analyze my fieldwork to answer these larger questions of the assimilation-separation spectrum and of the role of Fordson and Dearborn in identity formation.

4.1 **Identifications of Mainstream American Culture**

Assimilation is a key element throughout my thesis because it emphasizes both my interviewees' place in the larger American context and their ability to analyze American culture to answer larger questions on forms of representation. As each of the fourteen interviewees had lived in America for at least a decade, they all have gone through the process of structural assimilation. Each of them had obtained an education within the American school system and currently works or will work in American workplaces. Therefore, it is clear that all of the interviewees had gone through structural assimilation.

When considering my interviewees in terms of behavioral assimilation, I use the boundary theory of Richard Alba and Victor Nee because they expressed a clear boundary

blurring between Arab and American cultures. Rima alluded to this boundary blurring (3.1) where she asserted, “How am I am supposed to know which parts are coming from my [American] culture and my father’s [Arab] culture. It’s hard to separate the two.” Here, she highlights how the two cultures have come together to form a third one that is both Arab and American at once. Pia Rebello Britto extends upon this arguing, “This bicultural identity should not be understood as a midpoint between ethnic and American identity, but rather results from identification with two cultures, American and Arab.”[157] Therefore, as all of the interviewees except Fahim expressed also having the American part of their identity, it is clear that they had at least gone through the process of boundary blurring.

So when considering this boundary blurring in terms of forms of representation, what is distinctly American and what is distinctly Arab is sometimes unclear to my interviewees. However, they do identify different forms answering what is mainstream American and what is Arab-American. In this section, I focus on what my interviewees identified as forms of mainstream American culture.

4.1.1 *White Categorization and Whiteness*

For my interviewees, the governmental white categorization of Arabs and whiteness represent mainstream America. While only five specifically mentioned it (3.1), all fourteen answers on the self-identification of their ethnic identities showed a distinction between Arab and whiteness. Kristine Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal in their article, “Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans” (2007), analyze this white identity acceptance of Arabs in America by observing it through four predictors: immigration status, national origin, religion, and Arab-Americanness, which they define as having an Arab-American identity. In their research, they found that recent immigrants and Muslims are less likely to identify as white, while immigrants from Lebanon and Syria are more likely to identify as white than other national origins.[158] They argue that this is the case because Syrians and Lebanese immigrants are more likely to be from older generations and more likely to be Christian. Recent Christian immigrants are even more likely than other recent immigrants to identity as white because of religious similarities to the American mainstream.[159] They further found that

157 Pia Rebello Britto, “Who Am I?,” 855.
158 Kristine J. Ajrouch and Amaney Jamal, “Assimilating to a White Identity: The Case of Arab Americans.” *The International Migration Review* 41, no.4, (2007), 870.
159 Ibid., 873.

identifying as Arab-American was not a predicator because it did not reflect a homogenous attachment to the white identity.

This study emphasized two concepts important to my research. First is the role of age in the white categorization. Older interviewees Ms. Z, Karam, and Mr. Fadlallah each answered that they select "white" in demographic forms because there is not category for them, while the younger Omar and Idris emphasized that they fill out the "other" category. None of the interviewees said that they personally identified as white. Between the five interviewees who brought up the white categorization, there is an age difference between who filled out "white" and who filled out "other." Secondly, Ajrouch et al. further emphasize how race is highly sensitive to religious affiliation further shown through the conflation of Muslim and Arab.[160] The emphasis of this conflation by Idris and Mrs. E, though I did not ask either of them about the subject directly, accentuates the importance of religion in identity formation. As Ajrouch observed, more Christians identified as white than Muslims because they fit easier into mainstream American ideals, which further links to my own research as my interviewees identified this sentiment. Therefore, one form of representation of mainstream American culture that my interviewees identify is whiteness.

4.1.2 *Citizenship*

When discussing who is a true American, interviewees identified greater discussions of citizenship. Political scientist Diana Owen introduces three constructions of American citizenship in her paper, "Citizenship Identity and Civic Education in the United States" (2004): the loyal subject, the voter, and enlightened community participant.[161] The interviewees' answers allude to Owen's three constructions. Seven identified practicing American values as a part of citizenship. As a loyal subject citizen, these answers consider how a citizen must learn about the "customs, traditions, rituals, folklore, and heroes…of a nation's political culture."[162] Seven also mentioned how voting is an essential part of being an American citizen, which Owen argues occurs from a political socialization that emphasizes voting as the most important political act in a democracy.[163] Eight identified a slightly different aspect of citizenship by arguing that by not hiding one's identity that person is

160 Ibid., 876.
161 Diana Owen, "Citizenship Identity and Civic Education in the United States," Paper presented at German-American Conference on Civic Education, San Diego, CA, September 2004, 7-9.
162 Ibid., 7.
163 Ibid., 8.

American. This seemingly modest action relates to a stronger political engagement of citizenship that Owen's regards as the enlightened community participant.[164]

Fahim's answers specifically highlight a distinction between being a citizen and being an American. While he emphasized that he voted and went through the naturalization process, he differentiated himself from other Americans. Gabriel de la Paz in his paper, "Citizenship Identity and Social Inequality" (2004), emphasizes the differences between citizenship as a legal status and as an identity.[165] Unlike the other interviewees, Ali considers the subjective viewpoint of citizenship where he focuses less on the rights of citizenship and more on the social disadvantages that hinder him from becoming a full citizen. This is not to say that the other interviewees may not have felt similarly; however, they did not consider this aspect in their interviews.

4.2 **Identifications of the Arab-American Subculture**

Homi Bhabha's "third space" theory permeates throughout my thesis, as the Arab-American identity is central to my interviewees and my analyses. Within the physical space of Fordson, Arab and American cultures collide to create this third, Arab-American culture. I further observed this within the Dearborn community and with the Lebanese Student Association during events at Halloween. Though Bhabha and Amal Abdelrazek (1.1.4) focus more on the internal aspects of cultural hybridity and hyphenated identity, in many ways it is also very physical. Hearing Beyoncé's music blended with Fairuz or seeing Halloween decorations over Arabic art reflect actions and symbols that represent this Arab-American subculture. So while only twelve of my interviewees labeled themselves as Arab-American, this culture surrounded all of them while within these communities.

4.2.1 *Transnationalism and Diaspora*

Parallel, and often intersecting, to assimilation is transnationalism. Steven Vertovec argues in *Transnationalism* (2009) that migrant transnationalism affects an individual's identity because immigrant communities adapt religion and other socio-cultural practices into and from the host society.[166] Though many of the interviewees mentioned a connection with their home country, Rima best provided an example of the changes between Lebanese culture

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164 Ibid., 9.
165 Gabriel de la Paz, "Citizenship Identity and Social Inequality," Paper presented at German-American Conference on Civic Education, San Diego, CA, September 2004, 1.
166 Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, 128-140. (See 1.1.3)

in Lebanon and in America when speaking about a shift to hyper-conservative values. Rima asserted (3.4), "[There is a] fear in [Dearborn specific culture] of parents that we will move to a country and lose our values. So they instill values that might not even be real "Arab" values." Here, Rima highlighted the fear of losing a culture as the reason why some values, such as hyper-modesty and strict gender roles, only exist in America and why she has never seen them expressed in Lebanon. Hakim similarly brought up cultural shifts in America when mentioning how he was Iraqi in a majority Lebanese city (3.1). "If have to pick [my ethnicity, I would say Arab-American, otherwise I would say that I'm just me. Because [I'm] Iraqi in a Lebanese city…[I] feel like a mix of everything but at the same time don't feel like I fall into any category," he disclosed emphasizing how in Dearborn his Arab cultural identity was more pan-Arab because of the different immigrant populations in Dearborn. Therefore, by this adapting of religious and socio-cultural practices in America, these practices shift from their original form from the home countries.

Furthermore, Dearborn is the result of the Arab diaspora into America. Sally Howell and Andrew Shyrock highlight "Arab Detroit" (which includes Dearborn) as a diaspora in their discussion of the area in a post-9/11 United States in "Cracking Down on Diaspora" (2003). They argue, "Arab Detroit is connected to the Arab world by ties of kinship, structures of shared religious and political sentiment, and commercial relations."[167] They further assert that Arab Detroit fits into the category of a diaspora because of the continued ties between it and the Arab nations, either through culture-sharing or economics.

Despite this, I chose to not use a diasporic understanding during my fieldwork research. Diasporic groups can fit within a transnationalist understanding of movement; however, since the term "diaspora" has a connotation of forced movement, I shied away from placing this identity on my interviewees during the initial stages of my research.[168] Therefore, I chose to not ask questions specific to this diasporic identity, and instead, focused on a broader understanding with migrant transnationalism. This does not mean that diasporic elements did not come out in my research. Eight of the fourteen interviewees' families moved to America directly as a result of wars and political tensions. The remaining six came because of career and education opportunities. Each of these movements could be understood as being forced or coerced due to events in the home country or opportunities within other countries. Moreover, Vertovec argues that diaspora is a type of consciousness marked by multiple

167 Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, "Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's "War on Terror,"' (2003): 451.
168 *Transnationalism*, 12.

identities and shared roots.[169] Nour, Hakim, and Fahim each also mentioned feeling a loss of their identity by growing up in Dearborn. This feeling signifies diasporic identity where they had the type of consciousness where they feel that the forced movement out of their home countries took away from their identity and understanding of themselves. So while I chose not to include a diasporic identity during my interviews, this is not to say that I am arguing that this identity does not exist amongst my interviewees.

4.2.2 *Language*

My interviewees further identified language as a form of representation of the Arab-American subculture. Researchers often cite America as a "language graveyard," where mother languages die because of the power of monolingualism in English. Consistent research on the subject has found that by the third generation, descendants of immigrants speak only English fluently more often than speaking English and their heritage's language.[170]

The interviewees highlighted two specific reasons for maintaining Arabic. First, language has a strong connection with identity. Therefore, by speaking Arabic, the second-generation interviewees were able to preserve a part of their identity that was lost when their parents came to America. With second-generation interviewees who disclosed that their parents pushed them in Arabic school for a formal literacy education (3.1.3), there is the element of retaining this aspect of their identity. Likewise, when describing "acting Arab" or even more generally a "Dearborn Arab," code-switching was an essential part of the description. Interviewees, who spoke on the subject, each mentioned the ability to intertwine English and Arabic phrases. They argued that switching between English and Arabic is an important element of Dearborn and Arab-American culture that allows for them to feel comfortable in their Arab identity. Secondly, maintaining Arabic for second-generation interviewees happened for practical reasons. Idris and Hakim both expressed that their mothers do not speak English very well so they speak Arabic at home to communicate with their mothers better. Similarly, Karam and Reverend A both mentioned needing to know Arabic for their jobs. Therefore, maintaining Arabic happens both for practical and for cultural reasons.

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169 Ibid., 6.

170 Rumbaut, Ruben G. "A Language Graveyard? The Evolution of Language Competencies, Preferences and Use Among Young Adult Children of Immigrants." *Journal of Social Sciences*, (January 2009,): 35-71. Accessed March 19, 2017. SSRN.

Arabic was not spoken in all of my interviewees' homes. Only Ms. Z said that she did not speak any Arabic at home with her children. As her children are the only example of third-generation, the lack of Arabic at home fits within the pattern of monolingualism in English in America. Mr. Zaban also mentioned that he rarely speaks Arabic at home with his children. As Mr. Zaban grew up predominantly in America and his children are still young, not speaking Arabic to his children similarly follows this trend. However, since there are strong practical reasons to know Arabic in Dearborn, such with older generations and new immigrants possibly not speaking English or with the numerous Arabic stores and businesses, the ability to not have any proficiency in Arabic even may be a hindrance in functioning in the community.

4.3 **Fordson's Role in Identity Formation**

"School really is a hub to explore identity…because they were more influenced by their peers than their families or their parents. [The school] really plays an instrumental role in how one envisions their identity," Rima answered (3.2) when asked about the school's role in ethnic and racial identity formation focusing on two significant points of identity formation. First, that the school plays an influential role in identity formation. Second, that schools act as a hub. I explore the first point throughout this section of the chapter. Before this, one needs to understand the concept of a hub.

In Michigan, high school students spend an average of 6.56 hours per day in a high school classroom 178 days.[171] Considering that many of the students are also involved in after-school activities such as sports and clubs, the time spent in a high school setting with peers and faculty increases to that of a full-time job (forty hours a week) with summers off. Five of the eleven related interviews spoke about peer influence as a reason for their identity in terms of ethnic/racial and religious identities. Therefore, the school acts as the main area of education and socialization for students, which makes it a hub. Similar to Rima's point, Mr. Fadlallah discussed how high school is critical for identity because it is the "last frontline for reform," where he meant that it is the last time misbehaved and undisciplined students can develop positive life skills and improve their futures. Therefore, with the understanding that school is a hub for students where it is the central point of connect outside of the family

171 "Average number of hours in the school day and average number of days in the school year for public schools, by state: 2007–08." *Schools and Staffing Survey.* National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed March 22, 2017. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass0708_035_s1s.asp.

during developmental years, this raises the question of what kind of hub Fordson is more specifically.

Pia Rebello Britto in her article, “Who Am I?” (2008), emphasizes the role of the school in identity formation. She focuses on the concept of the school being a “contact zone,” which refers to a place “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”[172] Fordson acts not only as a hub, but also as an arena of identity negotiation as mainstream American and Arab cultures meet. Despite having a majority Arab student population by 2004, Mr. Fadlallah, Rima, and Mrs. E all cite how power remained with the minority population of non-Arab faculty in their discussions of expectations signifying how this came from a clash of understanding (3.3). Only during Mr. Fadlallah’s time as principal does a major shift in expectations change to influence the social standing of Arab students at the high-school level and allowed them to improve on their lives by pursuing higher education.

Adjustments are likewise important for understanding Fordson as a contact zone. For example with Omar’s teacher allowing the Quran in a debate about evolution, the teacher (the minority population) meets[173] with the student (the majority population) to allow usage of the Quran giving the opportunity for the two cultures to come together. Previous to Mr. Fadlallah’s time as principal, this meeting may have had more of a clash as the two cultures grappled with each other.

These adjustments in recent years may not only signify an increase in fairness for the Arab population within Fordson, but may even highlight moments of equality with the white minority population. This becomes the case because the white minority population needs to accept elements of the Arab population into their everyday life at Fordson, such as not going to school on Muslim holidays or eating halal meat in the cafeteria. Of course, there are still pervasive aspects of American culture throughout with the school having time off for Christmas, serving American meals in the cafeteria, and singing the anthem before events. Rima argues that this remains the case because of the mainstream perceptions in America arguing, “Because of country’s perceptions, students can’t express their identity as much. We had a Christmas tree at our school and nobody cared.” So while Fordson may have increased fairness—or even gained equality in some forms—between the white and Arab populations, it is difficult for me to analyze the differences of fairness and their functions within Fordson.

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172 Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 34.

173 Here defined as “join” or “come into contact”

Moreover, as Fordson is not an ethnic school because it still has a dominantly mainstream American curriculum with few culturally aware classes, there still remains a gap in equality.

In this next section, I discuss two central roles Fordson plays in identity formation: active and passive. To define these, Fordson is an active actor in identity formation when Fordson official policies and/or teachers and staff policies influence aspects of identity formation. Examples of this would be school policies such as classes teaching subjects related directly to Arab history or policies such as the dress code allowing for the hijab. On the other hand, Fordson is a passive actor when it is acts more as a hub where students connect with peers and faculty who influence their identities, such when its physical setting results in identity formation. Examples include peer influence and/or teachers and staff speaking about aspects of identity formation through an un-official setting. These methods are not part of a dichotomy but often intersect and work together in identity formation. With my interviewees' identifications of various parts of their identity, I am able to analyze how the Fordson community also shaped and embodies forms of representation.

4.3.1 *Americanist Identity Formation*

All of the seven asked interviewees agreed that the school should play a role in Americanist identity formation, identifying primarily patriotism and good citizenship (3.2.1).[174] The interviewees identified numerous ways that Fordson actively played a role including teaching government and history classes, pledging to the flag every morning, and singing the national anthem before major events. With these symbolic actions, Fordson worked to instill Americanist (and mainstream American) elements into daily practices.

Age differences between older and younger interviewees show how successfully or unsuccessfully Fordson had been in instilling Americanism amongst the student population. In terms of patriotism, the older first and 1.5 generation interviewees—not including Fahim—all strongly emphasized that they love America and that they are patriotic. As an older 2nd generation interviewee, Ms. Z also fits into this category. This group most often cited better opportunities as a reason for their patriotism. The majority of the younger second-generation interviewees answered about their patriotism with more hesitation. However, when considering citizenship, many of the younger interviewees exhibited good citizenship. Two common aspects of good citizenship is the ability to "pull [one's] weight," as defined by Theodore Roosevelt in 1902, and the pursuit of education so that the citizen can make good

174 In 1.1.7, I define Americanism to mean one's placement in America alongside their beliefs in the values of the country. Americanism is a more over-arching term, while patriotism is a specific element within Americanism.

decisions.[175] As all of the younger interviewees were involved in their communities and pursued furthering their high school education, they could all be considered good citizens. Therefore, Fordson's passive role in Americanist identity formation is complex, because while the younger interviewees were good citizens, their patriotism provides a less clear answer. The active role that Fordson played—classes and patriotic actions—did not create a strong enough environment to shape Americanism identity fully within the student population, but there are still some elements throughout.

4.3.2 *Ethnicity and Race Identity Formation*

Ten of the eleven related interviewees [176] agreed that Fordson had a role in ethnic and racial identity formation (3.2.2). As school acts as a place where students learn about their placement in society, this allowance of an Arab identity in Fordson gave the students the opportunity to grow up unashamed and unapologetically Arab. Mr. Fadlallah, Mrs. E, and Miss R concentrated on the active role Fordson played in ethnic and racial identity formation. Mr. Fadlallah discussed how Fordson is crucial in identity formation and reform by teaching positive actions and habits. Mrs. E and Miss R spoke about ethnic clubs and on Fordson administration's role in accepting these clubs. Miss R also included how the social studies department works to include Arab history and culture into their courses. Though Rima specifically spoke about how the curriculum was not culturally responsive enough considering the school is 90% Arab, Miss R's statement counters Rima's to reflect a shift towards the curriculum becoming more responsive. These courses, furthermore, show Fordson playing a very active role in ethnic and racial identity formation. The active role Fordson has in identity formation further highlights how it shapes forms of representation through specific actions by creating experiences of allowing an Arab-American identity to flourish.

The alumni and Mr. Zaban identified ways Fordson played a passive role by being a hub. Idris highlights this point in a longer quote (3.2.2) arguing, "I know for sure that if I

175 Theodore Roosevelt, "Speech at Chamber of Commerce of State of New York,"(speech, New York City, 11 November 1902), Almanac of Theodore Roosevelt Speeches.And Roger Soder, "The Good Citizen and the Common School," *Phi Delta Kappan Magazine*. 85, vol. 1 (2003): 37.

176 As mentioned earlier, eleven related interviewees include: Mr. Fadallah, Rima, Fahim, Hakim, Idris, Omar, Nour, Miss R, Mr. Zaban, Mrs. E, and Ms. Z while twelve also includes Karam.

went to a different school, [my Arab identity] would have changed." Idris's emphasis that Fordson is the reason for his Arab identity mimics that of many of the younger alumni interviewees. The awareness of these interviewees that Fordson played this role signifies how strongly Fordson's passive role was. Their examples further highlight how Fordson shapes forms of representation by being a hub of identity formation.

Ms. Z objected to Fordson playing any role in ethnic and racial identity formation because she felt that the school did not emphasize one ethnicity or race over another. In many ways, what she said is correct. Despite Miss R's example of Arab inclusion into the curriculum, as mentioned, six of the eleven interviewees spoke about taking typical, American-focused classes that would be found across America. Moreover, as a public school, Fordson administration needs to be critical in its actions so that Fordson remains within the government's standards. So while it allowed an Arab Student Association, it also had to allow a Japanese club as long as both fit within the guidelines of student organizations and clubs. Despite this, I would still argue along with the other interviewees in that Fordson played both an active and a passive role in ethnic and racial identity formation. By allowing ethnic and racial identity to flourish and including it into the mainstream culture of Fordson, students are able to live their ethnic and racial identities to the fullest while at Fordson.

Because of this freedom to be Arab at Fordson, I questioned how Frantz Fanton's theory on the inferiority complex of minority groups fit into my analysis, if it did at all.[177] Despite the overwhelmingly strong emphasis by interviewees that Dearborn and Fordson shaped their Arab identity, many of younger interviewees who had recently left Dearborn for a period expressed emulating mainstream American culture to some extent. Rima spoke about her experiences applying for Teachers for America where she felt she needed to fit into a "cookie-cutter" imagine of professionalism that hid her Arab identity. Nour mentioned needing to change her slang and not include anything overly Arab so that she did not need to educate people about her identity. Omar and Idris both discussed needing to change their name to something less "exotic" and more pronounceable by other Americans. While I would not argue that their actions are the result of an "inferiority complex,"[178] as Fanton asserts, this emulation does highlight how the younger interviewees function within American society outside of Dearborn. By having different ways to emulate mainstream American culture, the interviewees find that this improves their lives, either by allowing them to get a job or not

177 See 1.1.4

178 Frantz Fanton, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952, translated by Richard Philcox, (New York City: Grove Press, 2008).

having to educate or correct people. Therefore, despite Fordson's role in a self-confident ethnic and racial identity, the younger interviewees still encountered needing to hide parts of their Arab identity when outside of Fordson and the Dearborn community.

4.3.3 *Gender Identity Formation*

Six of the eleven relevant interviewees agreed that Fordson plays some sort of role in gender identity formation (3.2.3). In Miss R's interview, she asserts that gender identity formation is very subconscious, but it still takes place at Fordson. Fordson's role in gender identity formation has the lowest numbers of any of the four categories (Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion), and I argue that Miss R's assertion explains why this is the case. Moreover, there were significant gender differences with the answers. Only two of the six men agreed that Fordson played a role while four of the five women agreed. In "Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity among Arab American Adolescents" (2004), Kristine Ajrouch argues that gender is a major identity for younger girls, which may influence their identity as an adult and a result in gender differences.[179] This theory illustrates the largest factor on why more women answered positively that Fordson plays a role than the men, though the men did add a lot about the subject.

Interviewees identified how Fordson had a role in actively influencing gender identity formation, such with separating classes by gender (3.2.3). The dress code embodies a significant role in symbolically shaping forms of representation by making it acceptable in school policy to wear abayas in gym class—where shorts or workout pants are the traditional attire in recent years—and hijabs—where mainstream American social etiquette dictates that covering one's head indoors is rude. These adjustments not only react to existent gender roles, but they also perpetuate them by accepting them and allowing them to continue.

Fordson not only plays an active role by accepting gender roles, but also attempts to alter some of them. Mrs. E discusses how Fordson works to educate parents so that female students can go farther away to college (3.3). Mainstream Arab culture, as discussed by Nour, emphasizes that young adults still live at home until they are married, which is in opposition to mainstream American culture where many move out of their homes at a much earlier age. Therefore, by having these mini-sessions to educate parents, Fordson is actively working to influence gender roles so that female students have more opportunities in life.

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179 Kristine J. Ajrouch, "Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity among Arab American Adolescents," *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2004), 378.

Fordson also had a passive role in gender identity formation. Nour spoke about Fordson's passive role by identifying the existence of sexism still within Fordson (3.6). This lingering sexist presence worked to create an environment where male and female students acted within specific gender roles. Nour's interview highlighted that it had a different effect on her and pushed her more towards feminism.

Being a hub similarly influenced gender identity with dating and relationships. Though Mrs. E spoke about a moment when Fordson played an active role in dating—with the dating service fundraiser (3.4)—Fordson's dominant role in dating is passive. The four alumni who spoke about dating all mentioned how it was done secretively so that parents would not know. Kristine Ajrouch's study further discusses how dating and reputation plays a role in gender identity. She asserts that Arabs tie reputation to girls.[180] Rima and Fahim both reiterated this point by focusing on how dating and sex affect girls' reputation. Hakim provided a very different example where his dating life affected his family's reputation (3.4); however, while men also need to act a specific way to preserve reputation, it is not to the effect as women. With the passive role, many of the actions of others shape forms of representation such with Nour's example of sexism and the examples of dating.

Azhar Abu-Ali and Carol A. Reisen's study, "Gender Role Identity Among Adolescent Muslim Girls Living in the US" (1999), though an older study, provides a connection with religion and ethnicity to gender identity, which, when used with the passive understanding of Fordson's role, helps understand how many of the elements of gender identity formation work together. Abu Ali and Reisen's article connects the importance of culture in gender identity formation by observing its influence on gender roles.[181] Many of the interviewees connected these aspects. In Nour's discussion on sexism, she associates sexism with gender roles in Arab culture. The conversations about dating also place culture at the forefront as to how it affects gender identity. Mr. Zaban, furthermore, emphasized how Islam affected gender identity formation within Fordson. He spoke most strongly about the hijab, though he believed that many of the women did not feel pressure to wear one, which Rima and Nour reiterated. Understanding the interplay of ethnicity and religion with gender, one understands how gender, while seemingly not discussed by many of the interviewees, still permeates their interviews and emphasizes the passive role Fordson had on gender identity formation.

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180 Ibid., 383.

181 Azhar Abu-Ali and Carol A. Reisen, "Gender Role Identity Among Adolescent Muslim Girls Living in the US," *Current Psychology: Developmental* 18, no. 2, (1999): 185-192.

As I conducted much of my previous research on gendered issues, I had expected other related topics to come up more often, such as sexuality, sex, and masculinity. As sexuality and sex are very taboo topics still in mainstream American and Arab-American cultures, most of the interviewees may have shied away from such subjects. The Michigan government allows for an opt-out option in regards to sex education, which Fordson complies with. So the emphasis on the opt-out option of sex education by interviewees (3.4) may elucidate to Fordson's role in helping to continue to perpetuate this taboo. Similarly when analyzing masculinity, many people often view gendered conversations as female. So when considering that female interviewees mostly agreed in Fordson's role of gender identity formation in comparison to men, Fordson may have played a passive role in feminizing gender conversations. Though there were many gendered topics not mentioned in my interviewees, analysis of the interviews highlight Fordson's passive and active roles in gender identity formation and the school's role in shaping forms of representation.

4.3.4 *Religious Identity Formation*

Nine of the eleven related interviewees agreed that Fordson plays a role in religious identity formation (3.2.4). As a public school, Fordson needs to be very critical of its treatment of religion so that the school fits within government regulations and laws. However, as a school that is 90% Muslim, the administration needs to also account for how this makes them different from other public schools. So while being a public school, Fordson plays both a passive and an active role in religious identity formation in similar ways to ethnic and racial identity formation.

Fordson shapes forms of representation through the active role in allowing experiences and accepting actions. For example, religious clubs had to be accepted by the school administration if they follow the guidelines, which permits students to experience a religious community at school. Similarly, Fordson administration needed to make adjustments to the school calendar and lunch menu to comply with Islamic practices (3.2.6). Though Mr. Fadlallah emphasized that this happened for practical reasons, the acceptance of religious practices by the school normalizes the religion, which influences religious identity formation by allowing their religion to flourish in the mainstream setting of Fordson.

Also similar to ethnicity/race, Fordson passively influences religious identity simply because Islam is the majority and permeates the school's culture. Mr. Zaban argued that Islam plays an instrumental role in getting more Muslim students to attend Fordson simply because

they want to go to a school where they are part of the majority and where the school accounts for their religious beliefs. Rima and Nour both discussed how the Muslim majority affected their identity through peer pressure and the desire to fit into the ideal mold. Peer influence had a substantially strong role at Fordson to influence religious identity.

Though as a public school Fordson needs to keep a strict separation between church and state, teachers also passively influenced their students' faith. In "Teacher Dispositions and Religious Identity in the Public School: Two Case Studies" (2010), Jason Nelson analyzes the role teachers' faith has on their teaching self and their religious self. Namely, he argues that teachers' dispositions, including their religion, influence teaching methods, so that while they may try to hold a neutral position, there is still a religious influence.[182] When referencing teachers (3.2.6), students mostly focused on religious non-Muslim teachers and their treatment of Islam with examples of numerous teachers asking questions like, "What do you think about Islam?" or allowing discussion of the Quran in evolution. For the teachers, negotiating their own faith and allowing their students' faith into the classroom created opportunities for the students to critically consider and grow their own faith within the school setting.

Football illustrates the role of religion at Fordson and the administration's need to be careful about its treatment. The team prays before every game and many fast for Ramadan (3.5). Mr. Zaban and other coaches leave the players during prayer to separate the school from religion to emphasize that Fordson is not promoting the prayer. However, the team coming together to pray emphasizes that their religion may flourish within the proper setting and creates a sense of unity amongst the players. This allows for religious identity formation also by normalizing it. For Ramadan, many team members fasting along with the coaches also creates this unity and allows for their religious identity to grow amongst peers. The religious inclusion of prayer and Ramadan not only highlights religious identity but they also show how an American sport became part of the Arab-American subculture.

Though Fordson does play a role in religious identity formation, eight of the eleven interviewees brought up how religious influences come most strongly from the home. I did not ask about familial influences on religion, so considering that such a large number mentioned this, the role of the family in religious identity formation is significant. Further research about the role of the family could provide more depth to this topic.

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182 Jason Nelson, "Teacher Dispositions and Religious Identity in the Public School: Two Case Studies," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 79, no. 3 (2010), 335-353.

Despite the points of emphasis by the interviewees providing essential information for my analysis, there were numerous other topics that I had expected the interviewees to allude to or directly mention. Since the only Christian at Fordson whom I interviewed did not discuss her religious identity within Fordson specifically, I have little information on religious identity formation for non-Muslims. At moments I did ask Muslim interviewees specifically if they knew about any tensions between Christians and Muslims at Fordson, but they all replied that it did not happen. However, this is not to say that it actually did not occur. Since I did not have any Christian students to ask this question and with my interviewees all within the majority, I cannot use this answer to represent the Christian experience. Similarly, as I only interviewed Shi'ites at Fordson—which is another dominant group—I cannot answer about tensions between Shi'ites and Sunnis, though Fahim and Hakim both briefly mentioned differences. Nonetheless, when considering Fordson's population and acceptance of Islam in the majority, Fordson does clearly play active and passive roles in religious identity formation.

4.4 **Community Role in Identity Formation**

Since I had questions directed towards community involvement, all of the interviewees answered about their engagement with the Dearborn community through examples of service work and local news consumption. What I had not considered until Fahim brought it up, and then the rest of the interviewees followed, is the role Dearborn plays in their identity formation. Though my research does focus on Fordson's role, the Dearborn community gives greater context to Fordson and the interviewees so I found it essential to include this section on the community's role in identity formation. Unlike with Fordson, the Dearborn community only has a passive role in identity formation by being an ethnic enclave. There may be community cultural and religious centers that actively worked in identity formation; however, I do not have information on the subject.

4.4.1 *Americanism*

Every interviewee exhibited pride in the Dearborn community through various means, such as community involvement and community service (3.7). The interviewees' pride in their community alongside their definitions of patriotism mentioned (3.1.1) highlights the Americanism of the interviewees within Dearborn. The emphasis of pride in Dearborn by committing to community service and following local events accentuate a sense of belonging by the interviewees within their community. Though some of the interviewees—

namely, the younger, second-generation—spoke about not always feeling as though they belonged outside of Dearborn, they always felt at home at Dearborn. They argued that this mostly came from the special sense of relationship the interviewees felt towards other Arabs. This closeness likewise emphasizes how the community plays a passive role in Americanism identity formation through this sense of belonging and pride of the community.

In "Nativity and Years in the Receiving Culture as Markers of Acculturation in Ethnic Enclaves" (2016), Seth Schwartz et al. analyze indicators of behavioral assimilation within an ethnic enclave focusing on nativity and years within the host country.[183] Schwartz et al. argue that nativity is the greatest indicator of acculturation, which aligns with my research as many of the second-generation interviewees felt that they best fit within a more Americanized culture than their parents. Importantly, Schwartz's research finds that nativity and years in the host country do not explain variance in retention or in loss of cultural practices of country of origin. This discovery clarifies variance I had in my research, such with Fahim and Mr. Zaban, both 1.5-generation immigrants in America for over a decade where one felt very American and the other did not feel American at all. Overall, Schwartz's research highlights ways how Dearborn as an ethnic enclave affects behavioral assimilation.

4.4.2 Ethnicity and Race

Dearborn also played a significant role in the ethnic/racial identity formation of my interviewees. Second-generation interviewees brought up the Dearborn specific culture that results from living in a place as the majority, which they define through examples of defensive attitudes and arrogance (3.7). The homogeneity of Dearborn greatly impacts the ethnic/racial identity formation of the individuals because it creates boundaries where the outside does not affect the community as strongly as the culture within maintains itself.

Revathy Kumar et al. analyze the effects of ethnic enclaves on identity in their article, "Immigrant Arab Adolescents in Ethnic Enclaves: Physical and Phenomenological Contexts of Identity Negotiation" (2005) where they emphasis that living in an ethnic enclave increases youths' sense of belonging. They argue that cultural and political tensions, national hierarchies within the community, and current contexts influence social identities (pan-Arab, national, religious).[184] Kumar's research identifies important aspects of my own by

183 Seth, Schwartz, Hilda Pantin, Summer Sullivan, Guillermo, Prado, and José Szapocznik, "Nativity and Years in the Receiving Culture as Markers of Acculturation in Ethnic Enclaves," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 37, iss. 3 (2016): 345-353.

184 Kumar, Revathy, Nancy Seay, and Staurt A. Karabenick, "Immigrant Arab Adolescents in Ethnic Enclaves: Physical and Phenomenological Contexts of Identity Negotiation," *Cultural Diversity And*

highlighting discussions of my interviewees. The national hierarchy is significant as non-Lebanese interviewees alluded to it throughout their interviews, notably with Hakim calling Dearborn a "Lebanese city" (3.1) and emphasizing a more pan-Arab identity than a national one. Moreover, all interviewees identified a sense of belonging within Dearborn that Kumar asserts comes from the ethnic enclave community.

4.4.3 *Gender and Religion*

Discussions of gender identity formation in Dearborn dealt dominantly with masculinity conversely to the earlier-mentioned discussions of gender within Fordson that dealt with femininity, though both considered the intersectionality of religion. Kumar et al. in their article, "Arab-American Male Identity Negotiations: Caught in the Crossroads of Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, and Current Contexts" (2014), focus on the link between masculinity in a cultural contact zone. They argue that the emerging identity includes three aspects: 1) the adolescents' understanding of masculinity with relation to religious and cultural identity, 2) the effect of stereotyping and heighted political awareness on their social identity, and 3) the interplay of these factors in community and social contexts.[185] Using their research, I analyzed their theories in terms of how masculinity may change when taking place within an ethnic enclave instead of a more diverse contact zone. With this in mind, I found that of the three to discuss stereotyping—specifically stereotyping of Islam in regards to ISIS, which they brought up without me asking a question on the subject—were all male. Though I cannot compare the two analyses, this does show a heightened awareness of stereotyping of the Arab Muslim male figure. As the only interviewee to speak about masculinity identity formation in Dearborn specifically, Abdul identifies a different perspective by including how the community has affected his male identity in a positive direction. He spoke about how the community shaped his gender relations, familial relations, and cross-generational relations. By describing how the community "folded" (3.7) him into a specific man, Abdul not only emphasizes Dearborn's role in his identity but also highlights how an ethnic enclave may function differently than a contact zone in terms of identity negotiations.

As I asked explicitly about modesty, interviewees also gave insight into not only the differences between definitions of modesty in American and Arab cultures, but also how the Dearborn community shaped these definitions. Rima identifies how Dearborn specifically

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Ethnic Minority Psychology 21, vol. 2 (2015): 201-212.

185 "Arab-American Male Identity Negotiations: Caught in the Crossroads of Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, and Current Contexts," 27.

altered the definitions of modesty causing a clash between American and perceived Arab cultures (3.4). Rima's quote reflects on ideas of how immigrants often create more conservative projections of the values from their home country as to keep them alive in the new country.[186] In this way, the Dearborn community shapes both religious and gender identities through this heightened conservatism.

4.4.4 *Reputation*

Many of the interviewees discussed the role reputation has on their daily lives. In terms of gender identity, it influences gender roles ranging from attire to university choices (3.7). The interviewees discussed how reputation goes even further to cause families to hide or lie about mental health. Mireille Aprahamian et al. discuss the relationship between behavioral assimilation and mental health more fully in their article, "The Relationship Between Acculturation and Mental Health of Arab Americans" (2011). They argue that more Americanized Arabs report better mental health when controlling for other demographic variables.[187] Similar to this article, my interviewees presented the viewpoint where they discussed mental health of less Americanized Arabs. Idris spoke about the topic largely focusing on how talking about mental health does not exist within Arab culture. Karam further relates this to a community problem linking reputation to the recent string of suicides in Dearborn (3.7). Both identify reputation in relation to mental health as a form of representation of the Arab-American subculture through its prevalence in the Dearborn community.

4.4.5 *"Othering"*

Many of the interviewees expressed sentiments that Dearborn is a safer place for them because the community consists of a large Arab population that understands them. Because of this, when asked about discrimination, interviewees most often pointed to Hall's concept of "othering" occurring outside of Dearborn. Nour and Rima (3.6) mention incidents of othering where non-Arab Americans questioned their culture and their Americanism. Both examples highlight how they suffered from othering directly in relation to their ethnic and racial

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186 Stein, Stephen J. "Religion and the Modern City, 1865–1945," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 479-498. Stein discusses this theory in his research. Numerous other scholars also examine this theory.

187 Aprahamian, Mireille, David Kaplan, Amy Windham, Judith Sutter, and Jan Visser. "The Relationship Between Acculturation and Mental Health of Arab Americans." *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 33, no. 1 (2011): 80-92.

identities. They did not discuss religious practices specifically; however, as they reference their "culture," one can also understand this to include religious practices.

In Ms. Z's example (3.6), she further discusses discrimination by focusing on gender and its link to other forms. Ms. Z places her friend, someone she considers very American, at Ground Zero in 2002 when a construction worker yelled at her to "go back to your country" because she is a brown woman in a hijab. Ms. Z's example not only highlights the racial and ethnic aspects of discrimination but also gender. Mr. Zaban speaking of his wife in stores, Hakim mentioning women he knows, and Miss R discussing personal experiences with hearing "go back home" all further emphasis gender discrimination. All of the examples of people yelling for someone to "go back home" were directed towards women. This signifies how because of the hijab, these women's religious identity becomes visible and people feel the need to "other" them by claiming that they do not belong in America.

With these examples, the interviewees most often point to how people question their Americanism because of their ethnicity, race, and religion. Because of this discrimination, thirteen of the interviewees also spoke about educating people about their culture as a way to fix this problem. As I did not specifically ask about educating people, this number is significant and accentuates how it is a common occurrence.

4.5 **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I answered how members of the Fordson community identifies and shapes forms of representation. I first analyzed the interviewees' complicated context as both an Arab and as an American through discussions of assimilation. With this, I used interviewees' understanding of assimilation alongside theories to fully comprehend my interviewees' placement in America. The Arab-American identity that the majority agreed to having emphasized the ability for an individual to live both as an Arab and as an American simultaneously. It further highlights how assimilation is not either linear or static, but fluid.

Next, I analyze Fordson High School as an arena for identity formation in terms of the interviewees' identifications of Americanism, ethnicity/race, gender, and religion. I analyzed how the interviewees identify various forms of representation and how they reflect on these forms in how they view themselves as Arabs, how they view others Arabs, and how they view non-Arabs. I further connected this to the Dearborn community to place Fordson within the context of an ethnic enclave. Overall, with this chapter, I answer how Fordson acts as hub where it plays both a passive and an active role in formulating students' identities. I further

highlight how Fordson is a unique case study of identity formation, as the school's majority population does not reflect the majority population of America.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Fordson as the American Dream

For my interviewees and many other Arabs in America, the aftermath of 9/11 and more recent global events, such as the rise of ISIS, still persist in their everyday life. Many of my interviewees discussed their dual role as educator and good citizen that results from many non-Arab Americans questioning their loyalty, assimilation, and heritage. Because of these questions largely linked to 9/11 and ISIS, in my thesis I hoped to unravel a different story focusing more the identity formation and assimilation at an American public school system with an Arab population. Through discussions of forms of representation of what is mainstream American and what is the Arab-American subculture, I am able to reflect on how and why members of a public school community form their Americanist, ethnic/racial, gender, and religious identities.

In this thesis, I conducted a study that intersects multiple disciplines including historical research, cultural studies, and ethnic/racial studies to analyze identity formation amongst Americans of Arab descent (ArDs) and Arab immigrants within Fordson High School, a secondary school that is about 95% Arab and 90% Muslim. In Chapter 1, I outlined my methodology and the state of the field that I used to formulate my research question: How does a dominantly Arab-American public school community identify and shape specific forms of representation as citizens of America in the post-9/11 era? I also found four main concepts of identity formation to focus on: Americanism, ethnic/racial, gender, and religious. With this background, I created my questionnaire and embarked on my fieldwork semester to gather as much information about the community as possible in my short time there.

In Chapter 2, I emphasize the importance of understanding Arab immigrants' long history in America to highlight how their story is not only a contemporary one, but one founded in the struggle for whiteness and citizenship by first wave Arab immigrants. I distinguished the three waves of immigration indicating the differences in the populations to

relate this history to the modern struggle of being an invisible minority placed within a majority population. By having this historical background, I developed a much stronger background in ethnic and racial identity formation of my interviewees that proved to be essential to my analysis.

In Chapter 3, I detail my experiences with participant observation and interviewing. I also highlight significant themes that I found within my data, which I categorized into seven divisions: Arab-American Identity, School Role, College, Modesty, Football, Discrimination, and Community Influence. During this stage, I acted as both the director of my research guiding the events with my interviews and as a passive observer as I allowed respondents to lead me to social events and around Fordson.

In Chapter 4, I analyze my interviewees' identifications of forms of representation of both mainstream American and the Arab-American subculture by focusing on using various theoretical frameworks alongside my interviewees' answers. By first observing assimilation into mainstream American culture, I concentrated on themes of citizenship and whiteness. Next, I addressed the Arab-American subculture focusing on transnationalism and language. Then, I shifted to analyzing how the Fordson community shapes forms of representation through both active and passive methods. My interviewees notably brought me to the concept that Fordson is a hub of identity formation. As a school where a minority population is the majority and as a place where students socialize and interact predominantly throughout the week, the school has one of the strongest impacts on the students' various identities. Through my discussion of Fordson, I analyzed the shaping of Americanist, ethnic/racial, gender, and religious identities. Furthermore, I ended this chapter by also considering how the Dearborn community shapes forms of representation also as a safe space with many members of a similar background.

Unfortunately, I only spent a few months within the area so there are many people and topics that I could not include due to the time constraints. For one, Fahim mentioned differences between Yemeni Americans and other Arab-Americans, as Yemeni Americans are often Sunni and more conservative. I did not find any Yemenis interviewees and could not follow up on this idea. I likewise did not interview any younger hijabis, as both of my younger female interviewees did not wear the headscarf. This also could have added another element to my research by giving a different narrative. And because Dearborn is dominantly Muslim, interviewing more Christians, especially younger ones, or others from different religious background could have also given better insight into identity formation. Therefore, my research does not encompass all identities that are found within Fordson or within

Dearborn. Nonetheless, it still analyzes identity formation for many of the most common identities.

I furthermore want to emphasize the importance of using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism as a self-check so that my research remains critical of my own preconceived notions of non-Western groups. Throughout my fieldwork and analysis, I often needed to step back from my research and ask myself if this was the story of the interviewees' and the community I was telling or if it was the story that I had created with my previous understanding despite the interviewees' responses. Because I began by critically evaluating my own biases, this research attempts to best represent the voices of the Fordson community as told through my interviewees.

Lastly, I want to emphasize how because it is a hub, Fordson High School shapes the identities of many of its students. Within its halls, my interviewees found a safe space to express their attributes, actions, and values without problems. I noticed this through many forms of representation, such as English-Arabic code-switching, hijab and abaya wearing, and flag pledging. In many ways, the ability for Fordson community members to act fully themselves is part of the ethos of the American dream.

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Interviewees (In order of date)

Fahim– (5 Sept. 2016, Skype) Alum, 24, Male, 1.5 generation Iraqi, lenient Shi'ite Muslim

Mr. Imad Fadlallah – (10 Sept. 2016, his home) Retired principal, 56, Male, 1st generation Lebanese, devout Shi'ite Muslim

Rima – (10 Sept. 2016, her home) Alum, 24, Female, 2nd generation Lebanese, Shi'ite Muslim

Karam – (12 Sept. 2016, his office) Newspaper reporter and alum, 29, Male, 1.5 generation Lebanese, non-practicing Shi'ite Muslim

Nour – (16 Sept. 2016, café) Alum, 19, Female, 2nd generation Lebanese, lenient Shi'ite Muslim

Omar – (16 Sept. 2016, café) Alum, 18, 2nd generation Lebanese and Saudi, devout Shi'ite Muslim

Ms. Z – (19 Sept. 2016, phone) English teacher, "18 and holding, no longer 29", Female, 2nd generation Lebanese, devout Shi'ite Muslim

Mr. Fouad Zaban – (19 Sept. 2016, high school field and his office) Gym teacher and football coach, 46, Male, 1.5 generation Lebanese, devout Shi'ite Muslim

Hakim – (22 Sept. 2016, café), Alum, 19, Male, 2nd generation Iraqi, non-practicing Shi'ite Muslim

Idris – (23 Sept. 2016, café) Alum, 18, Male, 2nd generation Lebanese, devout Shi'ite Muslim

Miss R. – (26 Sept. 2016, phone) Social Studies teacher, 28, Female, 1.5 generation from Lebanese descent but born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, devout Shi'ite

Mrs. E – (30 Sept 2016, her office) School-Parent Liaison, 52, Female, 1.5 generation Jordanian, lenient Christian

Abdul – (30 Sept 2016, café) Private school alum, 18, Male, 2nd generation Palestinian, devout Sunni Muslim

Reverend A – (9 Oct 2016) Local reverend, 44, Male, 1st generation Israeli/Palestinian, devout Christian

Example of the Standard Questionnaire Used
(Each changed slightly according to interviewee)

Demographic Questions

1. Can I ask you some basic questions for demographic purposes?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your marital status?
4. What is your highest level of education? Where was this attained?
5. Where were you born?
6. Do you know which country your family originates from?
    a. If yes, where?
    b. How long have they been in the US?
7. What is the language spoken at home?
8. What is the language spoken while out in public?

Ethnicity and Race

1. What ethnicity do you identify as?
2. How important is this to your everyday life?
3. How often do you discuss your background with others?
4. Do you belong to any associations linked to this ethnicity?
5. Do you predominately socialize with others of this ethnicity?
6. Do you feel a special sense of relationship among others of a common background?

Fordson High School

1. Do you participate within the cultural sphere of the school district?
    a. Are you involved in the PTA?
    b. Are you involved in any sports or organizations like the Girl/Boy Scouts?
2. Do you have child(ren) at this school district?
    a. If not, are they in a private school?
3. If money were not an object, would you prefer to send your child(ren) to a private school?
4. What do you consider the role of the school to be in forming an ethnic or racial identity?
    a. A gender identity?
    b. A religious identity?
5. Do you think the school supports the cultural values that you are concerned about with your child(ren)'s upbringing?
    a. Can you provide examples?
        i. Textbooks, food, dress, prayers during school, health/sex education
6. Do you believe that the school allows for an environment where ethnic or religious identity can flourish?
7. Do you believe that the school district offers suitable options that support your cultural views?
8. Does the school provide an environment where your child(ren) can perform cultural customs and traditions?
9. Do you believe that schools should create a multicultural setting where all ethnicities are learned about?
    a. Do you think this is practical?
10. Do you believe that the school has an appropriate dress code?
    a. Do you feel that your children's peers dress appropriately?
11. Are there any other concerns you have about the school district?
12. Are there any improvements that you feel the school district can make to better your child(ren)'s education?

Dearborn Community

1. Do you participate within the wider community of Dearborn?
    a. If yes, in terms of hours per week, how active would you consider your participation to be?
2. Do you read the local newspaper or watch the local news channel?
3. Do you follow local events?
4. Do you partake in community service?
5. Are you involved in any religious circles?

Discrimination and 9/11

1. Do you feel that there has been a change in your relationship with other Americans since the events of 9/11?
2. Have you or anyone you know experienced discrimination?
3. Do your children play on sports teams?
    a. Do you feel hostility when playing against other school districts?
    b. If yes, do you feel that these are related to your ethnicity or religion?

Forms of Representation

1. To you, what does it mean to be a true American?
2. How do you view "Arab-ness" within an American context?
3. Are ideas about modesty an issue?
4. Do you think the ideas of modesty in American and in Arab culture clash?
    a. If yes, how do you deal with this?
5. What specific forms do you use to fit within an American context?
6. Do you believe that schools should help create a sense of patriotism?
    a. How patriotic would you consider yourself?
    b. How important do you think it is to have a sense of patriotism within an American context?

Religious Identity

1. What religion were you raised?
    a. Would you consider yourself devout, lenient, or non-practicing?
2. Have you raised your children in this faith?
3. Do you believe that the school has influenced your child(ren)'s faith? If yes, how?
4. Does the school district provide an environment where your children feel comfortable being a member of their faith?