

COVER PAGE

Project Title:

Emergent Voices of Middle Eastern/North African American Youth: A Preliminary Focus Group Study and Small-and-Large Scale Infrastructure Development for Inquiry and Subsequent Democratic Transformations of Education and Society

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Project Summary:

Individuals of Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) descent in the US represent a population of approximately 3.5 million, including an increasingly high number of youth. Media and other

mainstream resources chronicle population-relevant socio-political events in domestic as well as global contexts. In a post-9-11 era this includes lingering perspectives on the actual 9-11 tragedy as well as more current world events such as the Arab Spring. Taken together, MENA youth of today face a myriad of unique adversities such as stereotyping and profiling, often leading to microaggressions and other harmful acts of discrimination. Empirically based, culturally competent practices are needed in order to foster the resilience of this population and, in turn, to empower these youth to navigate effective identity development processes.

The proposed project represents a 10 month initiative that will develop a protocol and corresponding training for interdisciplinary EMU faculty and students to conduct focus groups in southeast Michigan area educational institutions; develop interdisciplinary research networks of MENA scholars in the Southeast Michigan/Windsor area; provide opportunities for high school and college students to participate in focus groups exploring issues relevant to their identity development; finalize a pilot survey instrument for wide-scale (i.e., international) dissemination, identify a national and international networks of MENA scholars and prospective survey administration sites; and articulate specific funding sources to support full-scale national and international survey administration.

Anticipated Outcomes

- (1) local/regional interdisciplinary collaborative network of researchers focused on MENA (Arab) American youth issues in contemporary society;
- (2) network of EMU faculty and students prepared to orchestrate all facets of focus group development and facilitation across an identified array of educational settings (i.e., high school, college, university);
- (3) network of graduate students, ultimately with applied training on focus groups: including agenda-setting; recruiting and screening; facilitating and de-briefing; and analyzing data;
- (4) regional group of adolescents and young adults spanning local high schools, colleges, and universities, self-identified as youth of Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) ancestry who have participated in focus groups exploring issues relevant to their identity development in contemporary schools and society;
- (5) pilot survey instrument developed and normed on a US, southeast Michigan area based sample of MENA American youth, spanning high school and college ages;
- (6) national network of potential survey administration sites;
- (7) international network of researchers focused on MENA youth in contemporary society;
- (8) range of prospective grant funding sources

Problem Statement

Individuals of Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) descent in the United States are represented by a population of approximately 3.5 million, including an increasingly high number of youth. Media and other mainstream resources accessed by today's youth chronicle population-

relevant socio-political events in domestic as well as global contexts. In a post-9-11 era this includes lingering perspectives on the actual 9-11 tragedy as well as more current world events such as the Arab Spring. Taken together, MENA American youth of today face a myriad of unique adversities such as stereotyping and profiling, often leading to microaggressions or other harmful acts of discrimination in their schools and communities. Empirically based, culturally competent practices are needed in order to foster the resilience of this population and, in turn, to empower these youth to navigate effective identity development processes. The precursor to these effective intervention strategies in schools and communities is an accurate assessment of the issues these youth face. The proposed project represents a critical first step in gleaning the perspectives of this youthful population as well as creating a viable infrastructure on local/regional, national, and international levels in order to accurately assess experiences, issues, and needs among youth of MENA ancestry.

Scope and Impact

The currently proposed project represents a ten month initiative that will (1) develop a protocol for faculty and students across EMU to conduct focus groups for various interdisciplinary research endeavors in southeast Michigan area high schools, colleges, and universities; (2) provide training in focus groups based research methodology; (3) develop interdisciplinary research networks of MENA scholars in the Southeast Michigan/Windsor area; (4) provide opportunities for local area high school and college students to participate in focus groups exploring issues relevant to their identity development; (5) finalize a pilot survey instrument for local, national, and international (i.e., cross-cultural) dissemination; (6) identify a national network of prospective survey administration sites; (7) identify an international network of MENA scholars and prospective survey administration sites; and (8) identify an array of specific funding sources for full-scale national and international survey administration.

Relative to the proposed methodology, the planned PI on this project, Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan, has extensive experience in focus groups methodology and has received funding support from the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Association for several projects utilizing focus groups. She has multiple publications describing focus groups methodology, scale development, and curriculum and program evaluation in education and social science.

Outcome-related Activities

(1) local/regional interdisciplinary collaborative network of researchers focused on Arab American youth issues in contemporary society will be developed. This outcome will be achieved through electronic listserves (e.g., professional networking site such as LinkedIn) serving as a communication tool between the interdisciplinary scholars. Participants from the University of Windsor Symposium on Arab Youth will be invited, as will known collaborators of these individuals. Through snowballing strategies (e.g., participants will be asked to share the invitation with their respective colleagues), a local and regional network will be created.

(3) network of EMU faculty and students will be prepared to orchestrate all facets of focus group development and facilitation across an identified array of educational settings (i.e., high school, college, university). EMU faculty across disciplines will be

contacted by project PI and GRA to identify both faculty and graduate students who are interested in either becoming trained in the use of focus groups research methodology *and/or* those who might be interested in the topic of the study (i.e., MENA American youth identity development). Group meetings will involve educating these individuals on the broader stages of instrument development and the use of focus groups in that process as well as training on the actual facilitation of social science/research based focus groups. Focus group facilitators (EMU graduate students and/or faculty) will actually conduct these focus groups during May 2014, spanning local high school, college, and university sites (including EMU). Subsequent team efforts will involve training in data analysis and report generation/dissemination stages of focus groups research.

(5) regional group of adolescents and young adults spanning local high schools, colleges, and universities, self-identified as Arab American youth will participate in focus groups exploring issues relevant to their identity development in contemporary schools and society. Study (i.e., focus group) participants will be identified through calls by PI and/or GRA to local sites to locate individuals or groups of MENA American youth and to ascertain the appropriate protocol across sites to advertise the focus group opportunity and request consent to participate.

(5) pilot survey instrument will be developed and normed on a US, Detroit area based sample of Arab American youth, spanning high school and college ages. Initial items will be compiled from researching various relevant existing instruments; this stage of the research will be conducted collaboratively with scholar-researchers from EMU (e.g., Dr. Kristine Ajrouch, Sociology) and University of Windsor (e.g., Dr. Julie Hakim-Larson), among others. Focus groups will be employed for using open-ended questions as well as applying questions derived from some of the survey items gathered from other instruments. Once the data analysis from the focus groups is complete, the pilot instrument will be ready for piloting in a local sample (beyond the scope of the current project period).

(6) national network of potential survey administration sites will be generated. Other large MENA American communities will be contacted (with key officials being identified through snowball strategies, beginning with our colleagues in the immediate local communities); specific commitments will be recorded for later, large-scale administration of the survey (beyond the scope of the current project period).

(7) international network of researchers focused on Arab youth in contemporary society will be initiated. Beginning with the participants of the University of Windsor Symposium on Arab Youth, snowball strategies will be utilized to gather contact information and interest from MENA scholars world-wide; these individuals will be engaged similarly to the process described in outcome (1) above. MENA countries where there are no individuals readily identified may be explored through governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in those countries.

(8) range of prospective grant funding proposal options will be explored. Engaging services of the research offices at EMU and NC State, various prospective funding sources will be identified and program officers consulted about the viability of applying

for future funding for the pilot and national administration stages of the instrument developed, as well as subsequent international administration stages.

Principal Investigator Biographical Statement

Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan has been recognized on national and international levels for her work with MENA populations. She received (along with Dr. Julie Hakim-Larson, at the University of Windsor) the Best Practices in Research award from the American Counseling Association for her seminal work with MENA therapists in the Greater Detroit Metropolitan area leading to a still often-cited article in the *Journal of Counseling & Development* in 2003. Subsequently, in 2013, she received the American Counseling Association's coveted Extended Research Award for her sustained research and publication record on issues related to ancestry from the MENA regions. Dr. Nassar-McMillan is a prolific scholar with over 75 publications. She is often consulted as a content expert in this area and has served as an advisor to interdisciplinary organizations such as the American Psychological Association and the Arab American Institute Foundation's Census Information Center. Her most recent work in this area is an edited text entitled *Biopsychosocial Care of Arab Americans: Perspectives on Culture, Development, and Health* (Springer), integrating the works of prominent scholars across sociology, psychology, and medical fields; co-edited with Drs. Kristine Ajrouch (Eastern Michigan University, Department of Sociology) and Julie Hakim-Larson (University of Windsor, Department of Psychology). She has consulted and lectured in more than a dozen countries, most recently in Finland, Mexico, and Lebanon. Moreover, her previous work utilizing focus groups research methodology has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Association.