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# Social Identity Development and Religious Discrimination Among Muslim American Youth

Josefina Bañales[1], Muniba Saleem[2], Sohad Murrar[1], Deborah Rivas-Drake[3, 4], and Bernardette J. Pinetta[5, 6]

[1] Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, Chicago
[2] Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara
[3] Combined Program in Education and Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
[4] Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
[5] Department of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles
[6] César E. Chávez Department of Chicana/o and Central American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

The present study investigated the development of social identity centrality dimensions (i.e., Muslim, ethnic, and American identity centrality) among Muslim American youth as well as associations between religious discrimination and social identity centrality trajectories. Data were collected once annually from 2015 to 2017 with 220 Muslim American youth ($M$ = 14.20, $SD$ = 0.94) in the Midwest United States (girls = 53.2%; boys = 42.3%; missing = 4.5%). Participants were Arab (62.3%), Somali (15.9%), and African American (8.6%), among other ethnic groups (less than 2%). Latent growth curve models indicated that Muslim and ethnic identity centrality displayed negative trajectories and that American identity centrality increased over time. Surprisingly, religious discrimination was not associated with social identity centrality trajectories. This research suggests that Muslim American youths' minoritized social identities develop similarly, whereas youths' American social identity develops differently than these identities.

***Public Significance Statement***

The research indicates that minoritized youth must navigate the development of their social identities in the context of hostile sociopolitical climates (García Coll et al., 1996; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). However, minimal empirical research investigates how Muslim American youth—a group of youth minoritized on the basis of their faith tradition—develop multifaceted social identities in the context of Islamophobia. The current work attends to this research gap.

*Keywords:* Muslim American youth, social identity development, religious discrimination, adolescence

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Muslim youth in the United States face marginalization based on their religious affiliation (Abelson et al., 2020; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Muslims constitute only 1% of the American population, and their minority status contributes to the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiments (Ahmed & Ezzeddine, 2009; Lajevardi et al., 2024). In addition to being a numeric minority, Muslims living in Western societies are subjected to Islamophobia, which is characterized by fear, prejudice, and hatred toward Muslims, resulting in forms of mistreatment such as harassment, threats, and intimidation (Awan & Zempi, 2020). A body of work indicates that minoritized youth must navigate the development of their social identities in the context of hostile sociopolitical climates (García Coll et al., 1996; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Although research that examines relations between discrimination and identity development among minoritized youth is growing (see Del Toro et al., 2021; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018; Seaton et al., 2009), research in this area remains minimal. This body of research is especially lacking when it comes to understanding the social identity development of Muslim American youth, particularly in relation to the influence of Islamophobia on their social identity development.

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Josefina Bañales https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0119-3847

Josefina Bañales and Muniba Saleem share first authorship. This study's design and analyses were not preregistered. The data relevant to study variables and key study analyses are available on the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/2d9vq/. This work has not received any funding.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Josefina Bañales, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, Chicago, 1007 W Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60607, United States. Email: jbanal2@uic.edu

Thus, the present study investigated the extent to which Muslim American youth underwent changes in regard to the sense of importance placed on their religious identity as Muslims (i.e., Muslim identity centrality), being a member of their ethnic group (i.e., ethnic identity centrality), and identity as Americans (i.e., American identity centrality) across three waves of adolescence. In addition, this study investigated whether youths' experiences with religious discrimination were associated with developmental changes in these dimensions of social identity centrality. Considering the limited longitudinal research on social identity development among Muslim American youth, this study provides a foundational understanding of the nature of social identity development and how social identity trajectories are impacted by religious discrimination among this group of minoritized youth. Such insights hold critical implications for promoting the well-being, resilience, and resistance of Muslim youth growing up in Western countries, particularly within the context of Islamophobic social climates.

## Social Identity Development During Adolescence

Social identity is multidimensional in that it includes youths' expressions of their sense of self, which includes belief, attitudinal, and ideological components (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). That is, youths' social identity is more than the responses they provide on questionnaires that ask them to report the social groups (e.g., religious, ethnic/racial) to which they belong. Social identity models conceptualize multiple facets of such identities, including aspects of process (i.e., exploration and commitment around social group memberships) and content (i.e., attitudes and beliefs about social identity groups; e.g., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Social identity content includes how positively youth feel about their social groups (i.e., private regard), as well as how significant a social identity group is to youths' self-concept. The latter construct is commonly referred to as social identity importance (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) or centrality (Sellers et al., 1998). Considering the multifaceted and intersectional nature of social identities (Azmitia et al., 2023), it is crucial to understand how youth develop a sense of social identity centrality across various group memberships. In the case of Muslim youth residing in Western countries, it is particularly important to consider their religious, ethnic, and national social identities due to their dual marginalized status as religious and often ethnic minorities (Amer & Bagasra, 2013).

Developmental models posit that identity development is a key task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). In particular, adolescence is a time in which youth explore their social identity groups and develop a sense of belonging and commitment to these groups (Erikson, 1968). Research on social identity grounded in developmental models often focuses on understanding the nature and change in process dimensions of social identity among 11- to 15-year-olds (e.g., Bañales et al., 2020; Del Toro et al., 2021). Some research has used a developmental argument to explore change in content dimensions among multiple ethnic–racial groups in early to mid-adolescence (10- to 14-year-olds; D. Hughes et al., 2011) and of racial centrality, specifically, among African American mid- to late adolescents (~14- to 17-year-olds; Rivas-Drake & Witherspoon, 2013). The limited longitudinal research suggests that some affective facets of ethnic–racial identity content tend to remain stable between early to mid-adolescence, but some shift (e.g., increases, decreases) depending on contextual experiences such as discrimination exposure (Del Toro et al., 2021; Seaton et al., 2009) and school transitions (French et al., 2006). Other models outside of developmental science also posit how people come to understand and negotiate their social identities. For example, social identity theory posits that identity is based on a sense of belonging and affective connections to social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory has often been applied to understanding how content dimensions of social identity develop over time (e.g., Seaton et al., 2009).

Given that adolescence is characterized by increased sociocognitive capacities, abstract thinking skills, and perspective-taking abilities, adolescents, during this developmental period, become better prepared than they were at earlier ages to understand which social groups they belong to, who outgroup members are, and how their personal social experiences may relate to or differ from the experiences of ingroup or outgroup members (Brizio et al., 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2019). Adolescents' capacity to engage in self-reflection regarding their group affiliations, discerning those to which they belong and those they do not, facilitates the development of multiple social identities (Azmitia et al., 2023). These identities encompass various dimensions, including race/ethnicity, national origin, and religious background, among others. By later adolescence, youth are able to synthesize their social experiences and identities to form a more integrated, or coherent, sense of these various identities (Galliher et al., 2017). Having an understanding of the "bigger picture" into which one's identities fit may also provide clarity into the respective weight of each social identity in how individuals define themselves, both in relation to each other and as part of the integrated whole. Thus, shifts in social identity centrality could occur at different points in adolescence for different reasons. Among younger adolescents, changes observed could be a function of greater salience and awareness of experiences that imbue particular meaning to a given social group membership, whereas shifts among older adolescents could be driven by more intentional ascription of greater and lesser "weights" of different social identities to one's self-definition.

Socioecological frameworks underscore that social identity development for minoritized youth occurs in sociocultural contexts rife with racism and prejudice (García Coll et al., 1996; Spencer et al., 1997). Marginalization occurs through macro- (e.g., institutional, political) and microsystems (e.g., interpersonal) and can be displayed in explicit or implicit ways in order to maintain social stratification (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Due to these experiences of marginalization, minoritized youth may navigate their social identities in distinctive ways compared to counterparts with dominant social identities (García Coll et al., 1996). Thus, discrimination may serve as a risk factor for minoritized youth that increases their vulnerability to negative outcomes (Spencer et al., 1997). Although experiences with discrimination may negatively impact minoritized youth, youth may possess coping skills, such as the formulation of ethnic–racial identities that protect youth from the development of negative outcomes in the face of discrimination (Seaton et al., 2009).

Adolescents' sociocognitive capacities allow them to appraise personal experiences with discrimination (D. L. Hughes et al., 2016)—experiences that become more salient during this period (Neblett, 2023). In fact, developmental models and research articulate that experiences with discrimination may prompt racial identity development (Cross, 1995; Del Toro et al., 2021; Seaton et al., 2009). Yet, other research suggests that racial identity may

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prompt the appraisal of racial discrimination (Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018). Research on social identity development among minoritized youth provides a strong foundation for the study of social identity and how discrimination could inform this process among Muslim American youth.

## An Application of Socioecological Frameworks to the Understanding of Social Identity Development of Muslim American Youth

Consistent with socioecological frameworks that argue that minoritized youth develop in contexts that disadvantage their healthy development due to discrimination (García Coll et al., 1996; Spencer et al., 1997), we conceive of Islamophobia as a form of structural discrimination or oppression that disadvantages Muslim youth as well as those perceived to be Muslim. The presence and functioning of Islamophobia, as a structural factor, permeate youths' immediate social contexts, which may result in youths' exposure to interpersonal forms of religious discrimination. Islamophobia has been difficult to define and conceptualize as it operates through an incongruous conflation of nationality, race, and religion (Awan & Zempi, 2020; Naber & Rana, 2019). Presently, Islamophobia is recognized as encompassing fear, prejudice, and hatred toward Muslims, driven by institutional, ideological, political, and religious animosity, leading to mistreatment of individuals perceived as Muslims (Awan & Zempi, 2020). This multifaceted issue manifests as cultural racism within Western societies, affecting the identity development of Muslim youth akin to other racial minorities (García Coll et al., 1996). The current definition of Islamophobia emphasizes the institutional and political aspects of anti-Muslim sentiments, such as the "Muslim Ban," recognizing Islamophobia as a novel form of racism that portrays Islamic elements as threats to Western societies (Lajevardi et al., 2024). Narratives depicting an Islam–West clash, speculations about religious identity hindering Muslim immigrants' integration, and conflation of religious and ethnic identities underscore the need to explore how Muslim youth navigate these complex social identities in hostile environments.

With this larger sociopolitical understanding of Islamophobia in mind, the current research on Muslim individuals residing in Western societies is characterized by several limitations. First, the existing body of research primarily focuses on Muslim adults, neglecting an examination of social identity development among youth during adolescence. Second, the majority of research in this area relies on cross-sectional studies, which hinders an understanding of the longitudinal nature of social identity *development* and how marginalization (e.g., Islamophobia) informs this development. Third, many studies fail to acknowledge the racial/ethnic diversity among Muslim individuals in Western societies, often conflating their religious and racial/ethnic identities. Finally, the distinct national, cultural, political, and immigration contexts of different Western societies pose challenges in generalizing the experiences of Muslim individuals within these settings. Considering our particular focus on social identity development, we narrow our literature review to encompass research that investigated social identity processes among Muslim youth growing up in Western societies relevant to the present study research questions.

### Muslim and Ethnic Centrality Development

First, we consider possible developmental changes in Muslim identity centrality and ethnic identity centrality. Spiegler et al. (2021) conducted a parallel process model that examined the co-occurrence of developmental changes in Muslim identity centrality and American identity centrality. Study results indicated strong and stable levels of Muslim identity centrality among Muslim American youth over the course of 3 years. Conversely, Balkaya-Ince et al. (2020) conducted a study utilizing experience sampling methods, investigating daily fluctuations in the significance of Muslim identity over a 2-week period. Their findings revealed that prior assessments of the importance youth placed on religious identity were positively associated with subsequent reports of religious identity centrality. Considering ethnic identity centrality, Spiegler et al. (2019) observed that, among Muslim youth living in England, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, youth displayed a strong and stable ethnic identity over 3 years. Cross-sectional research investigating the interplay of multiple social identities among Muslim youth reveals a positive association between their religious and ethnic identities (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Verkuyten et al., 2012), suggesting that Muslim and ethnic identity centrality may display similar developmental trajectories among Muslim American youth. This finding aligns with the phenomenon of Islamophobia, where the amalgamation of religious and ethnic identities has led to Muslim identity functioning as a panethnic identity among many Muslim immigrants residing in Western societies (Lajevardi et al., 2024; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

### American Centrality Development

In considering the centrality of national backgrounds, including being American, Spiegler et al. (2021) observed that Muslim American youth displayed a strong and increasing importance placed on their American backgrounds in the context of a parallel process model that examined developmental changes in Muslim identity and American identity centrality. In contrast, among Muslim youth residing in England, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands, Spiegler et al. (2019) found that the importance of their national identity remained relatively strong and stable over a span of 3 years. In summary, the existing body of research yields varied results concerning the developmental dynamics of national identity centrality among Muslim youth.

## How Discrimination Influences Social Identities of Minoritized Individuals

As previously discussed, socioecological frameworks underscore the distinctive strategies employed by marginalized youth in navigating their social identities, particularly in regard to how they see and feel about their racial/ethnic selves, which are shaped by both macro- and microexperiences of marginalization (García Coll et al., 1996). In particular, the rejection disidentification model (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009) posits that immigrants facing discrimination may adopt a disidentification approach toward their national identity as a coping mechanism to mitigate the adverse effects of prejudice. By distancing themselves from the dominant national group, individuals aim to protect their self-concept and psychological well-being. This protective strategy allows individuals to preserve their self-esteem,

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reduce the emotional impact of discrimination, and seek alternative sources of identity and social support (Branscombe et al., 1999; Verkuyten, 2005).

In contrast, the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999) highlights the process of intensified identification with one's marginalized identity in response to discrimination. Individuals who face discrimination based on their racial or ethnic background may strengthen their identification with their marginalized group as a way to cope with and respond to prejudice (e.g., Meca et al., 2020). This intensified identification serves as a means of maintaining a positive sense of self and connection to one's cultural heritage (Sellers et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Indeed, empirical evidence indicates that ethnic/racial discrimination is associated with ethnic–racial identity development among ethnically/racially minoritized youth (Del Toro et al., 2021; Seaton et al., 2009). Although there is support for these models (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Ramos et al., 2012), there are also exceptions (Hutchison et al., 2015; Jasperse et al., 2012). These discrepancies may be attributed to the diversity of marginalized populations studied as well as the unique cultural, religious, historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts of each country and its specific intergroup dynamics (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016, 2018).

### *Associations With National Identity*

Pertinent to the present study, empirical evidence underscores that in Western societies, anti-Muslim social contexts and discriminatory experiences correlate inversely with the importance attributed to national identity among Muslim immigrants (Balkaya et al., 2019; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016; Saleem et al., 2018; Sirin et al., 2008). These findings align with the propositions of the rejection disidentification model. However, it is worth noting that much of the existing literature demonstrating this inverse relationship between discrimination experiences and identification with Western national identities relies on cross-sectional methodologies. This emphasizes the necessity and significance of investigating these processes using longitudinal research designs.

### *Associations With Religious and Ethnic Identity*

The influence of hostile social contexts and discrimination on the religious and ethnic identities of Muslim immigrants living in Western societies is mixed. In some studies, discrimination is positively associated with religious and ethnic identity centrality of Muslim individuals (e.g., Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012), but in other studies, there are no significant associations (e.g., Hutchison et al., 2015; Jasperse et al., 2012). In sum, there is mixed evidence supporting the propositions of the rejection identification model in studies focused on Muslim immigrants residing in Western nations. These discrepancies may be in part due to the sociopolitical contexts of different countries, the type of research design utilized to study these processes, and the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the Muslim population studied (Amer & Bagasra, 2013). Notwithstanding the contribution of these studies, there are no studies, to our knowledge, that examine associations between religious discrimination and social identity *trajectories* among Muslim American youth.

## A Consideration of Between-Group Differences in Social Identity Development

In contrast to stereotypical assumptions linking Muslims exclusively to Arab backgrounds (Awad & Amayreh, 2015), it is important to acknowledge that Muslim youth come from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds and may have distinct encounters with religious discrimination (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Thus, the present study explores this possibility by investigating differences in social identity centrality development and associations between religious discrimination and social identity development between Arab and non-Arab Muslim American youth. Further, youths' social identity development and religious discrimination experiences may also be informed by their age, immigrant generational status, and gender (Lindemann & Stolz, 2021; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015; Maliepaard et al., 2010; Verkuyten et al., 2012). The present study accounts for these sociodemographic characteristics in associations between religious discrimination experiences and social identity development.

## The Present Study

The present study aimed to examine developmental changes in the importance Muslim American youth place on their religious, ethnic, and American identities across three waves of adolescence. Second, this research investigated the extent to which adolescents' reports of religious discrimination at Wave 1 of the study were associated with developmental changes in social identity centrality. Guided by past research documenting the stability of religious and ethnic identities among Muslim immigrants residing in Western nations (Spiegler et al., 2021), we hypothesized that religious (Hypothesis 1) and ethnic identity centrality (Hypothesis 2) for Muslim American youth would remain relatively stable across the three waves. Research on the development of the importance placed on a national identity (e.g., American identity centrality) among Muslim youth is mixed (see Spiegler et al., 2019, 2021). In light of these mixed empirical findings, we draw on socioecological frameworks that elucidate the development of national identity among marginalized individuals (García Coll et al., 1996), and considering that Muslim American adolescents possess dual minority status in terms of their religious and ethnic identities, we predicted that youths' American identity centrality would decline over the course of the three waves (Hypothesis 3).

Given the minimal empirical research examining associations between religious discrimination and social identity development among Muslim American youth, we drew on the rejection identification and rejection disidentification models to inform hypotheses related to these questions. In line with the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), we anticipated a positive relationship between religious discrimination and Muslim identity centrality and ethnic identity centrality concurrently (Hypotheses 4–5) and longitudinally (Hypotheses 6–7). Consistent with the rejection disidentification model, we anticipated that religious discrimination would be negatively associated with American identity centrality concurrently (Hypothesis 8) and longitudinally (Hypothesis 9).

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## Method

### Transparency and Openness

This study's design and analyses were not preregistered. The data relevant to study variables and key study analyses are available on the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/2d9vq/. A separate peer-reviewed study by Spiegler et al. (2021) used data derived from the same longitudinal study associated with the current study.

### Recruitment and Procedure

Participants were recruited from three schools and community sites in Metro Detroit, Michigan, and Columbus, Ohio, to participate in three annual waves of data collection (2015, 2016, and 2017). These charter schools and community sites were selected, as they have programs (e.g., English as a second language), services (multilingual translators), and staff that are knowledgeable and sensitive to Muslim students' concerns. Self-identified Muslim students in each of these sites were invited to participate in the research study in exchange for $10 payment. Parental consent and student assent were obtained, and participants completed paper surveys in English in group settings in the presence of multilingual research assistants. This study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Data are not publicly available, but all data analysis files and associated tables can be obtained from the first author. Data relevant to study variables and key study analyses are available on Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/2d9vq/.

### Participants and Analytic Sample

The sample included 220 youth who identified as Muslim. The majority of youth identified as Arab ($n$ = 137; 62.3%) with a smaller percentage of youth identifying with 14 other racial or ethnic groups ($n$ = 83; 37.7%), such as Somali (15.9%), African American (8.6%), Pakistani (1.8%), Bengali (1.8%), and African (1.4%) among other ethnic groups (8.5%). In terms of denominations, most youth identified as Sunni (63.6%), followed by Shia (19.1%), Ismali (3.2%), and others (1.5%), including youth not knowing their religious denomination (8.6%) and 4.1% of youth having missing data. The majority of adolescents identified as girls (girls = 53.2%; boys = 42.3%; missing = 4.5%) and were born in the United States (U.S.-born youth = 68.2%; non-U.S.-born youth = 27.7%; missing = 4.1%). Youth who were born outside the United States lived in the United States for approximately 7.75 years. Adolescents born in the United States were considered to be second-generation immigrants, and those not born in the United States were considered first-generation immigrants. At Wave 1, participants were on average 14.20 years old ($SD$ = .94) and included 12- (.9%), 13- (21.8%), 14- (40.5%), 15- (24.5%), 16- (7.7%), and 17-year-olds (.9%). A small portion (3.6%) of age data were missing. As a proxy for socioeconomic status, youth reported on the number of bathrooms in their home, with the majority of youth reporting that they had two bathrooms (43.8%) followed by three (22.4%), four (15.2%), one (15.2%), or five to six bathrooms (3.4%). A small percentage of youth were recruited at the community sites in Columbus, Ohio (22.7%; $n$ = 50), whereas the majority of youth were from the schools and community sites in Metro Detroit, Michigan (77.3%; $n$ = 170).

### Attrition Analysis and Nonnormality

Of the 220 youth who comprised the analytic sample, or youth who identified as Muslim, 212 participated at Wave 1, 170 participated at Wave 2, and 149 participated at Wave 3. These sample size estimates are based on available data across key study variables.[1] Across the sample, 32 youth participated in one wave of the study (15%), 65 youth participated in two waves (30%), and 123 youth (56%) participated in three waves. One hundred sixty-two youth who had data at Wave 1 had data at Wave 2 (74%), 130 youth who had data at Wave 2 had data at Wave 3 (59%), and 142 youth who had data at Wave 1 had data at Wave 3 (65%). Missing data across the mean scores of variables was low to moderate, ranging from 3.6% to 32.3%. Chi-square tests were conducted to explore whether missing data patterns were associated with key demographics. Results indicated that Arab youth, relative to non-Arab youth, were more likely to complete the survey at Wave 1, $\chi^2(1) = 4.91$, $p = .03$, and at Wave 3, $\chi^2(1) = 4.08$, $p = .04$. Given the small to moderate amount of missing data and relatively normally distributed data (see Table 1), maximum likelihood estimation was used for study models.

### Measures

#### *Religious Discrimination*

Youth reported the extent to which they faced discrimination on the basis of being Muslim. Sample items were as follows: "How often are you treated unfairly because you are Muslim" and "How often are you treated with less respect than you deserve because you are Muslim" (Schaafsma, 2011). The measure included four items that were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (range = 1 [*never*] to 5 [*all the time*]; Wave 1 $\alpha$ = .91).

#### *Muslim, Ethnic, and American Identity Centrality*

The importance youth placed on their identities as Muslims, members of their ethnic group, and as Americans was assessed using three separate subscales. That is, distinct measures assessed the extent to which youth considered identifying as Muslim, with their ethnic group, or as American to be an important part of their self-concept. Items were adapted from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Each subscale had three items and was scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include the following: "Being Muslim is an important part of who I am," "I identify with other people in my ethnic group," and "Overall, being American has a lot to do with how I feel about myself." Alpha statistics were high for all measures, including Muslim identity centrality: Wave 1 $\alpha$ = .75, Wave 2 $\alpha$ = .82, and Wave 3 $\alpha$ = .89; ethnic identity centrality: Wave 1 $\alpha$ = .75, Wave 2 $\alpha$ = .83, and Wave 3 $\alpha$ = .88; and American identity centrality: Wave 1 $\alpha$ = .75, Wave 2 $\alpha$ = .80, and Wave 3 $\alpha$ = .84.

[1] Two-hundred twenty youth qualified for the study and provided informed consent at Wave 1. However, on the day of survey administration, eight youth were not present and thus did not complete the survey.

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**Table 1**
*Means, Standard Deviations, Sample Size Estimates, and Reliabilities*

| Variable | *M* (*SD*) | *n* | α | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. W1 discrimination | 2.18 (.94) | 212 | .91 | 0.46 | −0.37 |
| 2. W1 Muslim centrality | 4.37 (.70) | 212 | .75 | −2.10 | 6.59 |
| 3. W2 Muslim centrality | 4.35 (.80) | 170 | .82 | −2.15 | 5.54 |
| 4. W3 Muslim centrality | 4.22 (.89) | 149 | .89 | −1.56 | 2.35 |
| 5. W1 ethnic centrality | 4.18 (.70) | 212 | .75 | −0.91 | 0.79 |
| 6. W2 ethnic centrality | 4.11 (.79) | 170 | .83 | −0.83 | 0.61 |
| 7. W3 ethnic centrality | 4.02 (.80) | 149 | .88 | −0.84 | 1.28 |
| 8. W1 American centrality | 3.62 (.82) | 211 | .75 | −0.82 | 0.90 |
| 9. W2 American centrality | 3.68 (.87) | 170 | .80 | −0.68 | 0.52 |
| 10. W3 American centrality | 3.83 (.87) | 149 | .84 | −0.94 | 1.40 |

*Note.* W = Wave.

### *Covariates*

Demographic variables collected at Wave 1 were used as covariates in study models. These variables included youths' self-reported ethnoracial background as Arab (1) or as another ethnoracial background (0). Youth self-reported age (a continuous variable), gender (0 = boy; 1 = girl), and immigrant generational status (0 = first generation; 1 = second generation) were also included.

## Analytic Approach

Means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis estimates, and bivariate correlations were estimated to determine the nature of the data. As a form of preliminary analysis, longitudinal measurement invariance tests were conducted to assess whether participants interpreted items on measures the same way, and whether underlying latent factors can be interpreted in the same way, over time (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Longitudinal measurement invariance must be established on measures in order to assess mean change in constructs over time. Thus, these tests were conducted on social identity centrality measures (e.g., Muslim, ethnic, and American identity centrality).

Longitudinal measurement invariance involves conducting tests that impose a series of constraints on model parameters (e.g., item loadings, item intercepts) in order to determine whether aspects of the measure are invariant, or not changing, over time. These tests are referred to as *configural*, *metric*, *scalar*, and *strict* models, which are ordered based on the level of "strictness" imposed on the model. Configural invariance, or the least restrictive model, allows for all model parameters (i.e., factor loadings, item intercepts, residual variances) to vary across each time point the measure is assessed. Establishing configural measurement invariance suggests that the same factor structure of a measure exists across time (i.e., the same number of items load on the Muslim identity centrality latent factor at each wave). Once configural invariance is established, metric invariance is estimated, which involves constraining the item loadings to equality across factors at each wave. Establishing metric invariance indicates that items do not vary in how representative they are of factors over time.

Next, scalar invariance is conducted, which involves constraining the intercepts of items, as well as retaining the constrained factor loadings from the metric model. If scalar invariance is reached, the analysis of changes in means over time can be used and changes in the means can be interpreted as true mean change and not changes in participants' interpretation of measures (Little, 2013). Residual invariance is the final test and involves constraining the residuals of items, item intercepts, and factor loadings to equality across time points. Establishing residual invariance indicates that other variables that may predict variation in the examined latent construct also display minimal change over time. In order to progress through measurement tests, a given model must not fit significantly worse than the previous model on the basis of a chi-square difference test. If models are not significantly different from one another, the current model of invariance tested is supported.

Once scalar invariance, at minimum, was reached for social identity centrality measures, three unconditional linear growth curve models were estimated to determine the nature of social identity centrality trajectories. These models tested Hypotheses 1–3. In these models, two latent variables are estimated: an intercept, a predicted score at the first time point, and a slope, which represents the rate of change over a specified period. The intercept was centered at the first wave of measurement, or at Wave 1, and the slope factor was indicated by observed scores, or mean scores for variables that are modeled as factor loadings, that change linearly with respect to wave. Overall, these models estimated the means and variances for social identity centrality variables, as well as the covariance between the intercept and slope factors.

To test Hypotheses 4–9, three conditional growth curve models were used to estimate whether religious discrimination at Wave 1 was associated with the intercept and slope, or trajectories, of social identity centrality dimensions. Separate models were conducted to examine the unique association between religious discrimination at Wave 1 and a specific social identity centrality dimension. Models included covariates assessed at Wave 1 of the study. The factor loadings for the intercept were each set to 1, and the factor loadings for the slope were set to 0, 1, and 2 to reflect the annual assessment of constructs. Model fit was assessed using established fit indices, including the comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, the root-mean-square error of approximation, and the standardized root-mean-square residual. Comparative fit index and Tucker–Lewis index at or above .95 and standardized root-mean-square residual and root-mean-square error of approximation at or below .08 indicated models that fit the data well (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015). M*plus* Version 8.0 was used to estimate longitudinal measurement invariance tests, unconditional and conditional growth curve models (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017).

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, means for Muslim identity centrality and ethnic identity centrality appeared to decrease in a linear fashion. American identity centrality appeared to increase over time. Bivariate correlations (see Table 2) indicated that religious discrimination at

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**Table 2**
*Correlations of Study Variables*

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. W1 discrimination | — | .09 | −.02 | .01 | .05 | −.05 | .01 | −.02 | −.04 | .03 |
| 2. W1 Muslim centrality | | — | .39*** | .33*** | .37*** | .21** | .15 | .02 | .04 | .04 |
| 3. W2 Muslim centrality | | | — | .38*** | .22** | .50*** | .28** | .14 | .29*** | .22* |
| 4. W3 Muslim centrality | | | | — | .23** | .37*** | .55*** | .10 | .25** | .20* |
| 5. W1 ethnic centrality | | | | | — | .28** | .31** | .33** | .18* | .22** |
| 6. W2 ethnic centrality | | | | | | — | .40*** | .16* | .46*** | .29*** |
| 7. W3 ethnic centrality | | | | | | | — | .13 | .25** | .24** |
| 8. W1 American centrality | | | | | | | | — | .39*** | .30*** |
| 9. W2 American centrality | | | | | | | | | — | .44*** |
| 10. W3 American centrality | | | | | | | | | | — |

*Note.* W = Wave.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Wave 1 was unassociated with social identity centrality dimensions across all time points.

## Longitudinal Measurement Invariance

Longitudinal measurement invariance was conducted to determine whether measures of social identity centrality were invariant across the three waves. As seen in Table 3, measures of Muslim identity centrality, ethnic identity centrality, and American identity centrality reached full scalar invariance, suggesting that the meaning of underlying latent variables (e.g., social identity centrality) remained the same across time and the levels of items (item intercepts) were the same over time. Residual invariance was not achieved for any of the social identity centrality measures. Establishing scalar invariance allows for an examination of mean change in constructs over time without concern that changes are attributed to measurement error. Given that scalar invariance was met for all measures, unconditional latent growth curve models were conducted to examine the nature of social identity trajectories over time.

## Unconditional Latent Growth Curve Models

Three unconditional latent growth curve models were conducted to examine growth in social identity centrality. Given that trends apparent in mean scores for variables displayed linear increases

**Table 3**
*Measurement Invariance Tests for Social Identity Centralitcy Measures*

| Model | Parameter | $\chi^2(df)$ | $p$ | Model comparison | $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$ | $p$ | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M1. Configural model_Muslim centrality | 39 | 25.07 (15) | .05 | | | | |
| M2. Metric/weak model/weak factorial_Muslim centrality | 35 | 25.40 (19) | .15 | M1 | .33 (4) | .99 | No significant difference |
| M3. Strong/scalar invariance/strong factorial_Muslim centrality | 32 | 27.11 (22) | .21 | M2 | 1.71 (3) | .63 | No significant difference |
| M4. Strict invariance/ residual_Muslim centrality | 26 | 51.18 (28) | <.01 | M3 | 24.07 (6) | <.01 | There is a significant difference between strong and strict models. |
| M1. Configural model_ethnic centrality | 39 | 13.93 (15) | .53 | | | | |
| M2. Metric/weak model/weak factorial_ethnic centrality | 35 | 16.13 (19) | .65 | M1 | 2.20 (4) | .70 | No significant difference |
| M3. Strong/scalar invariance/strong factorial_ethnic centrality | 32 | 19.26 (22) | .22 | M2 | 3.13 (3) | .37 | No significant difference |
| M4. Strict invariance/residual_ethnic centrality | 26 | 39.31 (28) | .08 | M3 | 20.05 (6) | <.01 | There is a significant difference between strong and strict models. |
| M1. Configural model_American centrality | 39 | 12.30 (15) | .66 | | | | |
| M2. Metric/weak model/weak factorial_American centrality | 35 | 16.77 (19) | .61 | M1 | 4.47 (4) | .35 | No significant difference |
| M3. Strong/scalar invariance/strong factorial_American centrality | 32 | 21.44 (22) | .49 | M2 | 4.67 (3) | .20 | No significant difference |
| M4. Strict invariance/ residual_American centrality | 26 | 36.42 (28) | .13 | M3 | 14.98 (6) | .02 | There is a significant difference between strong and strict models. |

*Note.* M = Model.

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**Table 4**
*Fit Indices for Unconditional Models*

| Model fit index | Muslim centrality | Ethnic centrality | American centrality |
|---|---|---|---|
| CFI | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| TLI | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| RMSEA | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| SRMR | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.01 |
| $\chi^2(df)$ | 0.11 (1) | 0.00 (1) | 0.49 (1) |

*Note*. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.

or decreases in phenomena, linear growth curve models were conducted for each aspect of social identity centrality. Results for each model are reviewed below.

### *Muslim Identity Centrality*

The model for Muslim identity centrality ($n$ = 220) yielded an excellent fit (see Table 4). As seen in Table 5, the intercept of Muslim identity centrality, which was centered at Wave 1, was high ($b = 4.38$, $SE$ = .05, $p < .001$), indicating that the average youth participant reported a high sense of importance placed on their Muslim identity at Wave 1 of the study. The mean slope was negative, suggesting a declining trajectory ($b = -0.08$, $SE = .04$, $p = .02$), indicating that the importance youth placed on their Muslim identity decreased across the three waves of the study. As indicated by intercept and slope variances, respectively, there were significant individual differences in predicted values of Muslim identity centrality at Wave 1 ($b = 0.28$, $SE$ = .09, $p$ = .002), but not in the change across time ($b$ = 0.07, $SE$ = .05, $p$ = .15). The covariance between the intercept and slope was negative and nonsignificant ($b$ = −0.04, $SE$ = .06, $p$ = .53), suggesting that youths' Muslim identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their Muslim background across the study.

### *Ethnic Identity Centrality*

The model for ethnic identity centrality ($n = 220$) was an excellent fit (see Table 4). As seen in Table 5, the intercept of ethnic identity centrality, which was centered at Wave 1, was high ($b$ = 4.19, $SE$ = .05, $p < .001$), indicating that the average youth participant reported a high sense of importance placed on their ethnic background at Wave 1 of the study. The mean slope was negative, suggesting a declining trajectory ($b$ = −0.08, $SE$ = .04, $p$ = .02), indicating that the importance youth placed on their ethnic background decreased across the three waves of the study. As indicated by intercept and slope variances, there were no significant individual differences in predicted values of ethnic identity centrality at Wave 1 ($b$ = 0.13, $SE$ = .08, $p$ = .10) or in the slope ($b$ = 0.03, $SE$ = .05, $p$ = .48). The covariance between the intercept and slope was positive and nonsignificant ($b$ = 0.02, $SE = .05$, $p = .72$), suggesting that youths' ethnic identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their ethnic background across the study.

### *American Identity Centrality*

The model for American identity centrality ($n$ = 220) was an excellent fit (see Table 4). As seen in Table 5, the intercept of American identity centrality, which was centered at Wave 1, was moderate ($b = 3.61$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$), indicating that the average youth participant reported a moderate sense of importance placed on their American background at Wave 1 of the study. The mean slope was positive, suggesting an increasing trajectory ($b$ = 0.12, $SE$ = .04, $p$ = .003) for American identity centrality, indicating that the importance youth placed on their American background increased across the three waves of the study. As indicated by intercept and slope variances, respectively, there were significant individual differences in predicted values of American identity centrality at Wave 1 ($b$ = 0.33, $SE$ = .10, $p$ = .001), but not in the change across time ($b$ = 0.08, $SE$ = .06, $p$ = .14). The covariance between the intercept and slope was negative and nonsignificant ($b$ = −0.06, $SE$ = .06, $p$ = .29), suggesting that youths' American identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their American background across the study.

## Conditional Latent Growth Curve Models

Three unconditional latent growth curve models were conducted in order to investigate whether discrimination on the basis of being Muslim at Wave 1 was associated with social identity centrality dimensions across the study. These models tested Hypotheses 4–9. Separate models were conducted for each social identity dimension. Results for each model are presented below.[2]

### *Association Between Religious Discrimination and Muslim Identity Centrality*

The first conditional growth curve model ($n$ = 209) examined whether reports of religious discrimination at Wave 1 were associated with Muslim identity centrality across the study. This model was an excellent fit to the data (see Table 6). As shown in Table 7, religious discrimination was not associated with the intercept ($b = 0.07$, $SE = .05$, $p = .20$) or slope ($b = -0.04$, $SE = .04$, $p$ = .36) of Muslim identity centrality. The covariance between the intercept and slope was negative and nonsignificant ($b$ = −0.08, $SE = .06$, $p = .19$), suggesting that youths' Muslim identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their Muslim background across the study. Arab youth, relative to non-Arab youth, were significantly more likely to have greater increases in Muslim centrality over time. Second-generation immigrant youth were significantly more likely than first-generation immigrant youth to display increases in Muslim centrality over time.

[2] Parallel process models that examined whether developmental change in religious discrimination was associated with developmental change in Muslim, ethnic, and American social identity centrality over time were also conducted. These models had a slew of errors, such as negative degrees of freedom, which may be due to limited statistical variation in developmental phenomena over time. Parallel process models that examined associations in developmental change in one social identity dimension (e.g., Muslim identity centrality) with another (e.g., ethnic identity centrality) were also conducted but similar errors appeared, preventing an analysis of these results.

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**Table 5**
*Unconditional Latent Growth Curve Models for Social Identity Centrality*

| Statistical metric | Muslim centrality *b* (*SE*) | Ethnic centrality *b* (*SE*) | American centrality *b* (*SE*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Factor means | | | |
| Intercept | 4.38 (0.05)*** | 4.19 (0.05)*** | 3.61 (0.06)*** |
| Slope | −0.08 (0.04)* | −0.08 (0.04)* | 0.12 (0.04)** |
| Factor variances | | | |
| Intercept variance | 0.28 (0.09)* | 0.13 (0.08) | 0.33 (0.10)** |
| Slope variance | 0.07 (0.05) | 0.03 (0.05) | 0.08 (0.06) |
| Covariance between intercept and slope | −0.04 (0.06) | 0.02 (0.05) | −0.06 (0.06) |

*Note*. Unstandardized estimates are presented. *SE* = standard error.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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### *Association Between Religious Discrimination and Ethnic Identity Centrality*

The second conditional growth curve model investigated whether reports of religious discrimination at Wave 1 were associated with ethnic identity centrality across the study. This model ($n = 209$) was an excellent fit to the data (see Table 6). As shown in Table 7, religious discrimination was not associated with the intercept ($b = 0.04$, $SE = .05$, $p = .46$) or slope ($b = -0.02$, $SE = .04$, $p = .69$) of ethnic identity centrality. The covariance between the intercept and slope was nonsignificant ($b = 0.00$, $SE = .05$, $p = .97$), suggesting that youths' ethnic identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their ethnic background across the study. Arab youth, relative to non-Arab, were significantly more likely to report that their ethnic group membership was important to their identity at Wave 1. Second-generation immigrant youth were significantly more likely than first-generation immigrant youth to have increases in their ethnic identity over time.

### *Association Between Religious Discrimination and American Identity Centrality*

The final conditional growth curve investigated whether reports of religious discrimination at Wave 1 were associated with American identity centrality across the study. This model ($n = 209$) was an excellent fit (see Table 6). As shown in Table 7, religious discrimination was not associated with the intercept ($b = 0.01$, $SE = .06$, $p = .86$) or slope ($b = 0.01$, $SE = .04$, $p = .88$) of American identity centrality. The covariance between the intercept and slope was negative and nonsignificant ($b = -0.07$, $SE = .06$, $p = .28$), suggesting that youths' American identity centrality scores at Wave 1 did not relate to annual changes in the importance placed on their American background across the study. Girls, relative to boys, reported greater American identity centrality at Wave 1.

**Table 6**
*Fit Indices for Conditional Models*

| Model fit index | Muslim centrality | Ethnic centrality | American centrality |
|---|---|---|---|
| CFI | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| TLI | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| RMSEA | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| SRMR | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| $\chi^2(df)$ | 2.57 (6) | 1.40 (6) | 4.43 (6) |

*Note*. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.

## Ancillary Analyses

Ancillary analyses were conducted to examine potential differences in social identity development and associations between religious discrimination and social identity trajectories among youth who identified as Arab and youth who did not identify as Arab. A more detailed description of analyses, tables for descriptive statistics (Supplemental Tables 1–3), and key analysis tables (Supplemental Tables 4–9) are presented as Supplemental Files. A summary of key analyses is provided below.

Unconditional multigroup, latent growth curve models were run to investigate potential ethnoracial differences in social identity trajectories between youth who do and do not identify as Arab. In summary, chi-square tests indicated no significant difference in American identity centrality and ethnic identity centrality trajectories across the study between Arab youth and non-Arab youth (see Supplemental Tables 4–6). There was a significant difference between the freely estimated and mean-constrained models for Muslim identity centrality (see Supplemental Table 4), suggesting that the slope for Muslim identity centrality was different for Arab youth and non-Arab youth. Although the slopes for both groups were negative, the slope for non-Arab youth was significant (see Supplemental Table 7).

Following the unconditional multigroup, latent growth curve models, a series of conditional multigroup, latent growth curve models were conducted to examine whether associations between religious discrimination and social identity trajectories differed among groups. In summary, chi-square difference tests indicated (Supplemental Table 8) there were no significant differences in associations between religious discrimination at Wave 1 and American identity centrality at Wave 1 or across the study between Arab youth and youth who did not identify as Arab (see Supplemental Table 9). There were no significant differences in associations between religious discrimination at Wave 1 and ethnic identity centrality at Wave 1or across the study between Arab youth and youth who did not identify as Arab (see Supplemental Table 9).

For Muslim identity centrality, results indicated that the association between religious discrimination at Wave 1 and the Muslim identity centrality at Wave 1 was significantly different between Arab youth

**Table 7**
*Conditional Latent Growth Curve Models for Religious Discrimination on Social Identity Centrality Trajectories*

| Statistical metric and demographic variable | Muslim centrality *b* (*SE*) | Ethnic centrality *b* (*SE*) | American centrality *b* (*SE*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept and slope covariance | −0.08 (0.06) | 0.00 (0.05) | −0.07 (0.06) |
| Discrimination on intercept | 0.07 (0.05) | 0.04 (0.05) | 0.01 (0.06) |
| Discrimination on slope | −0.04 (0.04) | −0.02 (0.04) | 0.01 (0.04) |
| Controls on identity intercept | | | |
| Arab identifying | 0.12 (0.10) | 0.26 (0.10)* | 0.19 (0.12) |
| Girl | −0.05 (0.10) | −0.07 (0.09) | 0.32 (0.11)** |
| Second-generation immigrant | 0.09 (0.11) | −0.07 (0.10) | −0.06 (0.12) |
| Age | 0.03 (0.06) | 0.01 (0.05) | −0.11 (0.06) |
| Controls on identity slope | | | |
| Arab identifying | 0.19 (0.08)* | 0.10 (0.08) | 0.06 (0.09) |
| Girl | 0.04 (0.07) | 0.02 (0.07) | −0.09 (0.08) |
| Second-generation immigrant | 0.18 (0.08)* | 0.25 (0.08)** | 0.12 (0.09) |
| Age | −0.02 (0.04) | −0.03 (0.04) | 0.08 (0.05) |

*Note.* Unstandardized estimates are presented. *SE* = standard error.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and youth who did not identify as Arab (see Supplemental Table 9). There was no significant difference between Arab youth and youth who did not identify as Arab in the association between religious discrimination at Wave 1 and Muslim identity centrality trajectories (see Supplemental Table 9).

## Discussion

Muslim American youth come of age in a country that systemically discriminates against their religious community on the basis of false perceptions that they are "terrorists," "dangerous," or the "other." Similar to other minoritized youth, Muslim youth face the challenge of developing their social identities within a country that devalues their minoritized social identities (Awad et al., 2019; Neblett et al., 2012). Consequently, research on how Muslim American youth develop diverse social identities and how religious discrimination is associated with youths' social identity development is needed. Attending to this need, the current research investigated developmental change in Muslim American youths' religious (i.e., Muslim), ethnic, and national (i.e., American) identity centrality across three waves of adolescence. The current work also investigated the extent to which youths' experiences with religious discrimination were associated with the importance placed on their religious, ethnic, and national identities at Wave 1 of the study and with developmental changes in these social identities. This research significantly contributes to the field of developmental science by shedding light on how Muslim American youth navigate the development of their social identities within a national context that undervalues their religious community.

### Developmental Changes in Social Identity Centrality

Different developmental patterns emerged for social identity centrality dimensions. Unconditional latent growth models indicated that Muslim and ethnic identity centrality decreased over time, whereas American identity centrality increased. These findings advance research on social identity development among marginalized communities, the majority of which examines the development of ethnic/racial identity among youth of color in the United States (Bañales et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) and does not focus on Muslim American youth. Within the realm of research concerning Muslim youth, study findings emphasize the significance of exploring the development of religious, ethnic, and national social identities as separate processes. It is crucial to examine these identities simultaneously while recognizing their distinct developmental patterns.

With respect to religious and ethnic identity trajectories, our findings revealed that both dimensions of identity centrality displayed similar developmental patterns. These findings are in line with prior work that often finds a strong correlation between the religious and ethnic identities of Muslim immigrants in Western societies (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Verkuyten et al., 2012). Results further support the notion of a panethnic Muslim identity that has emerged in many Western nations, where Muslims are united by their shared religious affiliation, regardless of their racial or ethnic diversity (Sirin & Fine, 2008). The similar developmental trajectories of religious and ethnic identities suggest that Muslim youth are likely attentive to and influenced by the societal value (or devaluation) placed on both of these identities. As youth traverse new social contexts during the period of adolescence and thus are more likely to be exposed to discrimination (D. L. Hughes et al., 2016; Neblett, 2023), it could be that youth are exposed to more messages that convey that their religious or ethnic identities are devalued. Such *messages* may shape the developmental trajectories of either or both of these identities (D. Hughes et al., 2017; Lee & Ahn, 2013).

The concept of panethnic Muslim identity gains further support when considering the ancillary analyses conducted to examine racialized religious identities among Muslim youth who identified as Arab and youth who did not. Findings indicated that the development of American identity centrality and ethnic identity centrality did not significantly differ among youth groups. In particular, the similarity in ethnic identity centrality development suggests more similarities in ethnic identity development among the youth groups and/or that there are other dimensions of social identity development that differ among Arab youth and youth who identify with other racial/ethnic groups. Indeed, ancillary results indicated that the importance Muslim American youth place on their religious identities as Muslims significantly differed between Arab youth and youth who did not

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identify as Arab, although Muslim identity centrality trajectories for both groups were similarly negative.

It is plausible that Arab youth, relative to their non-Arab counterparts, may have a lower likelihood of encountering or attributing discriminatory experiences to their religious identity. Alternatively, it could be that Arab youth in our sample possess additional protective mechanisms, such as social, peer, parental, and community support, which mitigate the adverse impacts of any encountered discrimination. Certainly, this finding must be interpreted with caution, as the "non-Arab" youth group was both small and included youth from various ethnic/racial backgrounds, potentially masking important within- and between-group differences between different ethnic/racial groups. Future mixed-methods research that incorporates larger samples of Muslim American youth from different ethnic/racial backgrounds is vital to better understand how different groups of youth develop a sense of importance around their Muslim, ethnic, and American identities.

In contrast to the negative developmental patterns of Muslim and ethnic identity centrality development, adolescents' American identity centrality increased over time. Increases in American identity centrality might signal that youth are becoming more acculturated into U.S. society, as immigrants who identify more with the host culture and less with their cultural group have been described as assimilating into the dominant culture (Berry, 2005). This finding contradicts speculations of Muslim immigrants prioritizing their religious identity relative to the host society's national identity and perceptions that Muslims are not interested in integrating into Western society's culture (Pew Research Center, 2011). Increases in American identity centrality may also signal that Muslim American youth are learning more about American culture from their peers—a highly relevant socializing group that shapes assimilation into U.S. culture during adolescence (Wang & Benner, 2016).

Importantly, positive correlations between Muslim and American identity centrality in Wave 2 and Wave 3 further contradict speculations of any conflict between these two identities (Balkaya et al., 2019; Saleem et al., 2018). Although Muslim and ethnic identities decreased in importance across the study, youth reported higher Muslim and ethnic identity centrality scores at the start and end of the study relative to American identity, consistent with other work that examines ethnic identity and American identity among ethnic/racial minority groups in the United States (Phinney et al., 1997).

## Religious Discrimination and Social Identity Centrality Trajectories

The present study found no associations between religious discrimination and social identity centrality (Muslim, American, or ethnic) at Wave 1 or across the study. These findings challenge theoretical evidence that suggests that discriminatory experiences can *increase* identification with a minoritized social identity (e.g., Muslim identity, ethnic identity) among ethnic–racial minorities (i.e., rejection identification model; Branscombe et al., 1999). Although present study findings challenge theoretical evidence, results are consistent with cross-sectional research with Muslim individuals in which religious discrimination was not associated with Muslim identity centrality (Hutchison et al., 2015; Jasperse et al., 2012; Sirin & Fine, 2008). In terms of American identity centrality development, theoretical work suggests that discrimination may *decrease* national identity centrality among minoritized individuals, especially among recent immigrants (i.e., rejection disidentification model; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009). Present study findings are incongruent with this theoretical work, as well as cross-sectional evidence that suggests that discrimination is negatively associated with national identity (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

The nonsignificant associations between religious discrimination and social identity centrality trajectories might be attributed to the influence of other contextual factors. One such factor could be the impact of media—a relevant development context for social identity development during adolescence (Ward & Bridgewater, 2023). Previous research indicates that exposure to media stereotypes of Muslims is linked to reduced identification as Americans among Muslim adults over the long term (Saleem et al., 2019). Muslims are often portrayed in a negative light in Western media (Alsultany, 2016), and Muslim youth express dissatisfaction and frustration with the portrayal of their religious community (Sirin & Fine, 2008). In line with socioecological frameworks (e.g., García Coll et al., 1996), media depictions of minority groups reflect the esteem attributed to these groups within mainstream society (Ramasubramanian & Yadlin-Segal, 2017). Consequently, minoritized youth learn about their own group identities in relation to other groups through exposure to such depictions (Behm-Morawitz, 2020). The influence of media on adolescent development is particularly concerning, given the growing use of social media platforms and the increasing proliferation of hate speech targeting Muslim youth within these digital spaces (The Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2019). It would be valuable for future research to directly examine the impact of media stereotypes on the social identity trajectories of Muslim American youth.

There may be contextual and psychological variables that are moderators of associations between religious discrimination and social identity development among Muslim American adolescents. For example, a sense of social support and a sense of belonging are known to buffer the effects of discrimination on youths' social identities (e.g., DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). Specifically, for Muslims, social support from friends, family, and the community has been found to have positive associations and act as a buffer against the detrimental effects of discrimination on well-being (Hashemi et al., 2020). Adolescents in the present study lived in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods and attended predominantly Muslim schools in the United States. This sense of a local community with other Muslims may have mitigated the adverse effects of religious discrimination faced in broader contexts. Future work should systematically examine the ways in which multiple forms of exclusion and support interact and contribute to youths' social identities across adolescence. It will be important to conduct this work in social contexts across the United States and the world that differ in the representation of Muslim people.

The nonsignificant association between discrimination and social identity centrality may also be related to when discrimination was assessed. It may be the case that being treated unfairly due to being Muslim would be related to the change in centrality at other important points in the life course, such as the transition to the workforce or college. For example, the transition from adolescence to adulthood has been characterized as a time in which minoritized youths' experiences with discrimination and understanding of its implications for their life chances may increase (Hope et al., 2015;

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Sladek et al., 2021). It could be that associations between religious discrimination and social identity centrality among Muslim American youth may appear during key developmental transitions in which such exposure may have more evident implications for one's economic, health, and other life outcomes. Additional research that integrates socioecological frameworks that articulate links between discrimination and social identity development alongside other developmental frameworks would advance theory and research on minoritized youths' social identity development (García Coll et al., 1996; Neblett, 2023).

Importantly, the diverse nature of research on Muslim individuals in Western nations could explain why present study findings may diverge from extant literature on Muslim people. First, previous research on Muslim individuals is largely cross-sectional, whereas the present study is longitudinal. Second, the national contexts and other contextual factors at the macrolevel (e.g., policy) of studies set the stage for study findings. These factors encompass the diversity of Muslim populations under investigation, as well as the distinct cultural, religious, historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts within each country. These contextual elements play a crucial role in shaping intergroup dynamics and contribute to the variations observed in research findings (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016, 2018).

The conceptualization of discrimination and social identity in research studies may have also contributed to differences in findings between the present study and other research. For instance, Sirin et al. (2008) observed a nonsignificant correlation between experiences of discrimination (specific to Muslim identity) and Muslim identity centrality in a sample of ethnically diverse Muslim adolescents. However, Hashem and Awad (2021) observed a positive correlation between discrimination (on the basis of one's race, ethnicity, or religion) and religious identity centrality in a sample of Arab American youth who identify as Muslim and Christian. Finally, previous samples include youth and adults, whereas the present study focused on adolescents.

## Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Given the difficulty with recruiting Muslim adolescents in psychological research (Amer & Bagasra, 2013), our sample was limited in its representation of certain ethnic/racial groups (e.g., African American) and branches of Islam (e.g., Shia). Although ancillary analyses did not detect significant differences in associations between religious discrimination and social identity development among Arab youth and those who did not identify as Arab, the current analyses were limited in that youth who did not identify as Arab were minimally represented. Such underrepresentation of youth who did not identify as Arab prevented analyses that tested differences between each ethnoracial group. It is indeed possible that Muslim American youth who are also racially stigmatized (e.g., African American) experience different levels of and attributions for discriminatory experiences compared to Muslim youth who racially identify as White, for example. It is also possible that youth of different ethnoracial backgrounds have different meaning-making processes around what it means to be Muslim (see Wang et al., 2020). Future mixed-methods research with Muslim American youth is needed to understand youths' lived experiences with religious discrimination and subsequent social identity development, and the ways in which youths' social position among other axes of oppression (e.g., the systems of racism, sexism) informs these associations. Relatedly, future research on Muslim American youth should be accessible to youth of different social backgrounds and experiences. For example, the present study administered the survey only in English and provided translators while youth took the survey in person, which could have made it difficult for youth who preferred to read in another language to engage with the survey. Future research should attend to the diversity of Muslim American youth throughout the research process.

The meaning of what it means to be Muslim may also differ based on youths' experiences in different social contexts. The majority of youth in the present study were recruited from the Metro Detroit, Michigan area—an area that has large and long-standing Muslim communities (Howell, 2014). A smaller percentage of youth resided in Columbus, Ohio, which is experiencing growth in Muslim communities (King, 2019). The demographic characteristics of neighborhoods are associated with youths' ethnic–racial identity development (Rivas-Drake & Witherspoon, 2013). Thus, it is possible that Muslim American youth who reside in large and deeply rooted Muslim communities may have more opportunities to explore their religious identities. At the same time, it is possible that Muslim American youth who are in contexts with fewer Muslim people might be more attuned to their minoritized religious background and might explore this aspect of their social identity more or earlier in adolescence. Additional research that examines differences in social identity development among Muslim American youth in different settings, neighborhoods, and states of the United States is needed, including work on their perceptions of their social experiences in these contexts.

The current investigation examined the developmental nature of different dimensions of social identity in isolation; however, previous research finds that dimensions of religious identity (Balkaya-Ince et al., 2020) and ethnic identity and religious identities (Maliepaard et al., 2010) are interrelated (Spiegler et al., 2021) and that American and Muslim social identities may be perceived as compatible or incompatible among Muslim American youth (Saleem et al., 2018). It could be that religious discrimination informs changes in the extent to which Muslim American youth perceive their Muslim, ethnic, and American identities as compatible across adolescence. Future longitudinal studies should investigate these questions using experience sampling methods and annual assessments to account for more subtle and larger fluctuations in social identity development. Such longitudinal research should examine other potential predictors of youths' social identity development, such as youths' experiences with religious or ethnic–racial socialization from parents (e.g., Balkaya-Ince et al., 2020). This work has the opportunity to include the perspectives of youths' caregivers to provide more comprehensive insight into the contextual factors that stimulate social identity development among Muslim American youth.

## Conclusion

Overall, the current research makes important contributions to psychological research by investigating Muslim American adolescents' social identity development across three waves of adolescence and associations between religious discrimination and social identity development. Study findings indicate that youths' Muslim and ethnic identity centrality followed similar negative trajectories, and American identity centrality had a positive trajectory. Despite negative trajectories for Muslim and ethnic identity centrality, youth maintained more central Muslim and ethnic identities, as compared

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to their American identity, at the start and end of the study. These findings are important for the development of culturally sensitive interventions and educational programs that address the needs of Muslim American youth. Such initiatives should be designed to cultivate a profound sense of belonging and inclusivity within American society. Simultaneously, they should celebrate the depth and diversity of Muslim American youths' ethnic and religious identities. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the nurturing of an American identity does not occur at the expense of their ethnic and religious identities. Results also underscore that religious discrimination does not necessarily impact the social identity development of Muslim American youth. These findings are critical in understanding the development and correlates of important social identities for marginalized youth, especially when some of those social identities are minoritized.

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