Masjids and Maple Leafs: The Influence of Media Culture on Muslim Young Adults’ Ethnic Identities in a Canadian Context

by

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the influence of media stories on ethnic identity development in Muslim Young Adults. Twenty Muslim young adults aged 18-25 residing in Ontario participated in a qualitative interview which focused on the influence of media stories on their ethnic identity. Participant narratives were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Findings suggest that master narratives about Muslims that are communicated through media stories tend to position Muslims as violent and scary. Participants described different perceptions and reactions in relation to these media stories, including prompting exploration and expression of ethnic identity, impacts on feelings of belonging and fear, the development of strategies for resistance and implications for current and possible life trajectories. Findings are discussed in relation to implications for future research.
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Introduction

Since the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, growing up as a Muslim in the Western world has been especially complicated. The turbulent political and social contexts that exist today promote wariness towards Muslims on the part of many people living in North America (Britto, 2008). The media often portrays Muslim men as terrorists and Muslim women as oppressed (Alsultany, 2012). These stereotypes do not lend well to educating others of the nuances of what it means to be Muslim and they have the potential for creating unsafe spaces for young adult Muslims trying to grapple with their identity in a White majority country. This project explores the question of how Muslim young adults in Canada construct identity in the context of media culture.

Over the past two decades, researchers have increasingly focused attention on the concept of ethnic identity and its development in adolescence and emerging adulthood (e.g., Flum, 1998; Syed & Azmitia, 2009 Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Ethnic identity encompasses cultural history, beliefs, and practices of a relatively well-defined group (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). For the purposes of this study, Muslims as a group will be defined as per this definition. An adolescent’s ethnic status has significant impact on his or her life, including their identity (Quintana, 1998). For adolescents of colour living in North America, they must come to terms with their ethnicity in the context of a White dominant society (Pahl & Way, 2006) which is rooted in European Christian tradition. High levels of commitment to ethnic identity are positively related with higher self-esteem in African America, Asian, Latino and Middle Eastern adolescents (Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1993; Phinney,
Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookins, & Seay, 1999). There is also research that suggests that in the United States, African American and European American adolescents demonstrate fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety and more positive self concept when they strongly identify with their ethnic identity (Yasui, Dorham & Dishion, 2004). Individuals who strongly associate with their ethnic identity are more resilient and able to protect themselves from racial discrimination (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007), using illegal substances, and engaging in violent and antisocial behavior (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006).

Research with Muslim-Americans suggests that identity development is complicated by individuals’ dual identities, as young people must make meaning of both their “Muslim-ness” and their “American-ness” (Sirin, Bikmen, Mir, Fine, Zaal, & Katsiaficus, 2008). At times these dual identities and the world views which they represent are in conflict. For example, while a majority of Muslims living in the United States endorse strong adherence to religious rites, traditions, and the idea that education must be accepted without question (Britto, 2008), the public education system encourages students to question, challenge, and think critically about the things they are learning (Sarroub, 2013). Flum’s (1998) work emphasizes that the development of ethnic identity in adolescents and young adults who are immigrants is an ongoing process of negotiating culture(s). The participants in his study expressed a sense of conflict about what aspects of their Ethiopian culture they should hold on to upon immigrating to Israel (Flum, 1998). Many participants found a way to deal with this struggle as most were committed to the well-being of their current community which greatly helped to anchor their identity (Flum, 1998). With this commitment, participants were able to “link their past
experiences in one cultural context and their current perception of themselves and future orientation in a different cultural context” (Flum, 1998, p. 157) in order to create an identity narrative they were comfortable with (Flum, 1998).

Research suggests that exploration of ethnic identity may be especially pronounced during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). For emerging adults who attend postsecondary institutions, the educational setting might also encourage identity exploration. In a longitudinal study examining change in ethnic identity during the college years among ethnically diverse students in the United States, Syed and Azmitia (2009) found that ethnic identity exploration and commitment increased over the four years. This suggests that exploration and commitment to ethnic identity was an ongoing process as the participants developed across emerging adulthood.

**Narrative Identity Processes**

This project is grounded in a narrative approach to identity, which emphasizes that identity is constructed and communicated through stories (e.g., McAdams, 1993) that are developed by the individual in interaction with culture (Breen, McLean, Cairney & McAdams, 2017; McLean & Breen, 2015). Narrative identity is constructed by integrating meaningful past events and an imagined future to create some sense of meaning and purpose at the present time (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This process provides a feeling of sameness, or continuity through time (McLean, 2015). Habermas and Bluck (2000) support that it is not until an individual reaches the adolescent stage of development that they typically begin to create stories that have causal and thematic coherence. It is at this time when an individual can make cause-effect statements about past events (causal coherence) and show more consistent themes or trends in their stories.
Having this capacity allows them to experiment with different ways to make sense of their earlier years, their relationships with parents, and their ethnic and religious roots (McAdams, 1993).

According to narrative approaches to identity, identity construction is a collaborative process between the person and the social world, both are in part responsible for the life story (Breen et al., 2017; McAdams, 1993; McLean, 2015). Similarly, Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001) emphasizes identity construction as a process of interactions between the person and other “selves”, including both other people and the individual’s various selves. These ideas have in part contributed to McLean and Breen’s (2015) conceptualization of the “narrative ecology of the self.” The narrative ecology speaks to the interactions between and influences of one’s personal, family, and cultural stories with the individual’s identity (Breen et al., 2017; McLean & Breen, 2015).

One aspect of the narrative ecology that has been emphasized in the identity literature is the “master narrative”. Master narratives are large cultural stories that convey social values, norms, and communicate the expected trajectory of how an individual should live their life (e.g., Habermas, 2010; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, 2015; McLean & Breen, 2014). Researchers have found that individuals try to align their personal identities with cultural expectations of what is considered a typical life course (Habermas, 2010; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The telling and retelling of dominant cultural stories (master narratives) causes these narratives to infuse, shape and inform personal narratives (Breen et al., 2017; McLean & Syed, under review). The presence of master narratives in personal narratives creates a shared narrative reality among
individuals, which contributes to their sense of belonging (Hammack, 2008). At the same time, personal narratives serve to support, extend, challenge, and/or maintain master narratives (Breen & McLean, 2017; Hammack, 2008). This interaction between culture and the individual positions the individual as an “active instrument” in the development of both culture and the self (McLean, 2015).

The media (e.g., books, movies, television, social media) is a primary vehicle for the communication and construction of master narratives (Breen et al., 2017). Work by Breen and colleagues (2017) has demonstrated that both emerging and middle-aged adults use stories that they hear and see through the media in the construction of self-identity. A few other research studies have similarly emphasized that the stories we encounter in the media influence the development of self and identity. For example, research conducted by Keith Oatley and colleagues (Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman, & Peterson, 2009; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009) has shown that reading fiction literature can increase social understanding and empathy and can result in fluctuations of self-reported personality traits.

Research on media influence on narrative processes is in its infancy and we do not yet have published research examining the intersection of master narratives encountered through the media and personal identity in minority samples. As suggested above, the present research was focused on Muslim young adults. Research with Muslim samples is especially relevant. There has been some limited work examining Muslim immigrants’ interactions with master narratives around Muslim identity (e.g., Brown, Brown & Richards 2015; Ozyurt, 2013), which suggests that master narratives exert a powerful influence on identity development in Muslim individuals. Ozyurt (2013) conducted a
A qualitative study examining the narratives of Muslim women in the United States and Netherlands on their processes of negotiating multiple master narratives. Ozyurt found that Muslim women in America felt the cultural and political environment in America allowed for a hybrid identity, being Muslim and American. Participants in Ozyurt’s study suggested that the ideals of American civic culture and Islam are highly compatible. On the other hand, Muslim women in the Netherlands felt they could not merge their identities into a coherent integrated self, due to the existence of a master narrative in the Netherlands that Islam is backwards in nature and oppresses its women (Ozyurt, 2013). Muslim women in the Netherlands had created a sense of self with the understanding that they needed to shift between their two lives (Ozyurt, 2013). Ozyurt found that master narratives either, (1) allow space to create a hybrid or integrated personal identity, or (2) result in the individual having to mediate between two narratives, two cultures, two lives (Ozyurt, 2013). It is important to note that either option can result in successfully managing multiple identity narratives (Ozyurt, 2013).

The present research built on past work by Ozyurt on master narratives and Muslim immigrant populations and on Breen and colleagues’ (2017) work on the interactions between media stories and personal identity to explore the development of self and identity in Muslim emerging adults living in Canada. This project focused on traditional media forms, including books, movies, magazines, TV shows, news et cetera. To some extent the media stories that people access are global but also unique to the countries they live in. This is suggested by the level of Muslim acceptance in different places in the world as reflected in Ozyurt’s study. There is good reason to suspect that the Canadian context is different from the narrative ecologies that Ozyurt’s participants
encountered in both the U.S. and the Netherlands. Canada prides itself on being a culturally diverse nation, a world leader in championing multiculturalism, and a country that is tolerant of individuals from any religious, ethnic, or racial background (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2016). There is a perception that Canada is relatively less affected by the global surge in anti-Muslim rhetoric and, according to relatively recent (2010) data, a majority of Canadians (83%) believe that Muslims make a positive contribution to Canada (Kymlicka, 2010). Further, the Canadian Government and Canadian people have shown their support for some Muslim groups by accepting 33,723 Syrian refugees since November 2015 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016a). Of the 33,723 Syrian refugees, 12,651 refugees have been privately sponsored, which means individuals or groups of people in Canada are taking the responsibility of helping refugees settle in Canada of their own volition (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016b).

Despite these signs of general acceptance of Muslim immigrants in Canadian society, it is likely that Muslim young adults who have immigrated to Canada find that there are various and perhaps competing master narratives to contend with as they construct their personal identity. Cultural narratives that may have guided their expectations, values, and day-to-day lives in their country of origin may be different from those that they encounter in Canada. Moreover, there are likely competing narratives around religion, and, specifically Islam, in a country where the dominant majority identify as Christian (67.2%; Statistics Canada, 2013) and the country has a strong orientation to separation of religion and public life. Research suggests that both 1.5 (individuals who move to a new country in their teenage years) and 2nd generation
immigrants are equally susceptible to the values and social structures of the host country and their country of origin (Harper, Zubida, Lavi, Nakash, & Shoshani, 2013) therefore, for this study, both 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants will be included.

**Objectives**

The current study explored the interplay of media and ethnic identity in a group of immigrant Muslim young adults. The guiding questions were as follows:

1. What are master narratives around Islam and Muslims in the media?
2. How do master narratives encountered in the media effect the development of ethnic identity?
3. How do master narratives encountered in the media effect one’s sense of belonging?

**Methods**

**Participants**

Following ethics review and approval (Appendix A), participants were recruited for this project via informational flyers posted on Facebook, on my personal Facebook page and various university Muslim student association web pages, and emailed through University of Guelph’s listservs, including one for international students and the Family Relations and Applied Nutrition departmental listserv (Appendix B). Snowball sampling was also used as it is successful in recruiting difficult to access participants such as Muslims (Weiss, 1994). Participants were asked to tell others who may be interested about the study. Twenty participants (ages 18-25; mean age = 22.75) were recruited for this study. There were 11 female and 9 male participants, with participant birthplaces
including: Canada \((n = 9)\), Pakistan \((n = 6)\), USA \((n = 2)\), Egypt \((n = 1)\), Afghanistan \((n = 1)\) and Saudi Arabia \((n = 1)\).

To be eligible for this study, (a) either the participant or their parents had to have immigrated to Canada; (b) identify with being Muslim; and (c) were between the ages of 18 and 25. All participants that expressed interest in this study met the criteria; no participant was turned away.

**Procedure**

Interested participants contacted the researcher, upon which an email script (Appendix C) and letter of consent (Appendix D) was sent to participants. Participants were given the option of Skype or in-person interviews. With the advancement of technology and the internet, Skype provides a feasible alternative to face-to-face interviews (Hanna, 2012). All participants chose to do a Skype interview.

Participants participated in an interview with the researcher which ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes in length \((\text{mean time} = 67 \text{ minutes})\). The interview was a semi-structured interview based on a media studies interview protocol used by Breen and colleagues (2017). The interview protocol explored participants’ conceptions of the influence of media stories on their sense of self and identity. The protocol was modified to include questions of media influences on ethnic identity (Appendix E). The interview began with gaining verbal consent to participate in the study, some demographic questions, followed by a narrative warm up. Participants were then asked about key scenes in their life story, media stories, Muslim identity, and finally the interview ended with a reflection (Appendix E). Participants were offered $10 in compensation for their
participation in the interview and encouraged to pass along the author’s contact information to individuals they thought might be interested in participating in the study.

**Reflexivity**

My personal experiences with media, my identity, and living in Canada were the inspiration for this research. I went to a private, International School in Pakistan and immigrated to Canada for my undergraduate studies. Western media has been a big part of my life—books, movies, TV shows, and news made up my media experiences. Often I was presented with narratives of what it is to be Muslim that differed from my own experiences. This resulted in an internal conflict while I tried to find common ground between my personal narratives and the ones I was being exposed to. I wondered if some of the challenges I am faced with as a Muslim young adult striving to integrate various parts of my identity were mirrored by other Muslim young adults.

While this research is grounded in my own experience, I wanted to be as open as possible to learning from others’ experiences and not to assume that my experiences were the same as other Muslim young adults. I did not want the details of my upbringing or path to identity construction influence my participants. Therefore, the only personal detail that I shared with the participants was that I am a Muslim immigrant; noted in the recruitment email script (Appendix C).

My challenge in conducting this research was to recognize my own experiences and perceptions and to be impartial during interviews so that the research could shed light on experiences and perceptions that were both similar and different to my own. With this in mind, I adhered to the interview protocol as closely as possible (Appendix E), only asking participants to describe something in more detail or share how an experience made
them feel. Every so often, I would reiterate something my participants explained to ensure that I understood their perceptions rather than assuming meaning based on my own experiences, beliefs and assumptions.

**Analysis**

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. I reviewed the transcripts while re-listening to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy of the transcripts. An overall general thematic analysis was conducted with the data according to the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). A thematic analysis is useful for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In part, this study aimed to identify patterns of influences of media on identity construction and specifically narrative identity in Muslim young adults. As a result, a thematic analysis was deemed appropriate. This process was further refined to include memos and the use of the qualitative program NVivo 11 (*NVivo*, 2015).

In order to familiarize myself with the data, I reviewed the transcripts multiple times while writing memos on recurring, unexpected and expected narratives, and potential codes. With keeping the research questions in mind and using NVivo (*NVivo*, 2015) to provide line numbers for the transcripts, I reviewed the transcripts line-by-line. The interview questions focused on topics about positive and negative media stories in general versus specific to Muslim identity, family stories, beliefs and values, and being a Muslim in Canada. My initial interest was to collect data on media and family story influence on identity. However, my advisor, Dr. Andrea Breen and I deemed it appropriate to limit the scope of this project to keep the project manageable for a Masters thesis by looking specifically at media influences on the participants’ “Muslim identity”.
There is some evidence (eg. Breen and colleagues, 2017; Ozyurt, 2013) that master narratives can impact identity in minority populations and that media is a useful tool through which to access dominant cultural stories. Therefore, I analyzed the data pertaining to the following questions: (a) “Could you think about a book movie, TV show, something on the news, that has had an influence on how you see yourself as a Muslim?”; (b) “Have you watched anything, read anything, heard anything that has had a positive/negative effect on your Muslim identity?”; and the following questions only if the answers referenced being Muslims or Islam (c) ”can you remember a specific media story, so something you heard, saw or read that influenced how you understand your identity?”; (d) “can you think of a book, movie, TV show, news story that has had a positive effect on your identity?”; and (e) “Has there been any media form that has had a negative effect on your identity?” (Appendix E).

I reviewed the data and began grouping them by similar ideas or concepts; a narrative perspective and my research questions informed the initial codes and themes. I used the software program Inspiration (Inspiration, 2010) to group and visualize the initial codes and themes. With the help of my advisor, Dr. Breen, the themes and codes were further refined through ongoing analysis into the themes and subthemes which are presented in the next section of the paper.

**Results**

Before presenting the results, I would like to highlight that, while there was overlap in participant responses regarding media influences on their identity, there were substantial individual differences in how participants interpreted things they saw and
heard in the media. As such, I will be presenting not only the similarities in responses, but also the diversity in responses that participants shared.

Participants chose their own pseudonyms, which will be used to report their narratives.

The themes and subthemes will be presented in order of the research questions. I will first present what the dominant media stories are. Then I will present the various ways these master narratives influence participant ethnic identity. Participants talked about how they explored their ethnic identity, how that sometimes led to resistance and taking on the social role of Ambassadors of Islam, how media stories influenced their understanding of their beliefs and values, and how media stories present current and possible life trajectories. Finally, I will present how master narratives influenced these participants’ feelings of belonging.

Master Narratives

The first research objective of this study was to determine, what the master narratives around Islam and Muslims in the media are. In making the determination that something is a “master narrative,” I focused on portrayals that participants suggested were dominant in the media. As will be described below, media portrayals described by participants tend to focus on Muslims as frightening and radical, suggesting a dominant master narrative about Muslims as dangerous and scary. There were also alternative narratives presented by some participants, which positioned Muslims as victims and Muslims as positive contributors to society.

Muslims as frightening and radical. Participants recalled physical attributes of Muslims in movies as well as in the news that supported a view of Muslims as dangerous
and threatening. Aladdin said media made “assumptions about Muslims”. After describing scenes from the movies Iron Man and Argo, Aladdin stated:

The way that that movie [Argo] presented specifically the Irani population um, was kind of shocking in the way that like they used certain footage that wasn’t real but that also merged it with stuff that was doctored and like certain music that they had playing in the background to give an eerie sense of certain other like, people they showed on screen. Or even like other movies generally they always feature the Muslim guy as the bad guy and then typically be bald as well um or bearded for sure, and like for example Iron Man was another one where you have the terrorist group and then like the guy has a vicious scar across his face um and it just adds to that idea that like Muslims are supposed to look scary… I don’t know if that was necessarily that’s what they were going for but like that was the image that was presented. (Aladdin, male, 22)

In addition to negative movie presentations of Muslims, participants suggested that news reports highlight Muslims as dangerous and, especially, as terrorists. Azaan stated that:

There have been several headlines um you know just in general about terrorism and Islam and Muslims… And it’s recurring and you know stations like Fox News will do anything that they can to jump onto the words Muslim and terrorism and put them together. (Azaan, male, 21)

These presentations have “spiral[ed] into [a] fear” of Muslims (Azaan).

**Muslims as victims.** Some participants also detailed master narratives that position Muslims as victims. For example, Dean recalled watching a fictional movie about two brothers and their experiences in a post 9/11 world:

It was a story about how their lives had started off very similarly, but after uh, that attack, they – their lives took very different turns. One of them became very radicalized, one of the siblings became very radicalized, and one of them became, uh he became a prisoner of uh, I think, it must have been the United States, from uh, from – from a point of view where he was mistakenly put under capture. And it’s sort of told a story of how people may have been treated after-post 9/11 in terms of if they were Muslim for example, it told a story of how different people with different experiences, some of those experiences were of being radicalized, or some of them were being tortured in inhumane or unjust reason. (Dean, male, 22)
Dean’s quote suggests that media portrayals may include both stories about Muslims as radicals (similar to the quotes provided above) and stories about innocent Muslims being victimized because of their religion. In a news story that Ammu recalled, innocent people were targeted because of their faith:

There was um, a guy who was a dentist and he was in dental school and his wife was also in dental school. And I don’t know if you remember, it was, um, in their neighbor who was a white man who hated Muslims. So he just showed up to their house and killed the husband and the wife and their younger sister. and um, and I thought that was like really tragic because these people were like, pretty much like the perfect human beings—they were in dental school, they did so much charity work and they dedicated their whole lives to like, you know like, give back to community and then someone just because they hated their religion, they came and he shot these young people who were in their 20s. (Ammu, female, 24)

Ammu perceived this as a hate crime but mentioned that “the police did not and still did not describe that as a hate crime.” By stereotyping Muslims as scary or radicals, it results in all Muslims being perceived as such and as outlined in the narratives above, they end up becoming victims of these perceptions (Alsultany, 2013).

**Limited menu of characters to choose from.** Based on participant responses, it seemed that Muslim media portrayals were rather one-dimensional, and often racist. This idea was expressed in the following excerpts from Ammu and Aladdin:

You hardly ever see brown people in the media and if you see them they’re either very typical brown people with accents and stuff or like, the Mindy project—that show where it’s like a brown woman but her behaviour and everything is like a typical like a typical white girl…There is nothing Indian about her… brown people or Muslims are very like misunderstood but the white majority and I guess it kind of unconsciously creates an us versus them type of image in my head. That oh we are misunderstood, they don’t understand us, they just stereotype us. (Ammu, female, 24)

Even when you have a movie that has like, brown characters in it.. those “brown people” are actually played by white actors um and this was something that I found odd just in the sense that like, it takes that “othering” to another level. And it’s like sure now you’re portraying actual Muslim people as the bad guys. so, now you’re doing that but you’re also then taking it a step further that like the
Muslims in the story that are good can’t even be played by Muslims they have to be played by white people. (Aladdin, male, 22)

Ammu pointed out that Muslim or “brown” representation in the media is limited. And, when Muslims were included in media stories, they were either portrayed as having accents or no ties to their culture. There were no middle or neutral expressions of what it meant to be Muslim or “brown”. It is important to note that not all Muslims are “brown” and the association here that “Muslim” equals “brown” is Ammu’s perspective. Aladdin mentioned a different kind of Muslim representation in the media. He referred to the stereotype of Muslims been seen as terrorists, but also realized a more subtle presentation of Muslims. Even if the Muslim character was good, the good can only be represented by a “White person” in make-up. According to these participant responses, there was an apparent lack of truthful or relatable Muslim characters in the media.

**Positive master narratives surrounding Muslims in media.** Although it was discussed infrequently in the interviews, it is noteworthy to mention that some of the participants recalled positive narratives about Muslims in the media. For example, MA (female, 22) described watching a news story about a Muslim community helping a Jewish community raise money to rebuild their synagogue and she said “it felt good”. For her, this kind of positive news story was rare and “it doesn’t happen enough”.

A subset of participants mentioned positive media stories about the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader and Imam of a small Muslim community called Isma’ilis. For example, Jen said:

So within our community we have a spiritual leader who’s known as the Aga Khan and um, and I guess one of the events that positively influenced me was when he made an address to parliament, I think it was 3 years ago 2014. …I think like though the media it kind of uh, we were able to um, share this moment, this event with the outside world… it positively impacted me because I feel like it was
um, putting our, who we are on the map. ...and then also showing what we stand for, but not being afraid of who we are. And then also, simultaneously recognizing how um, how we fit within the political uh environment, right? Not just like a spiritual, religious type of environment… and that we were recognized. I think recognition is probably one of the biggest things so people know who we are, and we establish a sense of presence in the Canadian government and you know, to reach out to Canadians at large. (Jen, female, 25)

Jen saw the Aga Khan’s address to the joint session of the Parliament of Canada as a momentous occasion where she as a Muslim could share her values with others and be recognized as a positive force within Canadian society. In a similar vein, Amanda recalled the Aga Khan’s address to the Parliament of Canada, as well as public buildings such as the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto as sources of pride for her:

Because um the Aga Khan has done a lot um, over time and specially with new building being built in Toronto and Canada that are like very visible um, and open to the public and it’s like, a lot more people are are are understanding that oh that this is the Aga Khan’s building and he spoke at the –what’s it called—that address in front of the whole parliament, so it’s like, it gives you like a lot of pride but also more responsibility. (Amanda, female, 21)

The visibility of her Isma’ili community via these buildings and the address to the Parliament of Canada were positive portrayals of her community, but she also touched upon how this visibility caused feelings of responsibility in being a member of the community.

Generally, participants identified narratives that were fairly simplistic and generally negative. Some focused on victimization, while some Isma’ili participants identified positive media stories specifically associated with their community.

**Ethnic Identity**

The second research objective of this study was to determine how master narratives effect the development of ethnic identity. In this section, I will present: how media stories prompt exploration of ethnic identity, how exploration can lead to
resistance, how media stories influence participants’ social roles, how media stories help individuals understand their beliefs and values in regards to their ethnic identity, and finally how media stories provide current and possible life trajectories.

**Media stories prompt exploration of ethnic identity.** There were participants who described grappling with how they understood their ethnic identity versus how others understood it. This tension pushed them to explore and understand the aspects of their ethnic identity that were being presented in a negative light. For example, in Ali’s case, he wanted to know if there was any merit to what he heard about Islam on the news:

I think a lot of the stuff on the news um, where people just kind of throw out accusations of things of what they’ve read one or two radical things about what they heard in the Quran. Or someone something said, I think that a lot has kinda made me question it. And kinda sometimes go look for either said passage to see what my interpretation of that context would be. (Ali, male, 21)

Peter too, questioned his understanding of Islam after interacting with media stories about Muslims:

One of the first few times that I heard about this, and like am I missing something, Is my religion really not that peaceful, or um, like am I missing a big point? Am I actually supposed to go killing these nonbelievers? What’s the deal, right? Um, but then, the thought process was that, maybe I should educate myself on what my religion is…So I started educating myself on that. And then I learned that, no there’s nothing wrong with me! (Both laugh) it’s just how people [Muslim extremist groups] perceive it in a way, in an extremist way. (Peter, male, 25)

These excerpts suggest that negative media stories of Muslims pushed participants like Ali and Peter to actively search for answers about the teachings of Islam.

**Exploration can result in resistance.** Some participants resisted the dominant cultural stories surrounding Muslims. The following excerpt from Ellie illustrated this kind of resistance:

It does bother me, like hearing something about ISIS, [on the news] I wanna like, oh like!! I get so frustrated because I’m like it’s such a mis-representation of my
faith. And it’s not even my faith specifically, but just the whole idea of Islam generally. It bothers me how there are people out there [ISIS] who are doing these things and like, are doing it in the name of Islam and stuff and I’m like, no that’s that really how it goes!... It’s unfortunate for the rest of the Muslims around the world because how can we really show what our faith is about, when we’re constantly overshadowed but what they [ISIS] claim to do. (Ellie, female, 21)

Her frustration was echoed by other participants including, Peter, who said that it was “extremist culture that’s just being portrayed” and that the people are carrying out violent acts in the name of Islam were “definitely crazy cus religion doesn’t tell you to go kill people because they’re like promoting a certain faith or not” (Sophia, female, 24). These participants rejected the narratives presented in the media stating that this was not what a majority of Muslims believe in or how they behave.

**Media stories influence participants’ social roles.** In resisting media stories, some participants found themselves in the position of “Ambassadors of Islam”. Some gladly took that role, while others were tired of being assigned that role by the people around them. For example, Ellie was happy to explain her faith to those who were unfamiliar with Islam:

> I remember always being very and even in adolescence as well, I remember being happy to talk about my faith just because I’m so proud about the faith that I come from. And I was always happy to talk about it and explain it to people who didn’t understand it as much. And then over the past few years, like I find, I find myself like, not defending or fighting for my faith, but I do find myself maybe a little more passionate talking about it… I think when I hear those stories … It makes me want to talk about it, it makes me want to like educate…people. (Ellie, female, 21)

Amanda also described wanting to be an ambassador of her faith:

> More people are becoming more aware of Islam. Maybe in a negative way but also a positive way, so either way I wanna be good like a good ambassador of the faith… (Amanda, female, 21)
Azaan found that, because he was Muslim, his non-Muslim friends would come to him for answers about what they would see in the news and he described feeling “a responsibility” to educate others:

I think first and foremost, it made me realize that I have a responsibility to myself and my community to educate myself on how to respond to these questions. Um... it made me realize that, you know, I have to do my part in knowing how to deal with these questions and how to answer. Because if I say something that is not accurate then it could be taken completely the wrong way, and I’m responsible for that.

Roger tried to be an ambassador of Islam by overcompensating for the negative stereotypes presented in western media about Muslim men:

I’m more conscious of the fact that I am a minority now than I was before. But, I don’t think that’s necessarily the result of those documentaries. I think they played a part together. It’s not one thing that happened and I stopped doing this immediately. I mean one thing I recognized that maybe I might be a person who is seen and misogynist and sexist. So I don’t know, I think I make a conscious effort not to be that in case that perception happens. And as horrible as it sounds, I can understand why they would think that, but it would be an extra step that they would need to take to accomplish. (Roger, male, 22)

He recognized that the media portrays men or Muslims in a certain way, and would strive to ensure that he acted in ways that communicated that he should not be viewed according to stereotypes of Muslim men as “misogynist and sexist”.

Other participants, like Zahra, resisted the role of “Ambassador of Islam”:

I get frustrated that I have to explain it to people. And I’m not explaining it to people. You can read between the lines, you can see through the media, it is not my job to convince everyone. (Zahra, female, 25)

Zahra described being “frustrated” by having to explain herself and her religion to people.
Even though some participants were passionate and keen to talk about their faith and educate others, some participants rejected the role that others expected them to occupy.

**Media stories help individuals understand their beliefs and values.** Before presenting the findings within this section, I would like to highlight that there are a plethora of narratives about “Western” cultures. Media that the participants engaged with are not representative of Euro-centric societies, similar to how media presentations of Muslims are not valid for all Muslims. The various media story narratives that exist about a Western life style are not the focus of this paper, but I felt that the reader should be aware that the participants are viewing a possible stereotype of “white” or “western” that people of those backgrounds may disagree with.

Exposure to western media prompted participants to reflect on their personal beliefs and values and the ones they perceived as “Western” in the various media forms they were interacting with. Janice told of how she viewed her beliefs and values in comparison to what she was watching on TV:

> It was very salient to me, the life style of westerners though the media… I watched for example a movie, or you know um, some TV show or something cus we watched a lot of English shows. It was relevant to me but it was also not relevant to me, like oh they kiss on the streets and I wondered that is so strange that like, you know, I would never see myself doing that. Or they sleep together, or oh they um, um they go on vacation together in this, you know, in this TV show … it wasn’t foreign to me that this actually happens, but it was more like like um, I…like, this was kind of how I looked at it and said to myself and said oh I would never do that. (Janice, female, 25)

Janice was familiar with “Western behaviors” but could not see herself incorporating these behaviors into her way of life, and similarly, Ammu talked about how the media
she interacted with normalized behaviors or values that did not align with her personal ones:

Just seeing like these shows and they’re like these people under the age of 18 and like they’re like sleeping around with so many people and like sex is just so normalized in these teenager shows. and I think that probably have an effect on me growing up because in my head I was like oh that’s just something normal and that just stuff you do in a relationship when that’s not necessarily true… it made me more aware of the fact that even though media normalized a certain culture, or media normalized certain things … it made me realize that no that’s not how it has to be and that’s not how it naturally is. There is an alternative way to live your life…and it made me like, want to practice that life instead. (Ammu, female, 24)

Although Ammu did not mention what “alternate way” she would like to live her life, she rejected a relationship narrative that the media conveyed as commonplace and preferred to find a different narrative to follow. Janice and Ammu recognized that the media portrayed values or behaviors different than their own but did not need to incorporate those into their identities.

James’ perspective differed from that of Janice and Ammu in how he interpreted the values he saw in the media versus his own. He described his process as

Like what are some of the tradition or values that religion has taught you, and you take that with what you like from Canada, and then you go back and look at media outlets, a lot of this is nonsense…there is no point in really listening to it. (James, male, 24)

To James, media offered values that were “nonsense” or “biased” so he did not let it have “much of a negative impact… because I know what I believe in.”

**Media stories present current and possible life trajectories.** Participants presented narratives about how some media stories validated their current life experiences. These media stories provided an indication of how life can unfold and participants found this relatable. There was a range of media that participants reported interacting with, including movies, TV shows and articles in online magazines.
Participants described feeling connected with media stories that were about Muslims or resonated with other aspects of their selves. For example, Janice talked about watching a movie that resonated with her own experiences as a Muslim:

I watched this movie when I was going through my first relationship... it was about this woman who is an immigrant. And she dates a white man. And you know, it's just sort of shows the transitioning period of her not being okay—and I really identified with everything she went through, like she wasn’t okay with it, and having trouble with her brother which is the same thing I was going through, her family, religion, the fact that she’s Muslim and he’s not, dating him, seeing him, kissing him, all these things. And so, the portrayal of this woman on TV, I could really relate to and I—finally consolidated my identity and there are other people like that who are going through the same thing so I can identify with people who are just interested in other people of other race and color or religion kind of thing... hopefully it will be okay one day [in referring to having an “atypical” relationship]. I haven't gotten there yet. But hopefully it will be one day. (Janice, female, 25)

Janice found a movie that mirrored her life at that point in time quite closely and she suggested that it had a real impact on “consolidating” her identity. Azaan also described media impacting his identity development. In the following excerpt Azaan described how a magazine article he read about “3rd Culture Kids” validated his experience of being a “jack of trades but master of none”:

Um, it was the idea of the 3rd culture kid...my identity is kinda of like mixed because I was born in Canada, but grew up a little in Tanzania and moved back and then there’s all this Indian culture and Muslim identity, so it’s like a real clash of things. ... A lot of these kids feel that, you know they they are what’s it called, a jack of trades but master of none. So it’s kinda of like a confusing feelings, so you relate to everything but you can never truly feel at home... so that’s that’s where I felt the media kinda of validated my experiences about this. Um, that like oh that I’m not alone in this and that other people feel that too. (Azaan, male, 21)

Most of his life he felt that he didn’t “really belong in any one particular place” and the stories he read about in the magazine article helped him understand that there were others whose experiences were similar to his own.
Zahra was not able to connect with Western media so she turned to watching Pakistani television shows. One particular show (she could not remember the name), encouraged her to be a strong female provider in her family:

One girl wanted to be a writer and she really couldn’t do it, so she kept trying and then she made it big and then she supported her whole family and it kind of showed to me how, like. You know women in Pakistani cultures can also support their family and be like the backbone. It has shifting now where it’s not only the males or boys now that can you know be the support hands to their parents… Internally it had an effect on me because I am like, the oldest daughter and the only daughter and like you know, it like, I am kind of like I feel like I am the backbone of the family. And like okay I see that this girl is doing, and it makes me feel that I am on the same track you know what I mean. (Zahra, female, 25)

Zahra’s description of this television show suggested that it had an impact on her “internal” sense of herself. She related the media story to her role in the family (“the backbone”) as well as the “track” her life story is taking. This suggests that the media story that Zahra interacted with may impact multiple aspects of her identity.

The second objective of this study was to determine how the media stories in media influence ethnic identity and as demonstrated by the excerpts above, participants recalled various narratives. These narratives touched on participants exploring their ethnic identities, how exploration can result in resistance, how media narratives influence participants’ social roles, how participants understand their beliefs and values, and how media stories provide current or possible life trajectories.

Be/longing

In the face of the dominant media stories about Muslims, participants’ narratives touched on ideas of being different, feeling unsafe as a Muslim, and some sense of acceptance.
You are different, you don’t fit in. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States sparked the othering of Muslims in the eyes of Jen and Zahra. Their excerpts described how Muslims were no longer accepted in North American societies:

I think I’d have to draw upon the most recent event of um, in the States how Donald Trump had the Muslim ban on…I think that was the most astounding, realizing that you know what, it actually happened. um, and then hearing you know, on the news um, the voices and the stories of the people who were stuck and detained and not allowed to pass freely into the country, simply because of the country that they’re from…how you can go from being accepted to not accepted at all, accepting at all. Um, I think that you know, the dramatic and very bold stance that Donald Trump took on you know, banning Muslims was astounding and almost like you-you-you-you-you knew it might happen, but when you actually saw it happen it was a huge shock. (Jen, female, 24)

Like Donald Trump kind of saying that they’re banning the Muslims from 5 majority countries. I think that was like, a big shock because that is the president of the most powerful country identifying and singling out Muslims. So that was when I was like, if now he can say it, I’m pretty sure it’s giving like other people who were holding back. Now they’re gonna go for it all, you know what I mean? (Zahra, female, 25)

Both participants talked about how people were being singled out and restricted from being able to move freely between countries simply because they were Muslim.

Similarly, Ammu talked of how she cannot be seen as an equal in the eyes of others, therefore, language used to describe a hypothetical violent act committed against her would not be seen as a Hate Crime; whereas if the opposite were to happen, Muslim on non-Muslim crime, words such as “terrorism” or “terrorist” would be used. Reflecting on watching a news story, Ammu said:

I guess it made me realize that even though I identify as myself as a Canadian instead of a Pakistani, no matter how much good I could do for the society or how much I study or how much what, whatever I do, if someone was to attack me because of my faith, it will probably not be labeled as a hate crime or if the opposite were to happen. If a Muslim was to attack a white person cus of their faith it would automatically be called a terrorist attack. … I guess it made me feel like a little bit of an outsider. That even if I’m raised in this country I will always be different than the other person. (Ammu, female, 24)
These kinds of narratives demonstrate that some participants of this study feel like they do not belong because of their ethnic identity. Even though they might not be direct targets of the Muslim Ban or a hate crime, they are in a position to be discriminated against or excluded. These excerpts provide examples of how participants feel different because of the media they engage with, which is the third objective of this study (the influence of media on an individual’s feeling of belonging).

**It’s not safe.** The potential to be discriminated against or excluded existed before Donald Trump took office. The 9/11 attacks for some participants resulted in a fear for safety. This fear led Peter, who was living in Saudi Arabia at the time of the 9/11 attack, to earnestly believe:

Oh my God is the US going to come kill us. We didn’t even know what had happened, because it was just such a system of shock and back then I was still a kid, and I was like holy shit we’re gonna die. (Peter, male, 25)

Even though Pat did not think she would be physically harmed, she was afraid of being verbally abused or accused:

I wouldn’t really want to tell people that I’m a Muslim because I knew that, you know, there was were consequences and the repercussions of it… People not accepting me for the person I am. That people would be calling me names, or you know, saying that oh it’s you guys and the reason why, you know so many people died. You guys think, you guys think this way….or that we’re bad people. Cus I know a lot of the times, depending on where you live, a lot of the times we make a generalization, and that’s what I was afraid of. (Pat, female, 24)

She believed that she would be blamed for something she did not do or accused for being a person she was not. At that time in her life, it was easier to conceal her identity to avoid feeling unsafe or threatened. The fear of Muslims, or Islamophobia generated by certain media has also had an impact on international travel. Azaan, stated that Islamophobia:
Kinda makes you feel like more anxious, and...and in any kind of setting there’s this... like, um, unsaid or ... or like mythical paranoia about it. like, just like, even walking to airports I feel like, I even though I have nothing to be scared of, I still feel scared and...you’re kind of trained or conditioned to feel a certain way because of what the media has done. (Azaan, male, 21)

Each of the above excerpts demonstrate participants responding in different ways. Peter feared for his life, Pat chose to hide her identity to avoid verbal confrontations, and Azaan carries a sense of anxiety with him. The harmful effect of media stories about Muslims on these participants has resulted in a genuine fear for their safety. As stated in the previous section, these narratives about fear provide more support in the ways an individual’s feeling of belonging is impacted by media stories.

I belong if you say so. Some participants did suggest that belonging was possible. For example, Zahra and Pat said:

When the whole ban thing happened, immediately there were people all over the airports and lawyers taking time out of their busy schedule I’m sure to do pro bono work and working with families. If that reaction was not there, I think he [Trump] would get much further than he is now. I had tears in my eyes, when I was watching it. I was like oh my God people care, people are good. I felt it made me more proud to be Muslim. (Zahra, female, 25)

I think it was a mosque in Ottawa or something like that where they [news outlets] were saying it was a Muslim that did it... and they [news outlets] called it a terrorist attack ... it was the Prime Minister or the President, it was probably Obama or Trudeau who clarified that it wasn’t a Muslim who did it...all these things happening around the world is not because of Muslims...Or because you know, they are doing it in the name of Islam. (Pat, female, 24)

For both participants, support from non-Muslims was needed to feel “proud to be Muslim” (Zahra) or to clarify perceptions of Muslims. Media stories that demonstrated ally-ship of non-Muslims were important for participants in order to feel a sense of acceptance or belonging.
Based on the narratives provided in this section, it is clear that an individual’s feelings of difference or belonging is linked to the media stories they interact with. I have described the different ways in how media influences one’s sense of belonging which was the third objective of this research. Participants are mostly made to feel that they are different and do not fit in, and this difference leads to a lack of safety. When given the opportunity to feel safe and accepted, it must come from an outsider of the community.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the ethnic identity of a young adult Muslim population in the context of their interactions with media stories. The guiding questions were: (a) what are some of the master narratives around Islam and Muslims that are communicated in the media?; (b) how do master narratives encountered in the media effect the development of ethnic identity?; and (c) how do master narratives encountered in the media effect young adult Muslims’ sense of belonging?

Master Narratives

It was unsurprising that the majority of narratives recalled by the participants in regards to Islam or Muslims were negative. Due to, in part, the 9/11 attack, heightened anti-Muslim rhetoric during the election of United States President Donald Trump, and growing unrest in Syria, media stories tend to portray Muslim men as terrorists (Alsultany, 2012). Negative portrayals in Canadian media stories may be similar to portrayals in other media cultures. In Britain, dominant media narratives portray Muslims conservative and sympathetic to terrorism (Brown, Brown, & Richard, 2015) and in the Dutch context, Islam is seen as backwards and oppressive of women (Ozyurt, 2013).
Participants in this study described dominant master narratives in the Canadian context as positioning Muslims as radical or scary but they also highlighted an alternative narrative of Muslims as victims. Alsultany (2013) noted that since 9/11 there was an increase of “Muslims as victims” representations in TV shows or news stories in the United States. Due to the heightened wariness of Arabs and Muslims, Muslims are often shown to be victims of the post 9/11 hate. This idea is illustrated by the news story recalled by the participant “Ammu” about a Muslim family being killed by a neighbor, but the attack not being called a hate crime. As sympathetic as a “Muslim as victim” portrayal may seem, it is situated in a narrative story in which it is the unfortunate expectation they will be victims due to the national security crisis caused by the 9/11 attacks (Alsultany, 2013).

Most commonly, media stories in Canada tend to portray Muslims in a negative light, however, some participants were able to find positive news stories of Muslims. For example, MA watched a news story of a Muslim community helping a neighboring Jewish community rebuild and raise funds for their synagogue that was burned down. Of this story, MA said: “just reading something good about Muslims and um, in the newspaper was a good feeling”. Similarly, Sophia L (female, 24) watched a news story of a Muslim man coming to the aid of people from non-Muslim communities in their time of need. When retelling the news story, Sophia L said: “Helping others….live like a simple life…this is more a peaceful religion”. Despite the over simplistic portrayals of Muslims in the media, some participants in the current study were able to engage with stories that resonated with their understanding of Islam and Muslims.
Although portrayals of Muslims as victims may contradict dominant portrayals of Muslims as violent, victim portrayals may in fact do little to change the dominant narrative of Muslims as violent (Alsultany, 2013). McLean and colleagues (McLean, Lilgendahl, Fordham, Alpert, Marsden, Szymanowski, McAdams, 2017) noted that, when trying to present an alternative narrative, the current master narrative is also reiterated—providing it with more power because it is still being referenced. This could explain why Alsultany (2013), Brown, Brown, and Richards (2015), and the current study all found that harmful master narratives of Muslims persist and have a significant impact on the individuals' interaction with others, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

**Identity**

The findings suggest that “Western” media has an influence on Muslim young adult’s ethnic identity. Participants described being prompted by media stories to explore their ethnic identity, which sometimes led to resistance or taking on a social role as “Ambassadors of Islam”. Media stories were also described as influencing participants’ understanding of their own beliefs and values and presenting current and possible life trajectories that participants could draw from. The idea of media stories influencing identity is aligned with findings reported by Breen and colleagues (2017). In their research on media stories and young adult identity they found that media stories influenced multiple levels of identity, including traits, relationships/social roles, values/beliefs, expectations for life trajectory and, in the case of participants from racialized and historically marginalized groups, the emergence of critical consciousness. The current study provides further evidence that media stories are important to identity
and that it can impact minority populations in some unique ways relating to the development of awareness of oppression and structural violence in society and the emergence of an orientation to resist these.

Resistance was an important part of the participants’ personal narratives. This was expected as participants had their own understanding of Muslims and Islam yet may have needed to manage the media stories of Islam and Muslims in the Canadian context, an idea that is supported by Ozyurt’s (2013) work with Muslim women in the Netherlands. The participants’ personal narratives about Islam and Muslim in Ozyurt’s and the current study were often in opposition with the narratives presented by the media they interacted with. In the current study, maintaining personal narratives about Islam and Muslims while challenging narratives about Islam and Muslims, put participants in a position to be an “active instrument” in developing their selves (by resisting) or the culture around them (by being ambassadors) (Breen & McLean, 2017; McLean, 2015; Hammack 2008). Participants positioned themselves as ambassadors or were positioned by others to take this role. While some participants gladly took on this social role, other participants felt burdened by needing to explain or defend Islam and the actions of other Muslims.

Media stories challenged participant understanding of their ethnic identity. However, upon active exploration of their ethnic identity, participants reconfirmed their existing understanding of their ethnic identity. McLean et al., (2017) found that regardless of marginalized or minority status of university aged participants in the United States, individuals who create alternative narratives to the master narrative are more likely to be engaged in active identity construction. Participants in the current study demonstrated they were rejecting dominant narratives and seeking alternative narratives
in the face of prevalent cultural stories about Muslims, which leads me to believe they are and continue to be in the process of constructing their ethnic identity. This active exploration was also seen in a study conducted by Syed and Azmitia (2009), where they found that exploration of the ethnic identity increased steadily over the college years. These findings suggest that media can play an important role in how individuals of minorities shape their identities, and that media can be the catalyst for exploration and cause for seeking alternative narratives.

**Belonging**

The negative portrayals of Muslims have real consequences for young adult Muslims. Ozyurt’s (2013) study offered some similarities to the participants and findings of this current study in regards to difference and belonging. The American-Muslim participants found that the environment in the United States was accepting of their ethnicity and provided them opportunities to combine aspects of their ethnic identity into their overall identity, whereas the Dutch-Muslim participants felt they could not combine their ethnic identity with one they presented in the public environment (Ozyurt, 2013). Canada’s push for diversity, multiculturalism, and support for immigration (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2016) set the scene for a similar cultural environment as proposed by the American-Muslim participants of Ozyurt’s study; however, the findings of the current study suggest that in the Canadian context there may be a combination of both types of experiences described in Ozyurt’s study.

Like the Dutch-Muslim participants, participants in the current study were faced with a negative narratives of Muslims that were quite inescapable. Some participants from the current study were at least able to challenge the dominant cultural story of
Muslims by constructing resistant narratives, however the participants did not perceive a complete acceptance of their ethnic identity by others as the American-Muslims from Ozyurt’s study did. This statement should be interpreted with caution as the current study only looked at media influences on ethnic identity.

Participants in the current study described that stories they encountered through the media contributed to a perception that they do not belong in Canadian society and they are not safe. According to Ozyurt (2013), the master narrative of Islam that exists in the Netherlands is that Islam is backwards and oppressive; this resulted in Muslims being excluded or marginalized. Although participants in the current study mentioned different media stories, negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims may similarly contribute to a sense of not belonging for the participants in the current study. The major difference in terms of belonging between the two studies, is that participants in the current study seem to have felt a genuine fear for their physical or emotional safety because of pervasive media stories which positioned Muslims as violent. This echoes Brown, Brown, and Richards’ (2015) study in which participants described feeling distressed by assaults to the Muslim aspect of their identity.

Overall, the present study has demonstrated that media stories about Muslims have an impact on Muslim young adults’ identity development. Participants of this study and possibly other Muslim young adults are developing their identities in a media culture where their ethnic identity is generally presented as negative. If Canada prides itself as being culturally diverse and a world leader in multiculturalism (Department for Canadian Heritage, 2016), then immigrant populations should not feel like they don’t belong or afraid. In order to succeed at being a world leader in multiculturalism, we need media to
develop and present a more varied and less stereotypic version of Islam and Muslims. Muslims young adults need a range of positive portrayals to interact with in their development of identity. Therefore, greater strides need to be made between accepting immigrants into Canada and actually providing safe environment where they can continue to construct their ethnic identity, which includes media culture. In the meantime, future research is required to better understand the impacts of identity development in this context.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to report for this study. The first limitation is the sample size. Although there was an almost equal number of male participants to female (9 male, 11 female), the sample size of 20 could influence the generalizability of this data. However, the aim of qualitative studies is not to generalize the results to larger populations (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). Qualitative studies present data that is complex and rich.

Another limitation of this study is that I belong to the same minority group I was researching. I strived to remain objective throughout the process of designing the study, asking the interview questions and analyzing the findings; however, undoubtedly my experiences and beliefs shaped this study. I followed the interview protocol as closely as possible, repeated information back to participants to ensure I understood their interpretation and not assuming my own in order to reduce my personal influence on the study.

The third limitation of the study is that it is a challenge to parse apart global media versus uniquely Canadian media. There were components of both types of media
in participant narratives, and although participants would be accessing media from all over the world, such was the case for Zahra (female, 25), news stories were certainly filtered through Canadian media. There was mention of specific Canadian events through the participant media stories but I cannot completely tease apart the Canadian media from global media.

The last limitation involved internet connection during Skype interviews. Due to weak internet connection, some skype calls disconnected mid-interview. This interruption impacted time available to complete the interviews once we re-established the connection.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

As briefly mentioned in the discussion section, further research could be conducted on identity development in the media context. This study focused on media influence on ethnic identity development of Muslims Young Adults. It would be interesting to explore what role media plays for individuals of other minority groups or cultures. It may be possible that individuals from other minority groups or cultures face similar stereotypic narratives that are one-dimensional in nature with little to offer for positive identity development. There may also be an impact on how others perceive their identity based on media presentations and subsequent interactions with outgroup members.

A component that could be included in future studies would be to explore what participants would have liked to gain from their media experience in regards to their ethnic identity. Participants in the current research study were very clear in the ways media misrepresented Islam and Muslims, and how these portrayals were not something
they could relate to. “Azaan” mentioned that “media has a responsibility” to disseminate accurate information, which is something he found they were not consistently doing. Answers to this question may provide better direction in how media stories need to change in order to better represent Islam and Muslims.

Lastly, as mentioned in the Analysis section of this paper, I focused on media stories in order to limit the scope of this study. I would like to look at the data pertaining to family stories and identity. McLean and Breen (2015) have suggested that an individual’s identity is influenced by various scripts or stories including those from media and family stories. It would be important to examine or compare what effect intersections of various stories have on the self. Since individuals have a multitude of sources to draw on for constructing their identity, it does not benefit identity research to look at only one aspect in isolation.

This study has provided valuable insight into the influences of media on ethnic identity of a minority population. The analyses suggest that media portrayals of Muslims tend to be scary or one-dimensional. These presentations in turn prompted exploration and expression of ethnic identity, beliefs and values, the development of resistance strategies, and impacted feelings of safety and belonging. While there is much research to do in regards to media and minorities, this study has offered some understandings of how media influences the identity of Muslim young adults.
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Appendix A

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS
Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research
Involving Human Participants

APPROVAL PERIOD: 07-Mar-2017
EXPIRY DATE: 08-Mar-2018
REB: Research Ethics Board – General
REB#: REB17-02-020
TYPE OF REVIEW: Delegated
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ANDREA BREEN
DEPARTMENT: Family Relations and Applied Nutrition
SPONSOR(S):
TITLE OF PROJECT: Narrative Identity and Media: What role does media play in the construction and expression of Muslim Young Adults' identity in the Canadian context?

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human participants in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition.

The REB requires that researchers:

- Adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB.
- Receive approval from the REB for any modifications before they can be implemented.
- Report any change in the source of funding.
- Report unexpected events or incidental findings to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
- Are responsible for ascertaining and complying with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements with respect to consent and the protection of privacy of participants in the jurisdiction of the research project.

The Principal Investigator must:

- Ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of facilities or institutions involved in the research are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.
- Submit a Annual Renewal to the REB upon completion of the project. If the research is a multi-year project, a status report must be submitted annually prior to the expiry date. Failure to submit an annual renewal will lead to your research being suspended and potentially terminated.

The approval for this protocol terminates on the EXPIRY DATE, or the end of your appointment or employment at the University of Guelph, whichever comes first.
Appendix B

MUSLIM YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

What for?
A research study on media and identity development

Who is eligible?
- Individuals who identify with being Muslim, ages 18-25, and must speak English and live in Ontario, Canada

What’s involved?
Participants will be asked to participate in an individual interview.

The interview will last about 1.5 hours and will focus on your experiences with media and your identity.

Who is the researcher?
The research is being conducted by Natasha Walji and is supervised by Dr. Andrea Breen from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. Natasha is a graduate student, who is also a Muslim young adult.

Why get involved?
You’ll be contributing to new research regarding identity development and media!

A $10 honorarium will be provided.

To find out more contact Natasha Walji (walji@uoguelph.ca) in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition.

REB#17-02-20
Appendix C

Recruitment Email Script

Subject: Recruitment for a research study on experiences of media and identity in Muslim young adults. REB#17-02-20

Dear __________

My name is Natasha Walji and I am a Master’s student at the University of Guelph in the Family Relations and Human Development program. I am also a Muslim young adult. I am conducting my research under the supervision of Dr. Andrea Breen in the Department of Family Relations & Applied Nutrition.

I am researching experiences of media and identity in Muslim young adults who have moved (or whose parents or grandparents) have moved to Ontario from another county.

- Do you identify with being Muslim?
- Are you between the ages of 18 and 25?
- Do you speak and understand English

If you answered yes to these questions, then please consider participating in this research study.

If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in an individual interview in person or through Skype. Questions will focus on your experiences with media and your sense of identity. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to skip any question that you are not comfortable answering. I expect that the interview will take about an hour and a half to complete. Interviews will be audio-recorded.

Participants will be given $10 e-transfer or PayPal transfer in compensation for participating.

If you would like to participate, or would like more information about the study, please contact me at walji@uoguelph.ca

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Natasha Walji, Hon BSc.

MSc Family Relations and Human Development candidate
walji@uoguelph.ca
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Narrative Identity and Media: What role does media play in the construction and expression of Muslim Young Adults' identities in the Canadian context?

We are conducting research to explore identity development and the influence of stories in the media.

We are inviting Muslim young men and women, ages 18-25 who are living in Ontario to participate in individual interviews.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore and further understand the role media has on the identity development of Muslim young adults.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in an interview with Natasha Walji, a graduate student at the University of Guelph. Questions will focus on your interactions with media and your understanding of your own identity.

The interview is expected to take about 1.5 hours. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. Your identity will remain confidential, although your e-mail address may be shared with University of Guelph Financial Services and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for Skype interviews. You will have the opportunity to choose a code name which will be used to identify your data.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

It is possible that you may feel stress or emotional discomfort if you choose to discuss experiences that were difficult for you. There are no other anticipated risks. You are free to skip over any question that you are not comfortable answering.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
There are no direct benefits to participants. However, this research is expected to contribute to our understanding of cultural processes of identity development in Muslim youth.

APPRECIATION FOR PARTICIPATION

All participants will be provided with a $10.00 e-transfer or PayPal transfer honorarium in appreciation of their participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. It is important to be aware that all efforts to ensure confidentiality will be to the extent of the law. However, it must be noted that if you choose to participate in a Skype interview, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as the internet is required for Skype. Participants are also requested not to record the interview.

All audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected and encrypted computer. Audio recordings will be recorded on an encrypted password protected laptop and will be transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. Your name will not be used in any products (written or electronic) that may result from this study. Transcribed and anonymized interviews will be stored on a USB key in a locked filing cabinet indefinitely for the purposes of future training and research of the Principal Investigator Andrea Breen.

Participant email address is required in order to send honorarium for participation. Currently, funding has not been acquired for this study. If funding is acquired, Guelph University Financial Services will require proof of payment. The confirmation e-mail of e-transfer/PayPal acceptance received by the graduate researcher, Natasha Walji, will be shown as proof of payment. The only information that will be in the confirmation email is the participants e-mail address—this will be the information that is shared with the Guelph University Financial Services.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw within 1 month of your interview date. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. REB# 17-02-20. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Director, Research Ethics  
University of Guelph  
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606  
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca

Please quote REB#17-02-20 in the title of your e-mail.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact:

Natasha Walji  
Graduate Student  
Family Relations and Applied Nutrition  
University of Guelph  
Telephone: 905-518-2887  
E-mail: walji@uoguelph.ca

Andrea Breen, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Family Relations and Applied Nutrition  
University of Guelph  
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 53967  
E-mail: abreen@uoguelph.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “Narrative Identity and Media: What role does media play in the construction and expression of Muslim Young Adult’ identity in the Canadian context?” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in a survey and individual interview for the study. I have been given a copy of this form.

☐ I give permission for the researchers to use verbatim quotes from the approved transcript any reports, presentations, or publications associated with the research project Narrative Identity and Media: What role does media play in the construction and expression of Muslim Young Adult’ identity in the Canadian context?

☐ I would like a summary of the study results and the honorarium to be sent to my email address: _______________________

☐ I accept sharing my email address with Guelph University Financial Services in order to provide proof of payment for the research project if need be.

__________________________________________  
Name of Participant (please print)

__________________________________________  
Signature of Participant  
_________________________  
Date
Appendix E
Interview Protocol

Do you consent to participate in this interview?

Do you feel comfortable sharing your email address in order to send you the e-transfer and results of the study?

**Demographic Questions:**

Age:

Country of Origin:

Gender:

Chosen pseudonym:

**Narrative Warm-up:**

Imagine that the story of your life were being made into a movie and each part of your life represents a scene in the script of the movie.

Can you describe for me a scene from your childhood that would be especially important to include in this movie?

What about your teen years, can you describe a critical scene from your teen years?

**Key Scenes in the Life Story:**

I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in your life story.

**1. High Point**

Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person.

**Media Stories:**

We started by asking about specific stories about your experiences. I’m also interested in other stories that may have been important to you in your life, especially stories that you’ve encountered in the media (books, movies, television and in the news).

Have specific stories you’ve encountered in the media (i.e. something you heard, saw, or read) influenced your understanding of your identity? Are there specific stories that you
encountered in movies, television, news, books any other form of media that have influenced your understanding of this aspect of your self?

Have there been books, movies, television shows, news stories that have positively impacted on your understanding of yourself? Have there been stories that have had a negative impact?

What about stories you’ve been told by your parents, grandparents and siblings about their own experiences. Are there family stories that have been especially influential to you in your understanding of yourself and who you are?

Are there family stories that you would like to one day pass on to your own children (or nieces, nephews, friends children)? What is a story that you think would be important for your children to know. Why is it important? What influence do you hope it might have on them?

**Muslim Cultural Identities:**

Now, I would like to ask questions about being Muslim and what being Muslim means to you.

Please describe in a nutshell your beliefs and values when it comes to religion. Is religion important to you?

Please tell the story of how your religious beliefs and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways? Please explain.

Can you tell me more about what it’s like to be a Muslim in Canada?

Some people from minority cultures and religious groups talk about existing between two worlds, their heritage culture/religion and Canadian culture and religion. What do you think of this? Does this apply in your own life? Can you tell me about a specific experience you’ve had that has shaped your understanding of this?

How has your understanding of yourself as a Muslim in Canada changed over time?

Media stories and Muslim identity; books, movies, television, stories on the news that have influenced your understanding of yourself as a Muslim (positively and negatively)

Parents, grandparents and siblings stories that have influenced your understanding of yourself as a Muslim.

**Reflection:**

Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. Given that most people don’t share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I’m wondering if
you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?