



# Theorizing Hyphenated Selves: Researching Youth Development in and across Contentious Political Contexts

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## Abstract

In this article, we present social–psychological notions about critical consciousness, change, and power that we consider foundational to the study of youth under siege. Relying on Lewin’s field theory and Du Bois’ dual consciousness, and critical psychology literature on sociopolitical understandings of conflict, we propose a new conceptual and theoretical framework that we call ‘hyphenated selves’ to better understand youth identity in and across contentious political contexts. Specifically, we report briefly on our own work with Muslim–American youth in the US post–9/11 and post–‘war on terror’ as a context from which we may reflect on a social psychology of youth identity and global conflict. At the same time, we want to think forward about critical methods for researching complicated subjectivities across politically and culturally contentious terrains.

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Willis (2002) writes that ‘youth are always among the first to experience the problems and possibilities’ of social change. Like canaries in the mine, they embody and perform the ‘flows of cultural modernization’ that accompany economic, political, and technological transformations. Willis continues:

Young people respond in disorganized and chaotic ways, but to the best of their abilities and with relevance to the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live and embody them. These responses are actually embedded in the flows of cultural modernization but to adult eyes they may seem to be mysterious, troubling and even shocking and antisocial. (p. 461)

In this essay, with Willis’s theoretical inspiration to look to youth to decipher political shifts, we sketch a conceptual framework for the study of *hyphenated selves*, focusing specifically on how teens and young adults form and reform their ideas about self and others when social and political contexts fracture. Borrowing a metaphor from geology, we consider how young people respond to politically induced tremors that may erupt far

away and yet reach deep into the soul, carving fault lines between self and other(s), where relatively smooth borders once existed.

The *hyphenated selves* frame focuses on the social and developmental psychologies of youths living in bodies infused with global and local conflict, as they strive to make meaning, speak back, incorporate and resist the contradictory messages that swirl through them. Suárez-Orozco (2000), Waters (1990), Portes and Rumbaut (2001), and Solis (2003), using different methodologies and theoretical approaches, have articulated the developmental consequences of shifting and contentious cultural contexts for youth on difficult journeys: immigrant and undocumented youth, respectively. In this essay, we seek to explore the innovative responses of youth who have stood still and have nevertheless been destabilized as social and political grounds shifted beneath their feet. We interrogate, theoretically and methodologically, life at the hyphen to discern the creative, imaginative, terrified, engaged, withdrawn, activist and contradictory moves of youth growing up at the nexus of contentious political forces.

We ground our discussion within our own research project on Muslim youth in the US diaspora, growing up post-9/11 and post-‘war on terror’ (see, Sirin & Fine, 2007, forthcoming; Sirin, Bikmen, Zaal, Fine, & Katciaficas, forthcoming; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007). To be more specific, in this project with Muslim-American youth, we sought to (i) document the collective impact of surveillance and scrutiny on youth identified as Muslim and/or Arab (another complexity), (ii) capture the variation, complexity, multiplicity, and vibrancy of young Muslims, and (iii) introduce ‘Muslim-American’ youth, who have been neglected in adolescence studies, into the core of youth studies *without* exoticizing them (most of the studies on Muslim youth to date had been investigations of girls/young women who wear hijab). It is our intention, however, with this essay, to invite a broader consideration of hyphenated selves as a framework for theorizing and interrogating a broad swath of youth development across shifting social contexts.

## **September 11 and the War on Terror through the Eyes of Muslim Youth in the USA**

For immigrant Muslim youth living in the USA, negotiating their identities across different cultural terrains became decidedly more challenging after the events of September 11, 2001 (Cainkar, 2004). Their lives, like those of everyone else in the USA, were under attack. But unlike everyone else, almost over night these youth and their families also came to be perceived as potential threats to US national security. We have no romance about life for Muslims in the USA before 9/11. Indeed, on September 10 these young people were vulnerable to the well-documented forms of *Orientalism* that Said (1979) and others have written about. But they were, also, relatively ‘ordinary’ kids. Most of them lived as invisible ‘whites’. Many of the young people we surveyed and interviewed in our studies had been

leading squarely middle-class lives, in predominantly white suburbs and attending racially integrated schools. And then on September 11, 2001, across lines of class, community, religiosity, documented and undocumented status, gender, and politics, Muslim-American youth and their families were abruptly evicted from the moral community of psychological citizenship in the USA and they were homogenized 'Muslim-Americans' (Opotow, 2004). In an instant 'they' could no longer be trusted. They had to be watched, detained, and sometimes deported. The category 'Muslim-American' congealed and split in a binary against the newly created (and for a moment diverse) category 'good American'. Aisha, 17 years old at the time of our interview, describes that morning in her suburban New Jersey community:

I remember that day (9/11/01) my father drove home a number of children from school, a religious school. As he dropped them at the elementary school, where they would meet their parents, the police were there, taking names, phone numbers, and licenses. That was frightening enough, but as we drove off we found ourselves in a big traffic jam and some woman screamed out of her car, 'Why don't you just go home?' I knew then that everything was going to be different.

From that point forward, a relentless series of legal, cultural, social, and psychological threats challenged the physical safety, psychological well-being, social relations, and public life of Muslims in the USA (Nguyen, 2005). Placed under watch, as if in a Foucauldian Panopticon (Foucault, 1995), in school, on the streets, at the mall, in the library, and on the bus, young Muslim-American men and women<sup>1</sup> suddenly found that 'Each individual is fixed in his place. And if he moves he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment.... [in the panopticon] Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere (p. 357). Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1977/1995, 361).

Samira, an 18-year-old high school student in one of our focus groups, narrates the shock of *becoming* a problem:

My mom would tell me ... just right after September 11th – if anybody asks you what you are, don't tell them. Lie. I was like, no, I'm not going to lie, you can't do that.... There was a lot of anxiety, and it was really hard. I think, in the beginning, in the very, very beginning, because people were scared and they kind of wanted to point fingers at people and, you know, it was just such a shocking event, and they wanted somebody to blame. And there we were.

Swept into the historic heap of human mass in the USA, they suddenly found themselves 'amongst those whose very presence is both "over-looked" – in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal – and, at the same time, over determined – psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic' (Bhabha, 2005, 13).

The contentious nature of living on the hyphen did not dissipate after the initial attacks occurred. To the contrary, the moral exclusion continues today, and is heightened with every news cycle filled with frightening accounts from the 'war on terror' that further increases the surveillance of Muslims. In 2006, 5 years after 9/11 attacks, a Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 46% of adults have negative view of Islam, which is 7 percentage points higher than in the months following the 9/11 attacks (Deane & Fears, 2006). At this moment in history, in this country, these young people are, at once, culturally grounded in multiple worlds and nationally rootless; transnational and homeless (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Bhabha, 2005; Levitt, 2000; Rizvi, 2005). They have learned, in the last half decade, that their standing in the USA is provisional, as Gualtieri would argue, 'not-quite-white ... not-quite-free ... subject to "the hyphen that never ends"' (2004, 65). As Hadice, a 17-year-old Syrian-American student, told us, 'I guess you could say I live on the hyphen'.

As psychologists we came to the idea of *hyphenated selves* theoretically and also empirically. In 2003, we thought we were studying the developmental pathways of Muslim-American youth identities – their cultural and religious commitments, their academic engagements and their psychological well-being and health. Since then we have asked a sample of more than 200 young Muslims in the USA from varied nations of origin, communities, and schooling experiences, boys and girls, with hijab and quite modern, attending mosque schools and public schools, aged 12–25, to draw maps of their many selves, complete surveys, participate in focus groups and/or individual interviews (for full details, see Sirin & Fine, 2007, forthcoming; Zaal et al., 2007). We gave them paper, crayons, markers and about 15 minutes. And they handed us portraits of global and psychic contention as depicted in Figure 1.

'In the eyes of one American Muslim' was created by Tani, a college student. While she notes that before 9/11 'much was still wrong with the world and America had its problems', she adds 'there was still some semblance of sanity'. On the column entitled America post-9/11, she indicates that now 'the U.S. Muslim community cowers in fear'. Her quick sketch of history reflects the tensions that characterized many of the maps, even her ending with a 'glimmer of hope yet and still'.

The maps told us much about the psychological space occupied in young minds by global conflicts; about the psychological density and complexity of the hyphen in the bodies of youth. Quite a few of the maps represented images of conflict, tension, and fear. A young man drew a face split in half, with the words American and Muslim framing the Janus-like face; two tears dripping from the side-labeled American and the words 'tears of racism' scrawled at the bottom. At the same time, many others drew hybrid images blending the flags of home country and the USA; rivers fed by Muslim and 'American' waters; outlines of themselves in hijab with headphones; basketballs and Koran and other portraits of



Figure 1 Youth Map: In the eyes of one American Muslim.

creative and innovative subjectivities at the hyphen. One young woman, Saria, described the hyphen as an opportunity to create 'fusion selves – like fusion food', a new, not-yet identity combination. Whether the hyphen was smooth or jagged, the maps displayed borders that now had to be negotiated. We could hear the desire to blend split selves, echoes of Du Bois' (1903/1982, 4) double consciousness:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an

American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

Encouraged by these maps (see Milgram & Jodelet, 1976), we took up an intensive investigation of the hyphen, theorized as a dynamic social-psychological space where political arrangements and individual subjectivities meet. We came to understand that the psychological texture of the hyphen is substantially informed by history, media, surveillance, politics, nation of origin, gender, biography, longings, imagination, and loss – whether young people know/speak this or not.

Across maps, interviews, and surveys, we could see great variety in young peoples' experiences of self/selves, Others and how they negotiated the hyphen in distinct contexts – on a bus, in an airport, at the dinner table, at school and in the mosque. While some spoke of the hyphen as a solid wall of mistrust, others describe it as a porous membrane. Namir, aged 16, told us that he worries 'when I walk down the street, people think I'm a terrorist'. In contrast, Hadice, aged 17, explained,

On the street I try to educate people. I wear hijab hoping they will ask me questions.... In school, when the topic turns to the war or the Middle East everyone looks at me. I used to mind it, but really it's better if I tell them the truth rather than them being so ignorant. American kids don't watch the news at all! And I watch CNN, Fox News, Al-Jazerra and French news. So, I think it's my responsibility to educate them.

Some portray the hyphen as a traumatic check point, and others as a space for cautious collaboration, public education, or (as you will see below) assertive confrontation. For a few it is a space of shame, for many a site of anxiety and for others an opportunity to invent new versions of self.

## Literatures at the Hyphen

Although the notion of hyphenated selves emerged from our research with Muslim youth, our work has been informed by a number of theorists who laid the groundwork to better theorize about the young peoples' lives across contentious political contexts. We have returned, for instance, to reread the texts of Kurt Lewin who wrote about 'minority group stress' just after World War II. Challenging to disciplinary moves toward decontextualization, Lewin (1951) insisted that lives grow and shrivel in social contexts; that forces seen and unseen affect well-being; that the complexity of lives is best revealed when undergoing change. Drawing from Lewin's 'field theory', we view youths' *fields* as 'the totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent' (Lewin, 1951, 240). Refusing to extract persons from their social contexts, Lewin invited researchers to study how individuals participate in a series of *life spaces* (such as the family, work, school, and church) and to understand that these contexts are themselves always in flux, constructed under the

influence of various, contentious *force vectors* (Lewin, 1936, 1948). Lewin conceptualized individuals and groups in what he called 'topological terms' using map-like representations and he urged researchers to study people, groups, and institutions, *when they are undergoing dramatic changes*.

Our theorizing about hyphenated selves also owes intellectual debt to W. E. B. Du Bois who was writing in the early 20th century about the ways in which the dominant racist ideologies pierced the soul of African-Americans. Du Bois (1903/1982) wrote on the complex experience of 'being a problem':

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (p. 1)

Like Du Bois, we have been taken by the psychological space between self, others, and fractured social contexts. Post-9/11 for Muslims in the US diaspora, however, the question shifted toward, 'How does it feel to *become* a problem?' The study of Muslim youth in the USA enables a perverse kind of pre-/post-analysis of the developmental implications of belonging to the moral community and then being exiled and placed under hypersurveillance; an empirical analysis of what it means to be ejected psychologically from a place (a nation, community, culture, diaspora, family, school, peer group) considered home.

While Lewin and Du Bois populate our historic legacy, the study of hyphenated selves also allies with contemporary interdisciplinary projects grounded explicitly in analyses of power (Apfelbaum, 2002), gender and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997), and hybridity (Bhabha, 2005). Thus, our work is in conversation with feminist psychology (e.g. Gough, 2004; Hermann & Stewart, 2001; Hurtado, 1996; Walkerdine, 2002), lesbian/gay/bi/trans/queer studies (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Kessler, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000), critical race theory (Ayala, 1998; Bhatia, 2007; Leonard, 2003; Martín-Baró, 1994; Nguyen, 2005), immigration studies (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waters, 1990), indigenous (Grande, 2004; Smith, 1999), and postcolonial theories (Abu El-Haj, 2005; Bhabha, 2005; Hallak & Quina, 2004; Maira, 2004; Peek, 2003; Sarroub, 2005; Spivak, 1987). At the same time, research on hyphenated selves seeks out scholars beyond the field of psychology, including radical geographers (Katz, 2003) and anthropologists (see Appadurai, 2006; Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999; Sen, 2004) who write on the long arm of globalization as it affects and dis/enables child and youth development across the globe.

The *hyphenated selves* framework, then, sits in a crowded conceptual parking lot. The specific theoretical intervention we address, however, lies in the social–psychological space, the membrane, *between* contentious social contexts and youth subjectivities and innovations, focused on troubled relations between self and other. Young people can be born at a hyphen, in political cracks between social identities, as W. E. B. Du Bois so eloquently described the ‘double consciousness’ of African-Americans (1903/1982). Youth may experience a politically induced shift in the foundational plates of social arrangements that incites a tremor between two previously compatible identities, as in the case of 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ and Patriot Act in the USA. Alternatively, a young person may decide to step out onto a hyphen, making public a slice of self that challenges normative expectations as Gough writes on gay athletes (2007; see also Garnets & D’Augelli, 1994). Or children may be thrust onto a hyphen of survival, removed from or thrown out of their homes by parents, social workers, landlords, the INS. A dynamic social–psychological site of taboo and desire, fear and challenge, voice and silence, despair and possibility, collusion and resistance, hiding and activism, the hyphenated selves framework sets up a lively, tension-filled, viscous and porous space for psychological theory and challenges for design and method.

## Methods for Studying Hyphenated Selves

The hyphenated selves approach is not, however, simply a conceptual framework. It also carries methodological implications. If researchers are to situate young lives in and across historic, cultural, and political contexts; link narratives of identity to distant and local political arrangements and interrogate intersectionality and wide variability within the ‘group’, we confront questions of design (see Shohat, 2006).

In our forthcoming book *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities Through Multiple Methods* (Sirin & Fine, forthcoming), we lay out a design we crafted with a participatory advisory board of Muslim-American youth, that relies on mixed methods and applies analytic techniques that have enabled us to analyze what was spoken/revealed and also what remained unsaid/hidden, perhaps unknown, only felt by these youth. We reflect here on the methodological choices we have made toward understanding the complexity of the hyphen, even as we remain skeptical and humble always about these decisions, all too aware of their limitations, their ambitions, and the impossibility of ‘catching politics’ as they circulate through the rapidly metabolizing bodies of youth.

### *Participatory action research*

We gathered a diverse group of Muslim youth, ages 12 to 18, from the New York and New Jersey area, with varied experiences and standpoints,



to help us refine the research questions, articulate the design and the methods, and think about the ethics of research on/with politically vulnerable young people. By design, participatory action research (PAR) projects rest on the assumption that social research should be sculpted through the knowledge carried by young people and adults most intimately affected by injustice and struggle<sup>2</sup> (see Lykes & Coquillon, 2006, for a comprehensive review of PAR projects on nation, culture, and gender; see [www.gc.cuny.edu](http://www.gc.cuny.edu) for information about the PAR Collective at the Graduate Center; Rahman, 2007; Torre, 2005).

The Muslim-American youth project, due to logistics, was admittedly *PAR lite*. That is, this project was conceived by us, Selcuk, and Michelle, with a strong, opinionated and very verbal advisory group of young people, who directed us toward the questions to ask, the nuances to understand, the points of 'normalcy' to interrogate (what books are you reading lately?) and the commitments that run deep in the souls of Muslim-American youths. The advisory group included eight US-based Muslim youth aged 12–18 – secular and religious, heads covered by hijab and baseball caps, full-bodied black robes and facial coverings and soccer shoes, attending public schools and Islamic, from the first or second generation, from across nations and struggles, boys and girls. We told them we were Turkish who grew up Muslim (Selcuk) and the youngest daughter of immigrant Jewish parents from Poland (Michelle), and that they – the members of our advisory group – were the experts on how Muslim-American youth make sense of living in the USA. They helped us create a design of mixed methods – surveys, focus groups, mapping, individual life stories – to best capture complex and layered stories about Muslim-American youth individually and collectively, as they matured amid the post-9/11 'war on terror' political context. They warned us about ethical concerns, critiqued traditional measures of stress and youth 'risk' behaviors, laughed at the 'dating measures' we thought about using and gently educated us.

Another challenge of the hyphenated selves frame concerns the task of assuming or naming the 'group' being studied. Accusations of essentialism come quickly, even if research designs deliberately search for intersectionality and variation. That is, whether one is studying queer, undocumented, disabled, or fundamentalist youth; teen mothers, homeless children, runaways, heterosexually active and/or Muslim teens; criminalized youth or children of privilege; Black, Latino, Asian, South Asian, White ... youth, there is the dilemma of articulating and naming the collective while being perceived as freezing or essentializing the 'group'. Desires to re-present the 'group' as structurally and collectively affected by political forces bumps up against an equally compelling desire to challenge homogenizing stereotypes of the group; to resist essentialism, exoticism, or in this case *Orientalism*, and reveal variation. And then there may be a third desire – to demonstrate that these youth are, fundamentally, kids.

Interestingly, when we have presented this material, particularly to non-Muslim audiences, we have been consistently challenged on our use of 'Muslim-American', chastised for flattening differences within. And yet when we have presented the material to youth and/or adults who sit within the newly constituted category, there has been relatively strong resonance – and discussion – about the psychological impact of being placed into the category Muslim-American, the most recent designated others in US history.

### *On mixing the methods*

Methodologically, we tried to develop a research design that could stretch to uncover the layered complexity of youth growing up in politically contentious contexts, including qualitative and quantitative information constructed by individuals and groups, about processes that are very much on their mind and buried in their personal and collective unconscious, documenting how local conditions and distant arrangements effect stories of self and relations with others. And then we sought to generate an analytic plan that would allow us to review the data by gender, nation of origin, parents' educational level, heterogeneity of community, type of school, religiosity etc. While a theory of hyphenated selves may appear to be most compatible with qualitative methods, we have found ourselves interested in intentionally mixing qualitative and quantitative methods. We take humorous comfort in Stenner and Stainton-Rogers' (2004) desire to 'encourage the "mixing" of qualitative and quantitative methods, [to which] we propose a monstrous new word – qualifquantology – to express this discomfoting hybridity. In our view the hybridity ought to be discomfoting, since any genuine hybrid represents a significant reformation in the bodies that are brought together in forming it. Hybridity pierces the boundaries of identity and opens up the difference of otherness. By contrast, merely adding a qualitative dimension to a quantitative study or vice versa does not constitute hybridity and may be far from discomfoting' (p. 101).

While Stenner and Stainton-Rogers write on Q-sort methodology as their method *de jure*, we gathered a sample of more than 200 youth from across communities (primarily New York and New Jersey, but also a few from across the USA) and asked them to construct maps, participate in focus groups, sit for interviews and complete surveys consisting of a number of open-ended questions and a set of psychometrically validated measures. Given the developmental shifts in identity formation, we sampled youth in two age cohorts (12–18 and 18–25) who completed quantitative surveys that assessed multiple social and cultural identifications with 'Muslim communities' and 'mainstream US society',<sup>3</sup> their experiences of and responses to discrimination, and standardized measures of psychological well-being and health. The survey also, at the encouragement of our

youth advisory group, included questions about the books they are reading, stresses in their lives from family and school, and imaginative open-ended questions asking them what messages they would include in an MTV show about Muslim-American teens.

Our mixed design allowed us to document common experiences of Muslim-American youth but also to excavate the rich variation of and within this group of young people. Via surveys we were able to generate descriptive statistics and correlations between discrimination and strength of ethnic identity that help us situate some of the experiences of Muslim-American youth alongside other marginalized groups and to articulate a theory of how unequal power relations affect youth development. At the same time, with interviews, maps, and open-ended questions we were able to go beyond the most typical experiences and understand the rich variation within this group of young people, in their own words/drawings. In addition to learning from each method one at a time, we also combined various aspects of these multiple methods through research questions. For example, in order to examine how young people negotiate their hyphenated selves, we produced cross-tabulations of survey responses by three metacodes of the maps: evidence of integrated lives at the hyphen, evidence of parallel lives, and evidence of conflict and tension between lives. The results from this mixing of the methods not only answered our research question but also validated the new method (the maps in this case) with previously established survey measures.

Our point here is simple: the theory of hyphenated selves has implications not only for conceptual framing but also for design, methods, and analysis. Below we explore a few of these methods to reveal how they were enacted within a mixed method design.

### *Mapping the hyphen*

In our work with varied groups of youth in schools, communities, juvenile facilities and with the Muslim-American teens, we have relied on an old social-psychological method – long buried and deserving of resuscitation – the personal ‘identity map’. Variations of this projective method have psychoanalytic roots with Winnicott, Shepard and Davis (1989) and have been applied by environmental psychologists (Lynch, 1960; Saarinen, 1973), radical geographers (Geiseking, 2007; Hart, 1981; Harvey, 2001; Katz, 2003), and social psychologists, most notably Milgram and Jodelet (1976).

While the prompts may vary depending on the research project – draw the city, your selves, safe and dangerous spaces in your life, a conflict in your life, your journey to your new country or into the future – across projects young people take the invitation for creativity and run with it. With the Muslim-American youth, we asked them simply to draw their selves (i.e., student, daughter/son, athlete, Muslim, American) the way they see it. We gave them crayons, markers, paper, and about 15 minutes.



**Figure 2** Youth Map: Documenting layers of self.

We have collected, to date, more than 200 of these maps, which reveal, as Willis would suggest, the varied ways in which young lives connect to political events, social arrangements, religious and cultural traditions, mass media and youth culture, interpersonal relationships, personal yearnings and fears, fantasies about home country and the USA.

Thus, for instance, the young man (see Figure 2) who sketched a colorful sedimented/volcanic layering of his emotional life, with Islam at the top (and 'doubts' hovering) continues to maintain balance in a fiery red at the core. A young woman (see Figure 3) portrays the questions/confusions that flood her, how global relations, media and religious convictions surround/effect/protect/emanate from her. Holding all that in her aura, she stands tall and sturdy, wearing hijab, floating above a rapidly rotating globe. Both young people have created maps that chart the layering of



**Figure 3** Youth Map: An occupied and thoughtful mind.

emotions, draw strength from Islam, carry doubts/questions in their bodies, recognize the multiple influences that penetrate their lives, and represent complex desires to maintain balance – in a volcano or atop a spinning world.

### *Surveying the hyphen*

We also used surveys to assess how young people negotiate their identities as Muslim-Americans. In order to avoid creating – and measuring – a false dichotomy, that is creating a framework that forces the research participants to pick one identity over another, we allowed for the possibility of having two unrelated identifications. Superficially, in our surveys we created parallel forms where in one set of questions we measured the degree to

which young people identify with Muslim communities using the collective self-esteem measure (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and an additional form where we used the same set of questions to capture the degree of identification with mainstream US society. Unlike more typical survey items where the participants are asked to choose their location in a bidirectional continuum (i.e., Muslim-American) or even worse, choosing one or the other, we asked them to rate each identity independently. It is possible, of course, that the two forms reified the distinctions between these identities, particularly for those seeking 'fusion' selves, but with this measurement strategy we were able to directly test the now famous 'clash of civilization' hypothesis to see how compatible these two forms of identifications. Surveying the hyphen in this way also allowed us to create psychological models of what might be called critical pluralism, understanding the bases of 'Muslim collective identity' and the bases of 'Mainstream US collective identity'.

### *Focus groups*

After youth completed surveys and maps, a subset were invited to participate in focus groups. Here we could interrogate, for example, the meaning of the red core, the source of the questions, the weight of external influences and what enables and threatens the balance, in the maps displayed above. As Wilkinson (1999) and Wilkinson and Kitinger (1995, 2000, 2003) have argued in their now classic essays on focus groups and conversational analysis, focus groups enable researchers to connect understandings of selves-in-relation with analyses of how young people actually engage with, experience, and perform in live *social settings*. Focus groups offer social spaces where 'differences' are animated and contact is engaged; where researchers can witness the intersubjective performances of self, distancing from, projections onto and alliances and confrontations with others.

In one of our focus groups with young women, for instance, we were able both to *hear about* public confrontations with prejudice and to *see how* young women react to difference and disagreement. In this group, they were discussing their varied reactions to anti-Muslim incidents: silence, withdrawal, conversation, and confrontation:

Rabab: A lady sitting across [from] us ... made a comment towards [us] ... a loud comment ... it was about Iraq, 'Why do we have to send our soldiers there to help them? Why can't they do it themselves?' ... The first thing that popped out of my mouth is that Bush wants to send them. No one wants them there. ... If it was up to those people, after a certain point they want them out, but Bush is not going to take them out.... We were so pissed off ... but we gave her responses.... We started commenting amongst each other very loud as well. So they don't feel that we're oppressed by them or in any manner that we're scared of what they're saying or ... we just want to ignore them; we don't want to start up with them. Because the more you feel like people are pushing down and

you're allowing them to do that, they'll feel like, 'Oh, they're scared of us,' and stuff like that. So, it's comments like that, you should definitely respond to, no matter what.... We both got ... inspired enough that *we had to say something; we couldn't keep it inside of us*. And, until that lady got off, we just kept on making comments towards that, even though she said it once, but it's like she'll never say that again, because she knows now that, you know, *people do respond. No one's going to shut up*. Just because you think we're from another country does not mean that we ... don't know anything. But, a lot of times, people think that if you're wearing a hijab or if you're dressed in your cultural clothes, you don't know English or you just don't know how to talk. And it's like once you respond to them, they're so amazed. They're like, 'Wait. *She just spoke*'.

In response, Noor explains that in such settings she asks herself, 'Should I step up and say something, or you know, as one person, what am I going to say against all their voices?'

Aisha then extends the psychological conversation that is happening across bodies in the focus group, when she offers that she worries about betraying her community when she does not speak up:

I'm not very political. But, in the past couple of years, I feel like ... I have to be.... If I'm not then I'm almost like letting ... Muslims down; I'm letting Arabs down.... So, yeah, it's kind of a burden, because it's not something that I really enjoy.

Suha defended the choice to remain silent:

'Why should I have to educate these people?'

Focus groups enable us to decipher a string of psychological conversation occurring across participants, about the desires and dangers of engaging hostile others. For all of these young women, the decision to confront the racism or not was laden with anxiety, risk, responsibility, and vulnerability. They typically have to calculate in a split second, usually alone, whether and how to respond. Manal then told us about how she challenged her religion professor about her offensive and inaccurate depiction of Islam, but her questions were ignored and dismissed. As a result, she chose to avoid the teacher and her class feeling like she could not get through to her. Her mother wished she 'had pursued it more'. Manal defends her decision,

I'm not the type of person who does that.... I don't feel like ... I should be out there educating people. If people want to get educated, they educate themselves.... Because if they want to stay ignorant and they want to stay the way ... they feel and they believe, then let them.

Focus groups enable researchers a doubled analysis of responses to 'difference' and discrimination. In the material gathered, we could *hear about* and also *witness* the collective existential challenge posed to self by engagement with others, narrated as a discursive thread across the group. Analytically, this is an opportunity to interrogate the discursive traffic where *self*, *other*, and

the *relations between* intersect (see Wilkinson, 1999; Sirin & Fine, forthcoming, for a detailed illustration of this methodology).

### *Questions of analysis*

The hyphenated selves framework is a radical departure from 'fixed', and in most cases dichotomous notions of identity that favor 'group comparisons' in favor of more fluid and contextual, hybrid notions of identity. As a result of this conceptual shift, we are also faced with critical questions about data analysis; that is, how to account for both what is said and what is not said.

The hyphenated selves frame develops out of standpoint theory (see Collins, 2006), assuming that youth who live at the dangerous intersection of political and cultural contestation feel deeply the static electricity of politics and surveillance in their bones. On the other hand, the frame also recognizes that individual lives – particularly youth – are affected by structures, policies, ideologies, practices that may be quite remote and concealed, even as they penetrate intimately. Although youth may experience these force vectors, in the language of Lewin, they may not be able to name them or even recognize their impact. As Willis described in the opening quote, young people often cannot narrate why, from where, or how the currents of social change run through their veins (nor can the rest of us).

Yet, even if young people cannot precisely name the sources, processes, and political formations that effect them and even though they vary enormously in terms of their reactions, we begin with the assumptions that they have knowledge, somewhere in their minds and their bodies, about the broad global shifts that shape their lives; that they recognize to whom they can speak this knowledge and where silence is better served; that they sense who might view this information as dangerous (police? some educators? healthcare practitioners?) and for whom it would just be another burden (parents).

The framework of hyphenated selves, however, also suggests that many influences on young lives lie outside the consciousness of these young people, encouraging researchers to search for and theorize those social factors and processes that are felt but perhaps not named. We find Josselson (2004, 14–15) most helpful on this point:

Many experiences may be both known and not known simultaneously. That which is unconscious may nevertheless be apparent in symbolization processes ... Attention is directed then to the omissions, disjunctions, inconsistencies and contradictions in an account. It is what is latent, hidden in an account that is of interest rather than the manifest narrative of the teller.

Maps and focus groups offer up interpretive material, therefore, that can be analyzed with respect for the material presented as it is, but also with an analytic eye for what is absent; enabling researchers to analyze at once, *what is* but also *what is not said*. Josselson (2004) explicates two distinct



strategies for analyzing qualitative material, relying on what she calls 'a hermeneutics of faith' and 'a hermeneutics of suspicion'. As Josselson explains, a hermeneutics of faith invites researchers to take respondents' words at face value, to give them the space in the scholarly literature they deserve, to re-present them as they would themselves, to craft counterstories with/from their words, to challenge dominant, hegemonic scripts. A hermeneutics of suspicion, on the other hand, invites researchers to exercise interpretive authority, to theorize through the words of our respondents, to venture to say something they don not/would not/did not/cannot say.

We analyzed the maps with both 'faith' and 'suspicion'. First – with faith – we coded for the presence and absence of repeated icons: nation, money, Koran, war, violence, flags, question marks; accounting for who is portrayed and where the map is situated. Analyses of suspicion, on the other hand, applied more critical and psychoanalytic techniques to assess if and how multiple selves are drawn – near, with, separate from or against each other? What metaphors characterize the map; is the hyphen represented as a split, tear, flower, bridge, river ... ? To what extent are the drawings filled with tension, conflict, and/or a new generative self? How is the emotional landscape portrayed at the hyphen? How does gender, class, sexuality, family, or community influence the nature of the hyphen and young people's resolutions? To what extent is there evidence of *melancholia* (see Cheng, 2001) and/or a *thrilling sense of experimentation* with new gendered and/or sexual freedoms?

Whether the hyphenated selves frame is applied to gay/lesbian/bi/trans/queer youth coming out in a homophobic family or on a sports team; documented or undocumented immigrants in a new land; young women from Christian fundamentalist or Orthodox Jewish families seeking an abortion or leaving the faith; working-class youth who are plucked out of their homes and communities to attend private boarding school or perhaps the first in their family to go to college; teens thrown out of their homes or those with incarcerated parents; young people who find themselves in a suddenly suspect ethnic group.... we need methods to help us chronicle disruptions and innovations on multiple fronts; to understand the intra- and intersubjectivities of young people whose fantasies of the past and desires for the future are simultaneously shaken (Yuval-Davis, 1997); to theorize what young people are telling us and what they are not.

## **Confessions at the Methodological Hyphen**

This full-bodied, mixed methods design, filled with commitments to participation and a hermeneutics of faith and suspicion, is of course fraught with complexity, contradictions, limitations, and methodological muddles. We name five here, just to signal our reflexive humility, but be assured that there are many more.

- 1 *Variations among young people* make it difficult to argue coherently about the collective consequences of contentious politics against a certain social group. Issues of class, cultural capital, family biography, and relationship to the marketplace and the US government, matter enormously in terms of supporting youth development or rendering young people more vulnerable. Gender too matters significantly. When we analyze the maps, the focus groups, and the individual interviews, young women told us over and over that they transform instances of discrimination and prejudice into opportunities to educate others – even police in airports! – while young men are more likely to hide, living in more embodied terror, aware that they are potentially viewed as terrorist.
- 2 *Triangulation*, in a rich-mixed methods design, is always partial, sometimes illusory. It was as provocative to consider how findings from our distinct methods *contradicted* each other, as it was to determine how they *validated* each other. Thus, for instance, the survey measures in our studies revealed almost *no* gender differences, after correcting for Type I error, while all of our more interpretative methods reflected sharp and powerful distinctions between males and females.
- 3 *With a desire to 'normalize' and de-exoticize Muslim youth*, we distributed surveys with some quite traditional measures of dating, 'risk', and even mental health problems. As it turned out, many of these items were wholly irrelevant to the Muslim teens and young adults in our studies. This 'null' finding itself, however, highlights a reality that could only be discovered with a survey that did not quite 'work' for this population.
- 4 *The privilege of the hyphen*. We worry that our sample, largely well educated, middle class, and recruited from colleges and universities, may reflect as much about privilege as it does hyphenated lives. That is, it may simply be a privilege to live at a hyphen. Poor children across national, ethnic, and racial groups do not typically feel torn between worlds, although globalization and media pierce even isolated communities. But children living in poor, segregated communities are usually stuck in a single, difficult world. Muslim youth who live in US communities that are heavily Arab and relatively impoverished live with relentless scrutiny, fears, and vulnerability. These young people would likely reflect very differently on this question of the hyphen; such a research project would be important to undertake.
- 5 *Research as another form of surveillance*. Interviewing young people from communities under siege raises ethical questions and concerns about research as another form of surveillance. Consequently questions about the validity of the material surface. The young people in our studies are well aware of what is dangerous to speak and to whom. They are undoubtedly cautious – if not wonderfully strategic – about offering us relatively 'safe' narratives of Muslim identity in the USA. We heard, for instance, much less rage than we expected – or felt.

## **Documenting a History of the Present for Youth Growing Up in Contentious Political Contexts**

Standing on the shoulders of many classic and critical psychologists, a hyphenated selves framework calls forth an explicit commitment to theory, methods, ethics, and of course reflexivity. This work relies on interdisciplinary concepts, insights, and methods borrowed from across continents, disciplines, and moments in intellectual history in order to examine the complex relation of adolescent and young adult subjectivities to global politics. We consider here how a hyphenated selves frame implicates both theory and method. We suggest how psychologists might take up the project of documenting the conditions under which youth come to be dissociated from aspects of biography; how pieces of self split off, reattach, become romanticized and transformed; how global and local politics penetrate the soul, leaving some in pieces and others inventing radically new selves, and how some young people manage to knit together the fragments of global conflict into a radically new subjectivity, poetry, and politic.

Research on and with youth living in (and across) contentious political contexts tracks a history of the present. Psychologists can, at base, bear witness to the ways in which young people are volunteered by the culture as a canvas for global economic, racial, cultural, gendered, and sexual conflicts. At the same time we can theorize the complex ways in which young people perform new hybridities of resistance and innovation, working the hyphens in a wide-ranging diaspora of youth who dare to speak back.

### **Short Biographies**

Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor of Social Psychology, Women's Studies, and Urban Education at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, has taught at the City University of New York since 1990. Before that she taught at the University of Pennsylvania for more than a decade. Dr. Fine's research focuses on youth in schools, communities, and prisons, developed through critical feminist theory and method. For more information about her research or the work of the Graduate Center Participatory Action Research Collective, you can link to <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/psychology> or <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/start.htm>. Her recent awards include the 2007 Willystine Goodsell Award from the American Educational Research Association, the 2005 First Annual Morton Deutsch Award, an Honorary Doctoral Degree for Education and Social Justice from Bank Street College in 2002, and the Carolyn Sherif Award from the American Psychological Association in 2001.

Selcuk R. Sirin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Psychology in New York University's Steinhardt School. Dr. Sirin's research focuses on the lives of immigrant and minority children and ways to

increase professionals' ability to better serve them. Dr. Sirin coproduced the Racial and Ethical Sensitivity Test and accompanying training program for school professionals and he is serving as the Research Coordinator for the Partnership for Teacher Excellence project at New York University. He is the recipient Teaching Excellence Award from Boston College, Young Scholar Award from the Foundation for Child Development, and 2006 Review of Research Award from the American Educational Research Association given in recognition of an outstanding article published in education. He recently coedited a special issue of *Applied Developmental Science* focusing on immigrant Muslim youth in the West and coauthored a book on Muslim youth with Dr. Fine, entitled *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods*, which will be out in 2008.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> With ambivalence we rely self-consciously on the term Muslim-American, as an extremely problematic category. While we do not want to participate in homogenizing, eroticizing, silencing, or oppressing the voices of young Muslim-Americans by essentializing them, the contemporary politics of the USA and the globe, post-9/11 and post-war on terror, have perversely amalgamated a set of extremely disparate groups under the generic, politically induced category 'Muslim'. A product of US ethnogenesis. It is this production, and the subjectivities of youth living in and through this ideological tightening, that we set out to study. We thus take solace in the writings of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000, 266), who asserts 'that the categories we use to describe also delimit. Who and what constitutes group membership is always at play'.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle is a founding member of the participatory action research (PAR) Collective at the Graduate Center, City University of New York and from that site, in settings as varied as a women's prison, the South Bronx Mothers on the Move community-based organization, suburban public and private schools and urban schools, men and women post-release from prison and now Muslim-American youth, we work in and across small project-based PAR collectives in which youth researchers craft the questions, determine the methods, collect and analyze the empirical materials, write the reports/pamphlets/Web sites, and produce the performances of data.

<sup>3</sup> Both extremely problematic – from our perspective – categorizations were accepted at the insistence of our PAR advisory board who explained that even though all of the respondents are from the USA, they do not always identify as 'American'.

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