

Emergent Voices of MENA American Youth: What They Are Saying

Sylvia Nassar-McMillan, Ph.D.
Michael J. Morris Endowed Chair, 2014
Eastern Michigan University

Professor & Program Coordinator of Counselor Education
North Carolina State University
snassar@ncsu.edu

Overview

- Project Background and Rationale
- Personal and Professional Interests
- National and International Perspectives
- EMU Emergent Voices Project & Objectives
- Local Study: Participants/Procedure; Analysis & Outcomes
- What it All Means
- Next Steps

Project Background and Rationale

- *MENA* used synonymously with *Arab*
- Post 9-11 & Arab Spring era
- Identity Development
- Acculturation
- Stereotyping/discrimination; microaggressions
- Need for empirical research

Personal and Professional Interests

- Born/raised in southeast Michigan/Detroit area
- OU, then EMU, first research paper (with ACCESS)
- 10+ years, articles, book chapters, training videos

U-Windsor International Symposium

- International scholars
- Acculturation processes
- Need for cross-cultural + collaborative research
- North Americans to take lead

EMU Morris Chair Award: *Emergent Voices*

○ Objectives

1. Local/Regional Interdisciplinary Collaborative Network
2. Focus Groups Training - EMU Faculty and Students
3. Local Groups of Adolescents and Young Adults (14-24)
4. Pilot Survey Instrument
5. National & International Networks of Potential Survey Administration Sites & Researchers
6. Community Outreach & Training

Emergent Voices/Michigan Study: Participants & Procedure

- Literature; “Expert” Survey
- *Think Tank* (advisory group)
- Parallel Focus Groups in Wayne and Washtenaw Counties
 - Central Academy (high school)
 - Jewish Family Services (recent immigrant group; post-high school age)
 - Eastern Michigan University [on-line; asynchronous]
 - ACCESS (high school group)
 - ACCESS (post-high school group)[on-line, synchronous]
 - UM Dearborn

Emergent Voices/Michigan Study: Focus Group Survey Instrument

- Questions about
 - Everyday environments and interactions
 - Sources of satisfaction, strengths and challenges
 - Solutions and support
 - Self-Identification

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Analyses

- Coder A
 - Grounded Theory (no pre-determined codes)
- Coder B
 - Phenomenological
 - Set of codes from literature, survey, *Think Tank* notes

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

- Acculturation

- “The way I see that is when they say Arab-American, they don't want it as a melting pot, they want it as a-- they want you to keep your culture and your way of living, just live in the same area - rather than in melting pot and lose your culture, and be accustomed to someone else's culture.”

- Identity

- “When we're in overseas, we're American. When we're here, we're Arab”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

- Societal Values

- “It just shows that being involved really, really helps. Because if you just stick with yourself or the people that you came with from your high school, your not really going to branch out and meet any new people and have different dialogues.”

- Supports

- “I think my family, my religion and myself.”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

○ Role of Family

- “I feel like when I go home when my parents are proud of me, that makes me happy. I mostly do things to make my mom proud, because she's done a lot of sacrifices for our family. I feel like whatever I do at school or at work, I'm giving back to my mom. That makes me very satisfied.”

○ Discrimination

- “In middle school, I knew a lot of the people who were in middle school from elementary school, but they still ended up treating me differently, because it wasn't like I was one of them anymore, I was the person with the headscarf. So I was-- sometimes it would get pulled off of me and stuff like that, and I would get called names. Even now, when I'm walking outside with my brother, I can still hear people saying like, “Terrorist,” and stuff like that. It's a lot different than before.”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

- Counteracting Stereotypes & Discrimination
 - “I personally think on most things it's education. I think people need to learn about everything, like about the scarf, about the conflicts and educate themselves before they just automatically assume things. I think that that would be the biggest solution and that's also the hardest solution though too, because a lot of people don't want to learn or a lot of people think that they already know and they don't.”
- Accomplishments/Achievements
 - “For me, because I do have big dreams that I really want to accomplish, the biggest stressful thought of it is that I won't be able to accomplish it.”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

- Impacts of Community

- “It’s probably a lot easier here in Michigan because there’s a lot of Arabs here.”

- Religion

- “Trying to live up to the expectations put forth by my father and put forth by religion in general, like certain things conflict, such as adhering to the American society and adhering to certain aspects of the Islamic religion.”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: Grounded Themes

- Social Networks

- “I don't really have any Arab friends. I have two Indian friends and Caucasian friends. I don't really have any Arab friends but they're all very aware that I'm Arab and they're very aware that I'm Palestinian.”

- Importance of Academics & Education

- “Education is a big thing, just making sure that you are able to support your kids so you don't struggle the way that they did - like my parents.”

Emergent Voices/Michigan: What it all Means (Students)

- All students – be bold! And, be allies!
- Don't be afraid to respectfully ask about and share cultural information
- Arab American students – be aware of generational and community differences
- Take pride in your biculturalism!

Emergent Voices/Michigan: What it all Means (Teachers/Counselors/Practitioners)

- Recognition of influences on day-to-day living
 - Family, religion, achievement, academics

Emergent Voices/Michigan: What it all Means (Scholars/Researchers)

- One size fits all will not work
- Mixed methods might be most promising for recognizing intra-ethnic diversity
- Qualitative or mixed methods best for cross-cultural collaborations

Emergent Voices/Michigan: What it all Means (Administrators/Policy makers)

- Recognize unique discrimination (profiling)
- Ally movements; diversity dialogs; cross-cultural inclusivity
- Recognition of values-based policies (e.g., Western/individualistic vs. non-Western/collectivistic)

Next Steps: National and International

- Open ended questionnaires
- On-line focus groups
- Recruitment for 18-25 age groups
- Social media recruitment

Questions

**Thanks for your interest and
support!**

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Acculturation	183
Immigration Experiences	38
Acculturative Process for the Individual	32
Gender Issues	29
Cultural Differences	22
Connection to Home Country	22
Acculturative Fears & Stress	10
Cultural Similarities	9
Acculturative Process – Society as a Whole	9
“Americanized” or “Americanization”	5

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Identity	130
Cross Cultural Identity	69
Arab-American	11
Religious Influence on Identity	10
American	4
Female	3
Female American	2
Including Arab Nationality	2
Arab Muslim American	1
Muslim Palestinian American	1

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Participant Values Related to Society	111
Participant Valuing Diversity	44
Engaging in Activism within their Communities or Settings	30
Engaging in New Experiences	21
Participant Acceptance of Others	16

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Support	88
Family as source of support & strength	88
Friends as source of support & strength	20
Religion as source of support & strength	19
Personal source of strength	7
Support groups	4
Support from others	3

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Role of Family	73
Desire to Please Family	18
Familial Expectations – stated or not	16
Role of family in passing on traditions and culture	10
Generational differences	9
Parents valuing a more diverse lifestyle	8
Parents valuing more traditional Arab lifestyle	8

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Discrimination Issues	73
Reflection on issue of discrimination	26
Negative or stressful personal experiences	19
Stereotype	19
Reflection on the development of discrimination/stereotypes	8
Somewhat positive experiences	5
Minority experiences	4

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
How to Counteract Discrimination/Stereotypes	71
Need to educate others	16
Importance of communication to foster open dialogue	14
Self advocacy	8
Importance of knowledge	7
Interest from non MENA about Arab culture	7
Need for public awareness	5
Equal or fair treatment	4
Hard work	4
Need for people to listen	2
Need for people to work together	2
“Allies”	2

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Accomplishment/Achievement	66
Goals	18
Motivation	9
Future Planning	9
Need to work hard to achieve	9
Fear of failure	1

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Impact of the Community/Surroundings	65
Intra Arab division	27
Inclusivity and diversity of the larger group	10
Judgment from within the Arab community	10
Attributes of highly Arab communities	6
Community engagement	2

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Religion	58
Religion as a stressor	12
Religious expectations	1

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Social Network	34
Friends	23
Work	11

Appendix

Theme / Subtheme	Number of References
Importance of Academics & Education	32