THE IDENTITY OF CRISIS: MUSLIM AMERICANS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

by

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A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology
2005
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The Identity of Crisis: Muslim Americans After September 11
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Date April 26, 2005

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find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

HRC Protocol # 0901.26
Peek, Lori Ann (Ph.D., Sociology)

The Identity of Crisis: Muslim Americans After September 11

Thesis directed by Professor Patricia A. Adler and Professor Dennis S. Mileti

This study examines in-depth the experiences of a sample of young, mostly second-generation, Muslim Americans both prior to and following the events of September 11, 2001. The research draws on data gathered through participant observation, focus groups, and individual interviews with 127 Muslim university students in New York and Colorado. I use an inductive theoretical model to define and analyze various issues, concepts, and themes that emerged from the personal stories of these Muslim men and women. The goal is to improve social theory regarding religious, ethnic, and gender identity development and identity transformation in response to crises. Further, this research explores the social psychological effects on a minority population of blame and hostility following a human-initiated disaster. It also contributes to our understanding of the social vulnerability and reactions of minority communities to catastrophic events.

Throughout this dissertation, I apply perspectives and ideas derived from the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and identity theory to explore the ways that these young Muslim Americans developed, understood, asserted, and maintained their personal and social identities. Specifically, I show how minority group consciousness and solidarity may emerge in response to social exclusion; offer a three-stage model of religious identity formation; examine patterns of ethnic self-identification and the negotiation of ethnic identity; and address the relationship of gender and religion to power and identity.

This research illustrates how identity emerges in social and historical context and demonstrates that its development is variable and evolutionary rather than static. Additionally, I discuss the myriad impacts of September 11 for this particular group and show how such a crisis event can impel certain identities to become more or less central to an individual’s concept of self. I also offer policy options to help communities better prepare for and respond to the social consequences of terrorist attacks and other human-induced disasters.
In loving memory of Mary Fran Myers (1952-2004)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped me conceptualize, carry out, and ultimately complete this dissertation. I would like to begin by thanking the Muslim American students in New York and Colorado who shared their experiences, thoughts, and feelings with me. Because I promised to keep their identities confidential, I cannot acknowledge them personally, but I hope they know how grateful I will always be for their time, cooperation, honesty, wit, and faith.

Throughout my graduate career at the University of Colorado, I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with a group of incredibly talented faculty members. Patti Adler has spent untold hours helping me with my dissertation and talking to me about my data, methodological issues, and theoretical contributions. I deeply admire Patti’s passion for sociological research, and I am thankful for her willingness to share her ideas and knowledge. It was because of her guidance that this project came together. I am grateful to Dennis Mileti, who hired me as his graduate research assistant in 1999. From the beginning, Dennis treated me as a colleague and an equal, and through his generosity and kindness, he greatly enhanced the quality of my graduate school experience. Beyond contributing significantly to the conceptualization of this dissertation, Janet Jacobs has been a friend and mentor. Additionally, Janet’s teaching and scholarship have served as a model of academic excellence. It has been a delight working with Joyce Nielsen, who is not only a gifted sociologist, but also an exceptional artist. Joyce consistently offered me support and was always available to provide feedback on my writing. Fred Denny, the “outside member” of my dissertation committee, has certainly been no outsider! Instead, he has treated me as one of his own students, and as a Professor of Religious Studies, has contributed important insights to my work. Peter Adler has enhanced my teaching, research, and professional development in numerous ways. Peter guided me through the academic job search process and also served as an unwavering source of support as I worked on my dissertation.

In addition to my advisors, I would also like to acknowledge a number of other faculty members in the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado who provided support, encouragement, and intellectual guidance during my time in the graduate program. I would especially like to thank Joanne Belknap, Liam Downey, Jim Downton, Lori Hunter, Leslie Irvine, Thomas Mayer, Jane Menken, Fred Pampel, David Pellow, Michael Radelet, Rick Rogers, and Sara Steen.

Norbert Baer, Professor of Conservation in the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, was enormously helpful during my data-gathering trips to New York City. Norbert, a native New Yorker, not only provided me with subway and bus directions so that I could get to my interviews and meetings in Brooklyn, Harlem, Manhattan, and Queens, he also offered some much-needed humor and tea and crumpets at the end of each of my visits. In addition to all of his help with getting me around the city safely, Norbert pushed me to focus and to write, often sending me chiding e-mails urging me to “Finish The Damn Dissertation!”
During my six years in Boulder, I was employed as a graduate research assistant at the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, which is the one institution in the nation dedicated to bringing together research and practitioner communities to minimize losses from hazards and disasters. The Hazards Center staff members have been my family during my time in Boulder, and they have provided much good food, fun, and support. I would especially like to thank Dennis Mileti and Mary Fran Myers for hiring me, despite my prior lack of experience with studying disasters. I would also like to acknowledge several other staff members, each of whom have contributed something special to my work and life, including Christine Bevc, David Butler, Sylvia Dane, Alice Fothergill, Julie Gailus, Eve Gruntfest, Greg Guibert, Wanda Headley, Janet Kroeckel, Sarah Michaels, Jacki Monday, Dave Morton, Eve Passerini, Christa Rabenold, Mara Salazar, Diane Smith, Wendy Steinhacker, Jeannette Sutton, Deb Thomas, Kathleen Tierney, Gilbert White, and Len Wright.

Several organizations provided generous financial support for this dissertation, which is gratefully acknowledged. I would like to thank the American Association of University Women, the Center for Humanities and the Arts at the University of Colorado, the Graduate School at the University of Colorado, the National Science Foundation (Grant #0200.05.0203B), the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, the Public Entity Risk Institute, and the University of Colorado’s Beverly Sears Graduate Student Grant Program.

David Butler, a particularly talented editor, has read every word of this dissertation (other than the acknowledgments, which would undoubtedly be more concise and devoid of any grammatical errors if he had gotten his hands – and red ink pen – on these pages!). I am not only thankful for his amazing editorial abilities, but also sincerely appreciate his generosity and friendship. I would also like to thank Wendy Steinhacker and Jeannette Sutton, who each reviewed and commented on drafts of this document. Sandy Adler expertly completed the majority of the interview transcriptions for this project, and she also contributed a number of articles for my review. I would like to acknowledge Nancy Whichard, who has been my dissertation mentor for over a year. She has patiently listened to my trials and triumphs, while challenging me to be courageous and consistent with my writing. Roy Popkin provided an important applied perspective based on his many years of experience in the disaster response field, and he was also highly supportive of my personal and professional goals.

Making it through graduate school is hard work, but finding great friends and future colleagues makes the entire process a lot more exciting and enjoyable. I would like to thank my fellow graduate students at the University of Colorado, who share a similar love for the discipline of sociology and passion for teaching and scholarship. I would especially like to acknowledge Rachel Bandy, Keri Brant, Robert Duran, Julie Gailus, Beverly Kingston, Patrick Krueger, Stacy Mallicoat, Jeannette Sutton, Erin Trapp, and Erica Winter.
As anyone who has ever written a dissertation knows, it is not a project that simply involves other academics. Having friends and family who love and support you, no matter what, makes all the difference. I am forever grateful for my closest friends, Sandy Hills, Michelle Scobie, and Rachel Smith. These three women have served as models of strength, beauty, intelligence, and integrity throughout my adult life, and they contributed a great deal to my mental well-being and happiness (by teaching me to knit, going on mountain adventures, and keeping me laughing and sane) during my undergraduate and graduate school years. I would also like to thank Julie Gailus, Beverly Kingston, Heidi Marshall, and Erica Winter for being unbelievably generous and supportive friends.

Words will never fully capture the admiration, respect, and love that I feel for my parents, Cathy and Bud Peek. My mom and dad have always challenged my siblings and I to do our best in all things, to be honest and respectful, and to never give up, no matter how hard things seem. I am thankful for all the sacrifices they made for us when we were growing up, and I hope that they realize that every success I have ever had is due in both large and small ways to them. I also am grateful for my brothers and their lovely wives and children: Brad, Heather, Sydney, and Banks Peek; Matt, Gina, Avery, and Abby Peek; and Zach and Laura Peek.

Much gratitude also goes to my in-laws, Dorothy and Chris Bell and Nora and Ron Gottschlich. They have welcomed me as a part of their families and encourage and inspire me in many ways.

Justin Gottschlich, my husband and best friend, has stood by my side, providing unconditional love and support in all things I do. Justin has been my biggest fan, and at the same time he has challenged me to be the best person and scholar that I know how. His presence in my life has been a gift, and all things I do are better because of him. I am also thankful for our little dog Max, who spent most days asleep under my desk or on my feet, helping me to stay put and keep writing!

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Mary Fran Myers, who passed away on April 1, 2004. Mary Fran was my supervisor while I worked at the Hazards Center, but more importantly than that, she was my mentor, role model, and friend. Not only was she a constant source of professional and emotional support, Mary Fran also encouraged me in completing my academic goals. In fact, it was because of Mary Fran’s advice to follow my heart and mind that I ultimately decided to pursue this particular dissertation topic. I am sad in every way that Mary Fran passed away much too soon, and I wish that she could have been here to see the completion of this dissertation. However, I am grateful that her spirit was with me every step of the way.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................1

A. The Events of September 11, 2001 ...................................................1
   1. Economic Costs .....................................................................2
   2. Physical and Mental Health Effects .......................................3
   3. Political Ramifications ...........................................................4
   4. Social Consequences ..............................................................5

B. Terrorism and the United States ........................................................6
   1. Definitions of Terrorism ........................................................7
   2. Consequences of Terrorism ...................................................9

C. Reactions to September 11 ..............................................................10
   1. Post-September 11 Backlash ................................................12

D. Purpose of this Dissertation ............................................................17

E. Overview of this Dissertation ..........................................................18

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....................................................20

A. Symbolic Interactionism .................................................................20

B. Identity Theory ................................................................................22
   1. Religious Identity .................................................................25
   2. Muslim American Identity ...................................................29

C. Identity Transformation Following Crisis Events .........................32

D. Disasters and Issues of Inequality, Blame, and Hostility .............37
III. SETTINGS AND METHODS ............................................................. 40
   A. September 11, 2001 ..................................................................... 40
   B. Research Design .......................................................................... 43
      1. Post-Disaster Research ......................................................... 44
      2. Qualitative Methods ................................................................ 46
      3. Longitudinal Design ............................................................. 47
   C. Research Settings ......................................................................... 48
      1. New York ............................................................................. 48
      2. Colorado ............................................................................. 49
      3. Gaining Entrée ..................................................................... 50
      4. My Role in the Settings ........................................................ 52
         a. Observer-as-Participant .................................................... 52
         b. Participant-as-Observer .................................................... 53
   D. Sample Population ....................................................................... 55
      1. Demographic Information ..................................................... 55
   E. Data Collection ........................................................................... 57
      1. Focus Groups ....................................................................... 58
      2. Individual Interviews ........................................................... 63
      3. Participant Observation ........................................................ 67
   F. Data Analysis ............................................................................... 69
   G. Methodological Challenges .......................................................... 71
      1. Research Design ................................................................... 71
      2. Research Settings ................................................................. 73
      3. Emotional Issues .................................................................. 74
      4. Outsider Status .................................................................... 76

IV. COMMUNITY ISOLATION AND GROUP SOLIDARITY .......... 80
   A. The Post-Disaster Community .................................................... 80
   B. Isolation from the Post-September 11 Community .................... 83
      1. Blame ................................................................................... 85
      2. Exclusion ............................................................................. 91
      3. Concern for Safety ............................................................... 94
      4. Stigmatization, Harassment, and Discrimination ................. 100
   C. Increased Group Solidarity .......................................................... 105
V. THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY .................112

A. A Model of Muslim Religious Identity Development ..........113
   1. Religion as Ascribed Identity ..................................114
   2. Religion as Chosen Identity ....................................118
   3. Religion as Declared Identity ..................................126

VI. THE NEGOTIATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY ......................136

A. Patterns of Ethnic Self-Identification ............................139
   1. Ethnic Identity Awareness ....................................141
   2. Ethnic Identity Distancing ....................................148
   3. Ethnic Identity Reaffirmation .................................157

VII. MUSLIM WOMEN: POWER AND IDENTITY .....................166

A. The Power of the Image ............................................166
   1. Representing Islam ............................................168
   2. Establishing Identity and Community .......................179
   3. Confronting Stereotypes .....................................183

VIII. CONCLUSION ..........................................................193

A. Theoretical Considerations .........................................193
   1. The Identity of Crisis ..........................................194
   2. Identity Development, Negotiation, and Assertion ........199
   3. Social Exclusion and Minority Group Solidarity .........201

B. Policy Implications ..................................................202
   1. Developing Proactive Community Response Strategies ....204
      a. Identify Vulnerable Populations .........................205
      b. Conduct Pre-Disaster Outreach to At-Risk Communities ....206
      c. Improve Cultural Sensitivity ............................207
      d. Develop a Backlash Mitigation Plan ..................207
      e. Implement the Backlash Mitigation Plan .............209
      f. Secure Long-Term Support and Resources ..........210

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..............................................................212
APPENDIX

A. Informed Consent Form: Focus Groups.................................246
B. Informed Consent Form: Individual Interviews......................248
C. Demographic Information Form ............................................250
D. Contact Information Form ....................................................251
| 1. | Timeline of Fieldwork Research and Interviews | 67 |
FIGURE

1. Total Number of Anti-Muslim Bias Incident Reports by Year 197
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

As the world knows, on the morning of September 11, 2001, at 8:46 a.m., a hijacked passenger jet crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, tearing a gaping hole in the building and setting it ablaze. Shortly thereafter, a second airliner hit the south tower of the World Trade Center and exploded. Within an hour, another plane struck the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and a fourth plane, whose intended mission was to strike either the U.S. Capitol or the White House, crashed in a rural area of southern Pennsylvania. The World Trade Center towers, along with eight other buildings in lower Manhattan, collapsed as a result of the attacks; part of the Pentagon was destroyed; and nearly three thousand people died, including airplane passengers, building occupants, and emergency response personnel. The attacks were extraordinarily well planned and coordinated, with the clear intent of damaging symbols of military power and economic strength in the United States, causing as many casualties as possible, disrupting the lives of millions of people, and instilling widespread fear. The September 11 attacks were the most devastating acts of international terrorism ever perpetrated.

The people of the United States were gripped by shock, disbelief, and horror as they watched these events unfold. Less than an hour after the first airplane struck the north tower of the World Trade Center, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered a halt to all flight operations at U.S. airports. This was the first time in American history that air traffic nationwide was grounded. Shortly thereafter, Secret
Service agents were deployed to the White House, and the U.S. military was placed on high alert worldwide. All federal office buildings in Washington, D.C. were evacuated, and New York state government offices were closed. Los Angeles International Airport, the destination of three of the hijacked airplanes, was evacuated and shut down, as was San Francisco International Airport, the destination of the fourth airliner that crashed in Pennsylvania. Schools, businesses, and other organizations across the United States closed, as millions of people watched non-stop television coverage of the events.¹ Newscasts included astonishing video footage of the airplanes colliding with the World Trade Center towers, along with images of flames and smoke billowing upward from the buildings while steel, glass, ash, and bodies fell below. The collapse of the enormous 110-story towers was repeatedly broadcast, as were images of the smoldering profile of the Pentagon and airplane wreckage in Pennsylvania. Over the next several months, stories of many victims, survivors, and heroes were recounted.

**Economic Costs**

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2002b), the September 11 attacks resulted in approximately $83 billion (in 2001 dollars) in losses in New York City, and the economic impact for the entire United States may total over $639 billion.² Furthermore, economists suggest that in New York City alone, as

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¹ September 11 represents one of the rare instances when television brought disaster into American homes in real time (Barringer and Fabrikant 2001).

² These estimates refer to both direct and indirect losses that resulted from the attacks. Examples of direct losses include the loss of human life; property loss; emergency response costs; debris removal, building stabilization, and site cleanup; health effects; and the costs associated with the provision of temporary housing. Indirect losses include lost employee income and business profits associated with organizations that were temporarily or permanently closed because of damaged or destroyed infrastructure; decreases in business travel and tourism across the United States; and fiscal impacts...
many as 100,000 people may have lost their jobs as a result of the terrorist attacks (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2002a, 2002b). Because lower Manhattan is a center of U.S. and world finance and trade, the attacks severely disrupted financial markets due to loss of life, damage to buildings, loss of telecommunications and power, and restrictions on access to the affected disaster area (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2003).\(^3\) Moreover, since the attacks, tens of billions of federal dollars have been allocated to homeland security activities at the local and state levels, as well as for the global “war on terror” that was launched in the aftermath of September 11 (Cohen, Eimicke, and Horan 2002; Waugh and Sylves 2002; Wise and Nader 2002). This government spending will undoubtedly have considerable consequences for other U.S. domestic and international programs (Haque 2002).

**Physical and Mental Health Effects**

In addition to the financial costs of the attacks, the events of September 11 resulted in significant health effects, including various initial traumatic injuries; a range of subsequent respiratory conditions such as wheezing, shortness of breath, sinusitis, asthma, and a new syndrome called “World Trade Center cough”; and mental health effects (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2004). Although the total number of people hurt as a result of the September 11 attacks is unknown, data on hospital visits in New York and New Jersey show that several thousand people were treated in its immediate aftermath for various injuries, including inhalation such as reduced tax revenues. A portion of the direct and indirect costs of the September 11 disaster have been reimbursed through payments from private insurance companies, federal disaster relief programs, and charitable contributions (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2002b).

\(^3\) The New York Stock Exchange, the American Stock Exchange, and the NASDAQ did not open on September 11 and remained closed until September 17, 2001. The closures resulted in substantial economic repercussions not only for the United States, but for world markets as well.
injuries, musculoskeletal injuries, burns, and eye injuries (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2002). In addition, thousands of disaster responders were treated for work-related injuries during the 10-month recovery and cleanup period (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2004).

Unlike the physical health effects, the emotional and psychological consequences of the September 11 attacks were not limited to disaster survivors and emergency responders, but were experienced nationwide, confirming studies showing that individuals who are not present at a traumatic event may suffer stress reactions (Kershaw 2002; Meisenhelder and Marcum 2004). In the weeks and months following the terrorist attacks, people across the country reported depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, and other symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (see for example Galea et al. 2002; Schlenger et al. 2002; Schuster et al. 2001; Scott and Connelly 2002; Taintor 2003). Many New Yorkers manifested stress and anxiety months after the September 11 attacks (Kershaw 2002). Behavioral changes in the aftermath of the disaster included increased use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, as well as difficulty coping with daily responsibilities (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2004).

**Political Ramifications**

Beyond economic and health consequences, the September 11 attacks radically altered the U.S. political landscape as well. For example, in the 2000 presidential election, terrorism received almost no attention from the candidates or the media (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004). Conversely, concerns about U.S. security, as well as questions surrounding the governmental response to
September 11, the candidates’ military experience, and the “war on terror” were central issues throughout the 2004 presidential campaign. In fact, many journalists and political commentators contend that President George W. Bush won a second term in office because of the pervasive fear among U.S. citizens regarding the threat of another terrorist attack on U.S. soil (see for example Harwood 2004; Klein 2004; Oliphant 2004; Seelye 2004).

Immediately following September 11, Congress held no hearings and mandated no studies to determine what went wrong and what remedies were needed. Rather, it enacted a legislative response that was unprecedented in its speed and bipartisan support (Cohen et al. 2002; Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2004; Rubin and Renda-Tanali 2001). Despite the initial unity and political coalition building that followed September 11, partisanship in both houses of Congress re-emerged within months (Collins 2004). Indeed, many observers now maintain that the United States is as polarized politically as it has ever been (see for example Mahoney 2004; Schwartz 2004; Williamson 2004).

Social Consequences

Martin (2003) argues that the American social milieu has changed drastically as a result of September 11, as the nation has shifted away from a culture of complete openness to a closed environment of defense and high security. The United States

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4 Traditionally, major disasters are followed by after-action reports and studies to determine necessary improvements for a better coordinated response and potential plans for mitigating future disasters.

5 New legislation and Executive Orders were rapidly enacted in the days and weeks following September 11. The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT ACT) implemented new, sometimes controversial, means to address domestic terrorism. The National Defense Authorization Act authorized funding to continue the war against global terrorism. See Haque (2002) for a summary of
had previously been the target of terrorism at home and abroad, but it was only after the September 11 attacks that the American people became acutely aware of the destructive potential of international terrorism. Consequently, the public reaction to September 11 has been more long lasting than that which followed terrorist incidents of the past (Newman 2003). Peek and Sutton (2003: 329) claim that September 11 and its aftermath created a “culture of disaster” in the United States, given the ongoing significance of the events not only for U.S. citizens, but for persons around the globe as well. September 11 continues to loom large in America’s public discourse (Haque 2002; Nimer 2002); it is rare to read the newspaper, listen to the radio, or turn on the television without hearing some reference to “life after September 11” or the “post-September 11 world.”

**TERRORISM AND THE UNITED STATES**

As an act of terrorism, September 11 was unprecedented in its high death toll, physical destruction, financial losses, and global consequences. Moreover, as suggested above, the economic, psychological, political, and social effects of September 11 have been wide-ranging and enduring. Nevertheless, despite the extraordinary nature of the events, September 11 represents only one of many terrorist attacks perpetrated against the United States over the past two hundred years (Campbell 2001). Indeed, there is a long and varied history of terrorism against the citizens, corporations, military, and government of the United States. Numerous additional antiterrorism measures adopted since September 11, as well as a comprehensive discussion of the social and political consequences of these initiatives.

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6 A total of 2,983 persons died as a result of the September 11 attacks (Lipton 2004; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004). Prior to September 11, the largest number of casualties in a single terrorist incident was the 329 passengers killed in the explosion of an Air India jumbo jet off the coast of Ireland on June 23, 1985 (Juergensmeyer 2000: 121).
attacks have been carried out by the “American left” (i.e., labor activists, people’s rights organizations, single-issue movements, and anti-traditionalist cultural experimentation groups), the “American right” (i.e., the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, anti-abortion activists, and anti-government terrorists), and international terrorist groups from countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East (see Martin 2003). However, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were far more elaborate, precise, and destructive than any of the earlier assaults against the United States (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004). The shocking and deadly attacks were seen by many – including journalists, scholars, and politicians – as a turning point in the history of political violence (Martin 2003: 2).

Definitions of Terrorism

No one definition of terrorism has gained widespread acceptance. Establishing a clear definition is difficult, largely because of the evolving social and historical circumstances in which the term has been applied. Moreover, the characterization of terrorism is clearly subjective – an event seen as an act of terror by some may be viewed as an act of liberation or war by others – and therefore definitions and their application may change based on ideological, religious, political, and moral interpretations and judgments of any given event. Scholars, government officials, activists, the media, and laypeople tend to use the powerful and politically charged words “terrorism” and “terrorist” in many different ways, which at times leads to fierce debate (Tilly 2004).

Nevertheless, there are some generally agreed upon aspects that distinguish terrorism. First, and perhaps most simply, terrorism is truly meant to terrify. The
word comes from the Latin *terrere*, “to cause to tremble,” and came into common usage in the political sense, as an assault on civil order, during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution at the close of the eighteenth century (Juergensmeyer 2000: 5). In addition to eliciting a public response—a trembling—terrorist acts are, of course, typically designed to cause death, injury, psychological and social trauma, and physical destruction. Terrorists tend to rely heavily on the element of surprise, since the more unexpected and shocking the event, the more likely the target population will become frightened and demoralized. Symbolism is also a central feature of terrorism (Alexander 2004). At some level, most terrorist targets symbolize the evil of the opponent the terrorists are fighting and the righteousness of their cause (Martin 2003: 14). In the age of mass communication, terrorists understand that the print and electronic media will disseminate the resulting, often horrific, images of violence (Simmons 2001) and that the impacts of their actions are no longer limited to the direct geographic target of an attack. According to Juergensmeyer (2000: 142), what makes the terrorism of recent years particularly unique and effective is the breadth of its audience, a scope that is in many cases virtually global due to the advent of newspapers, radio, cinema, television, and the Internet.⁷

Individuals, groups, organizations, or nations may commit terrorist acts. Through extortion, coercion, and fear, terrorism is most often used to advance a political, religious, or ideological cause or to bring about some form of social change. In the past, terrorists have employed various methods, including kidnappings, assassinations, hostage-takings, bombings, chemical weapon and biological agent

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⁷ Baudrillard (1993: 76) describes the terrorism of the late twentieth century as “a peculiarly modern form” because of the impact that it has had on public consciousness through electronic media.
attacks, cyberterrorism, hijackings, and, as was witnessed on September 11, turning commercial airliners into self-guided missiles. One difficulty in combating terrorism – whether by diplomatic, legal, military, or financial means – is that terrorists, in their attempt to surprise, traumatize, and devastate, are always trying to devise and ultimately commit previously unimagined acts.\(^8\)

Many explanations for terrorism describe factors and circumstances that may contribute to terrorist behavior. Experts have used various political, economic, psychological, cultural, and sociological theories to explain past acts of terrorist violence as well as to try to predict future events. When examining the social context of militant groups, explanations and theories often employ some combination of the following variables: political history, contemporary government policies, social demographics, economic deprivation, cultural tensions, ideological trends, and individual idiosyncrasies (see Martin 2003: 65-74).

**Consequences of Terrorism**

Terrorism may result in a range of intended and unintended consequences. As discussed previously, terrorism is designed to elicit specific emotional responses from victims and observers, most obviously, fear and terror. Moreover, terrorism usually results in the destruction of property, death and/or injury to victims, and economic losses for communities, states, and nations. Alexander (2004: 89) asserts that in addition to physical and emotional devastation, the aim of terrorism is to create political, social, and moral instability.

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\(^8\) In investigating the U.S. governments’ inability to prevent the September 11 attacks, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (2004) found that although there were considerable problems with governmental policy, management, and intelligence capabilities, the most important failure was one of imagination.
Beyond the typical, and largely intended, outcomes of terrorism, the consequences of any specific terrorist act may differ significantly from other acts, depending on the goals and actions of the terrorists, the response of the target population, and the context of the event. Because individuals and groups engage in terrorism for a variety of reasons – ranging from acts designed to draw attention to a single issue to large-scale attacks intended to radically alter the social and political order – the reactions of the target group may differ based on the method of attack and the scale of destruction. Even though a terrorist group may carry out an attack with a particular objective in mind, the target population may not react in the way intended. In fact, regardless of any perceived merit of a terrorist cause, because of the unanticipated, violent, and morally abhorrent form of most terrorist acts, governments and civilian populations often respond with outrage, increased antipathy, and reciprocal violence.

**REACTIONS TO SEPTEMBER 11**

The initial period following September 11 was depicted by the media as a time of national mourning that included a desire to return to life as normal (Turkel 2002), feelings of solidarity and national pride (Collins 2004), and widespread prosocial behavior (Alexander 2002; Cohen et al. 2002). In the wake of September 11, emergency response personnel and private citizens converged at the scenes of the attacks (Kendra and Wachtendorf 2001; Sutton 2003); tens of thousands of other concerned people volunteered at community service agencies (Lowe and Fothergill

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9 Even though there was an emphasis on quickly returning to life as normal, there was also certainly a general sense, often emphasized by the U.S. government and the media, that society was changed forever. Indeed, there was much discourse regarding the social impacts of these unprecedented acts of terrorism and the indelible mark they left on people around the world (Glendening 2002).
2003; Taintor 2003); more lined up at blood donation stations across the United States (Schoch-Spana 2003; Webb 2002); and individuals and organizations donated unprecedented amounts of money, food, clothing, and supplies to charitable organizations (Turkel 2002; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2002c, 2002d). In addition, numerous candlelight vigils, communal interfaith services, teach-ins on university campuses, and other events were organized to help people grieve, cope with the events they had witnessed, and establish a sense of social solidarity. Despite some apprehension, there was little looting or vandalism in New York City following the attacks (Weber, McEntire, and Robinson 2002).

Some scholars assert that the widespread public consensus and the outpouring of pro-social behavior, as well as the general decline in deviant behavior that followed the September 11 attacks, closely resembled reactions that typically follow most natural disasters (Alexander 2002; Mileti 2001; Tierney 2002b; Webb 2002). That is, the social changes immediately after September 11 were compared to what social scientists describe as the creation of an emergent “altruistic” or “therapeutic” community (Barton 1969; Fritz 1961). Essentially, these terms characterize the coming together of a “community of sufferers” immediately following a disaster – a process that ultimately provides disaster survivors the physical and emotional support necessary to re-create their lives (Cuthbertson and Nigg 1987; Erikson 1976; Fritz 1961: 686). Radio and television commentators recognized this solidarity and positive behavior, and they frequently used such phrases as: “Today we are all Americans.
Today we are all New Yorkers.” Reasserting national identity offered many Americans a way to deal with the shock and emotional devastation caused by the September 11 attacks.

There was certainly a tremendous increase in pro-social behavior after September 11, but there was also a general need to focus blame (Alexander 2002). The call to find those who were responsible and bring them to justice was understandable, given the intentional, violent, and criminal nature of the attacks. However, the attribution of blame, anger, and the subsequent scapegoating that followed the disaster resulted in some religious and ethnic minority groups in the United States feeling fearful and isolated because members of their communities were wrongfully associated with the attacks and consequently suffered harassment, discrimination, and violence. Indeed, while the events of September 11 brought together many Americans and led to increased feelings of patriotism and national unity (Collins 2004; Turkel 2002), the public and governmental response that followed the attacks alienated and further marginalized certain members of U.S. society as well. Truly, we were not “all Americans” on that day.

**Post-September 11 Backlash**

In natural disasters, people usually blame “Mother Nature” or attribute damage and destruction to an “act of God,” rather than holding government officials, building contractors, or other citizens accountable for individual and collective choices and actions that may have placed victims in harms way (Fischer 1998; Mileti 1999; Steinberg 2000). However, the events of September 11 were different from

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10 The day after the September 11 attacks, the French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, which is notoriously critical of U.S. foreign policy, ran the headline “We Are All Americans” on the front page of its morning edition.
most other large-scale U.S. catastrophes because a distinct group of individuals – namely, Arab Muslim men – were directly responsible for the destruction, pain, and death. As Erikson (1994: 19) states, there is a profound difference between those disasters that can be understood as the work of nature and those that are recognized as the work of humankind. Because disasters of overtly human origin are at least in principle preventable, there is always some blame to be assigned. Hence, intentional human-induced events may provoke fear, anger, and outrage, rather than passive acceptance or resignation (Juergensmeyer 2000).

Many Arab and Muslim Americans quickly recognized the magnitude and significance of the events of September 11 and anticipated potential hostile repercussions (Nimer 2002). In part because they were aware of a history in the United States of violence against Arabs and Muslims following previous crises, advocacy groups and Islamic scholars swiftly denounced the events of September 11. Indeed, within hours of the first airplane hitting the World Trade Center, American Muslim organizations issued a joint statement condemning the terrorist attacks (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a). Representatives from Arab and Muslim American communities also participated in candlelight vigils, interfaith services, disaster relief fund-raising efforts, blood drives, and public education activities following September 11. At the same time, many Americans, including newspaper columnists, religious leaders, public officials, law enforcement officers,

11 Over the past three decades, Arabs and Muslims living in the United States have repeatedly been victims of discrimination and violence, largely triggered by conflict in the Middle East and acts of terrorism associated (rightly or wrongly) with Arabs or Muslims (Human Rights Watch 2002). For example, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (1996) recorded over 300 occurrences of harassment and violence against Muslim Americans in the months following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings. These incidents were precipitated in large part by false media speculation about Muslim involvement in the attacks.
scholars, and ordinary citizens, took proactive steps to reach out to Arab and Muslim Americans and to speak out against discrimination (Arab American Institute 2002; Council on American Islamic Relations 2002a, 2002b).

Despite sustained efforts by the media, government, and civic leaders to combat intolerance in the days, weeks, and months after September 11, many individuals in the United States who share a common ethnic and/or religious background with the hijackers became the targets of hostility. Arabs and Muslims (as well as South Asians, Latinos, Sikhs, Hindus, and other individuals who were mistakenly perceived to be Arab or Muslim) suffered threats, harassment, discrimination, racial and religious profiling, property damage, and verbal and physical assault. Although the most dramatic increase in acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims occurred in the months immediately following September 11, reports of bias, civil rights violations, and hate crimes continue (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2005).  

Even though definitive statistics are not available, official and community-based organization tabulations – derived from law enforcement investigations, reports by individual victims, and media accounts – demonstrate the extent and severity of the backlash violence that followed the September 11 terrorist attacks. In the first week after September 11, newspapers and other media serving major cities throughout the United States documented 645 separate incidents of bias or discriminatory behavior involving Americans perceived to be of Middle Eastern

12 Given the length of time since the events of September 11 and the fact that the United States has subsequently engaged in two armed conflicts in the primarily Muslim nations of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is increasingly difficult to discern whether more recent bias incidents are a result of the September 11 attacks, related to the wars overseas, or the consequence of more long-standing, deeply embedded racism and religious intolerance in the United States.
descent (South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow 2001: 3). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also reported a dramatic rise in hate crimes against Muslims following the September 11 attacks. In 2000, the FBI received reports of 28 hate crimes against Muslim Americans. In 2001, that number jumped to 481, a 1700 percent increase (Anderson 2002). Since September 11, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has investigated over 890 anti-Muslim hate crimes (Watanabe 2004; Yee 2005). Prosecutors contend most of the crimes, including assaults, bombing plots, acts of vandalism, arson, shootings, and murders, were in retaliation for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Additionally, since September 11, reports to advocacy and human rights groups of backlash violence, discrimination, and other forms of prejudiced behavior have reached the thousands (see for example American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003; Arab American Institute 2002; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004b, 2005; Human Rights Watch 2002).13

It is important to recognize that even though these statistics are alarming, given the drastic increase in acts of violence and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims following September 11, the numbers do not tell the entire story. Hate crime statistics only document: a) acts defined as criminal under hate crimes legislation, which varies from state to state; b) acts that have actually been reported by victims, which is a significant issue within immigrant communities because immigrants often fear legal retribution; c) acts that have actually been recorded as hate crimes by local

13 The discrepancy between the number of hate crimes investigated by federal law enforcement agencies (hundreds of cases) versus the number of bias incidents reported by advocacy groups (thousands of cases) occurs because most advocacy groups record all types of incidents – ranging from verbal harassment to crimes involving arson, assault, and murder – whereas the U.S. government statistics only reflect the most severe cases that meet strict legal definitions of hate crimes.
law enforcement officials and submitted to the federal authorities; and d) in most cases, the most heinous of crimes (see Cogan 2002). Hate crime statistics obviously do not reflect the true number of incidents committed against any given minority population; nor do these numbers capture the full psychological and social impact of more common forms of harassment and discrimination. Indeed, acts of discrimination and violence demonstrate to a minority population that they are not safe, as members of stigmatized groups are made to feel fearful, different, and estranged. Because they feel like outsiders, they often believe they must demonstrate their loyalty to the nation through their behavior, public speech, and physical appearance.

Given the widespread backlash against religious and ethnic minorities following the September 11 attacks, political leaders, local, state, and federal authorities, and several government agencies instituted extra measures to protect individuals, Islamic schools, mosques, and Arab- and Muslim-owned businesses (Human Rights Watch 2002). In fact, on September 12, 2001, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution condemning bigotry and violence against Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians. On September 13, 2001, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights made a hotline available for people wishing to report hate crimes. Since September 11, the

14 See Ferber, Grattet, and Jenness (2000) for an overview of the limitations of the federal hate crimes reporting system.

15 See Collins (2004) for a discussion of what he calls the “protective use of symbols” on the part of ethnic minorities – primarily Middle Eastern and Asian taxi cab drivers and shop owners displaying flags and other patriotic signs in windows and on their clothing – in the aftermath of September 11.

16 The entire resolution stated, “Be it resolved that the Congress – 1) declares that in the quest to identify, bring to justice, and punish the perpetrators and sponsors of the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, that the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans, including Arab Americans, American Muslims, and Americans from South Asia, should be protected; and 2) condemns any acts of violence or discrimination against any Americans, including Arab Americans, American Muslims, and Americans from South Asia.”
U.S. Department of Transportation has investigated over a hundred complaints from airline passengers who claimed they were singled out at security screenings or barred altogether from boarding airplanes because of their distinct names or physical appearance (Wan 2002). In response to a substantial increase in reports of employment discrimination after September 11, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2002) disseminated information in an attempt to improve cultural awareness and stop workplace discrimination against Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans.

PURPOSE OF THIS DISSERTATION

Considering the magnitude and significance of the September 11 attacks and the severity of the backlash that followed, it is important to more thoroughly understand the consequences of the event from the perspective of the religious minority group members who became the focus of blame, harassment, and discrimination. The purpose of this dissertation is to document and analyze the experiences of a group of young, mostly second-generation, Muslim Americans since September 11. This dissertation will serve as a record of how some Muslim Americans responded to and were affected by the momentous events of that day.

More specifically, through the analysis of qualitative data, this work explores how the events and aftermath of September 11 have affected the personal and social identities of some members of this particular religious group. Drawing on data gathered through participant observation, focus groups, and individual interviews, the goal of this study is to expand social theory regarding identity transformation in

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17 Most of these incidents involved the refusal to accommodate religious practices in the workplace or the denial or termination of employment because of religious appearance (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002b).
response to crises while also contributing to our understanding of social vulnerability and the reactions of minority communities to catastrophic events. Moreover, the research examines the social psychological effects of blame and hostility following a human-initiated disaster, an area that has received inadequate attention in the literature on the sociology of disasters (Neal 1984). This lack of research is most likely because blame has been considered a fairly atypical disaster phenomenon (Phillips and Ephraim 1992: 1).

The body of knowledge regarding the traditions and experiences of Muslim Americans continues to grow (see Leonard 2003 for a review of the research), yet few empirical investigations have specifically explored identity development processes among Muslims in the United States. This study is designed to address this gap in our sociological knowledge. In particular, the analysis focuses on the development, maintenance, and negotiation of religious, ethnic, and gender identities for young Muslim Americans.

OVERVIEW OF THIS DISSERTATION

In this study, I examine the experiences of a group of Muslim Americans in New York and Colorado both prior to and following the events of September 11, 2001. These participants shared their stories with me, and I sought to make sense of what happened in their everyday lives.

In the chapters that follow, I summarize and analyze the experiences of a sample of 127 Muslim Americans. Chapter Two presents the conceptual issues that form the theoretical groundwork for this dissertation. In Chapter Three, I describe my reasons for pursuing this topic, how I entered the research settings and selected the
participants for this study, the methodological tools I used to gather and analyze my data, the roles I took in the settings, and several challenges that emerged during data collection and data analysis. Chapter Four examines issues of community isolation and group solidarity. In Chapter Five, I present a three-stage model of religious identity development. Chapter Six explores patterns of ethnic self-identification and the negotiation of ethnic identity, while Chapter Seven addresses the relationship of gender and religion to power and identity. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical contributions of this work. I also offer policy options to help communities better prepare for and respond to the social consequences of terrorist attacks and other human-induced disasters.
CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

By examining the experiences of young Muslim Americans after September 11, this dissertation both explores the process of identity transformation in response to crises and furthers our understanding of social vulnerability and the reactions of minority communities to catastrophic events. I use an inductive theoretical model (see Charmaz and Mitchell 2001) to define and analyze the various issues, concepts, and themes that emerged from the personal stories of these Muslim men and women. Overall, however, the analysis of the data is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and identity theory. In this chapter I explain these frameworks and discuss several conceptual issues that inform my interpretation of the findings. I begin with a brief overview of symbolic interactionism, then discuss identity theory, with an emphasis on religious, ethnic, and Muslim American identity construction. Next I explore the literature on identity transformation following catastrophic events, and I conclude with a discussion of disasters and issues of social inequality, blame, and hostility.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

There is no universally accepted symbolic interactionist perspective (see Cook 2000; Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds 1975; Rose 1962; Stone and Farberman 1986; Stryker 1981). However, in this section, I characterize some of the common ideas, concepts, and assumptions that unite symbolic-interactionist thinking. The characterization is derived largely from the early work of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Thomas (1937), Goffman (1959), and Blumer (1969).
Symbolic interactionism focuses on the details of interaction among individuals and groups, as distinct from the specific examination of macro-level social systems that distinguishes the conflict and functionalist perspectives in sociological theory (Turner 1998). Indeed, symbolic interactionism approaches the study of the social world from the tangible perspectives of human beings and the everyday realities they perceive (Adler and Adler 1980: 20). Symbolic interactionists study how we use and interpret symbols not merely to communicate with one another, but to create and maintain impressions of ourselves and to construct and sustain what we experience as the reality of a particular social situation (Cooley 1902; Goffman 1959, 1963). From this perspective, social life consists of a complex fabric woven of countless symbolic interactions, both within and between individuals and groups, through which life takes on shape and meaning (Mead 1934).

According to Blumer (1969: 2), symbolic interactionism is based on the analysis of three premises: 1) Human beings act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others; and 3) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters.¹ Thus, symbolic interaction is the creation of shared meanings through the process of interpreting the symbols used to convey meaning.

¹ See Snow (2001) for a discussion regarding the implications of Blumer’s often-cited three-pronged conceptualization of symbolic interactionism. With its narrow focus on meaning and interpretation, Snow argues that this “gateway to symbolic interactionism,” while useful, has opened the theory to much criticism. In effect, because many critics only consider Blumer’s initial conceptualization, they see the micro-level approach of symbolic interactionism as ignoring social structure. Snow offers additional propositions to correct this misconception.
A significant contribution of symbolic interactionist theory is the recognition that the structure of society is, fundamentally, created and maintained by the actions and interactions of individuals and groups; it is not an external form somehow imposed on human beings. Interactionists view society as possible because of people’s capacities to define situations and to view themselves as objects in situations (Thomas 1937: 8). Essentially, interactionists maintain that society exists through the human capacities for thinking and defining as well as for self-reflection and evaluation (Turner 1998). With the goal of describing and understanding (rather than predicting) human life, interactionists focus on the dynamic nature of reality and society rather than exclusively on the framework within which behavior occurs (Adler and Adler 1980). From a symbolic interactionist perspective, actors are not viewed simply as products of an overarching social structure that determines thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Rather, individuals are considered active, conscious beings who through their interactions create that evolving structure (Blumer 1937).

IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory attempts to explain the link between the individual conception of self and the larger social structure within which the individual thinks and acts (Burke 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1968, 1980, 1987; Turner 1978).² Sociologists generally think of a “self” as an idea that we develop about who we are.

²Identity theory and social identity theory (Hogg and Abrams 1988; Tajfel 1978, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1982) are similar perspectives that address the social nature of the self. Identity theory is principally a microsociological theory that describes the individual in terms of role-related behaviors, while social identity theory is a social psychological theory, with psychological roots, that addresses group processes and intergroup relations. See Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) for a comprehensive discussion of the similarities and differences between the two theories.
because of others’ reactions to us (Lois 2003: 11). We can only see ourselves as we think others see us – by interpreting their words and actions toward us. Thus, the idea of self is distinctly social (House 1977; Turner 1976, 1978). From this perspective, the person is shaped by interaction, but interaction is, in turn, shaped by social structure. Conversely, when human beings creatively alter patterns of interaction, social structure can change correspondingly (Stryker 1981: 23). Society is seen as a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organized, carried out by an array of groups, organizations, communities, and institutions that are further differentiated by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other variables (Stryker and Burke 2000: 285).

Theoretical approaches to identity vary in their emphases on social structure, on the one hand, and the processes and interactions through which identities are constructed, on the other (Burke et al. 2003; Howard 2000; Simon 2004; Stryker and Burke 2000). The structural approach relies on the concept of role identities to analyze individuals’ self-conceptions, behaviors, and social relations with others (Burke 1980; Stryker 1980; Turner 1978). The second approach highlights on-going processes of identity construction, selection, and negotiation (Cahill 1986; Nagel 1994, 1995; Waters 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987). Identity construction involves individual self-presentation and the management of verbal and visual impressions (Goffman 1959, 1963).

The concept of identity is generally used to define and describe an individuals’ sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses (see Cerulo 1997; Frable 1997; Howard 2000; Sanders 2002; and
Vryan, Adler, and Adler 2003 for overviews). Identity results from internal subjective perceptions and self-reflection on the one hand, and external descriptions and categorizations on the other. In essence, identity is “who or what one is” – in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others. It applies to the characterizations one makes of oneself as well as those made by others on the basis of one’s traits and behaviors (Gecas and Burke 1995: 42). Whereas identity was often conceived of as fixed and immutable by earlier theorists, today it is more often considered an evolving process of “becoming” rather than simply “being” (Dillon 1999: 250). An individuals’ identity can shift over time due to personal experiences and choices, external ascriptions, and larger social, cultural, and historical changes (Cook 2000; Haddad 1994; McMullen 2000; Nagel 1995).

Hewitt (2003: 98-113) distinguishes three forms of identity: situational, social, and personal. Situational identities emerge in and affect face-to-face interactions with others. According to Thomas (1937), when we come into the presence of others, we mutually construct a definition of the situation. Defining our own and others’ situational identities enables us to know how (and how not) to act; it informs our expectations and interpretations of our own and others’ behavior (Vryan et al. 2003: 368). Our situational identities become established as we announce them in various ways, especially through language and appearance, and as those we are interacting with define or place us in the given social situation (Stone 1962: 93).

Although situational identities change rapidly in dynamic, interactive environments, some aspects of identity are more stable and enduring (Hewitt 1989). Thus, based on group memberships, we define social identities for ourselves and
others that remain relatively stable across many different contexts, providing continuity even as we move in and out of various situational identities (Vryan et al. 2003: 371). These membership groups, which often are derived from ascribed characteristics and socially constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and so on, provide meanings and labels that define who we are (Burke 2003). Their existence depends on mutual recognition by ourselves and at least some others.

*Personal identity* recognizes an individual’s efforts to construct and maintain an “autobiography” or “life story,” which helps establish a sense of difference from others (Hewitt 2003: 111). According to Goffman (1963), personal identity involves distinctive traits of individuals, including their appearance, names, personal history, biographical information, personality characteristics, and their special place in a particular kinship network. Essentially, personal identity is what defines us as unique individuals (Stets 1995) rather than as a member of a class of individuals that share socially structured categories and affiliations (social identity) or as role enactments specific to a given context (situational identity) (Hewitt 2003; Vryan et al. 2003). While the distinction among situational, social, and personal identity is useful as a conceptual tool, these forms of identity are not mutually exclusive. In any given situation or relationship, all three or any combination of these forms may be relevant to the thinking and behavior of participants (Vryan et al. 2003: 372).

**Religious Identity**

While there has been much social scientific study of identity, major reviews of identity theory and research have largely overlooked the role of religion in forging the
identities of individuals and groups. For example, in a summary of knowledge regarding identity construction and processes, Cerulo (1997) does not include religion as an identity category. Similarly, the overview essays of Frable (1997) and Howard (2000) carefully examine the individual and social bases of various dimensions of identity – including gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, age, physical and mental ability, and class – but neither mentions religion as an important defining aspect of individuals or groups in society. Ironically, Appiah and Gates (1995: 1) invoke Christian symbolism, but ignore religion as a source of identity, in their claim that gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class form the “holy trinity” in the field of identity studies.

At the same time, however, sociologists of religion have conducted numerous investigations of the role of religion in maintaining group identity and solidarity, particularly for immigrants (see for example Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Gibson 1988; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Hammond 1988; Herberg 1955; Min and Kim 2002; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988). Rather than focusing on religion exclusively, many of these studies examine the connection between religion and ethnic identity. This research has documented the continuing importance of religion in preserving cultural and ethnic traditions, supporting the adjustment of first-generation immigrants to a new host society, and providing a source of identity for the second generation (Bankston and Zhou 1996; Chong 1998; Kurien 1998; Ng 2002; Rayaprol 1997; Yang 1999). According to Williams (1988: 12-13), although religion is often a significant aspect of ethnic culture, it is difficult to establish the

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3 Similarly, very few studies of recent immigration and ethnicity address religion, an omission that, according to Warner (1997: 218), represents a “huge scholarly blind spot.”
exact relation between the two – whether religious affiliation is essential to the ethnic community or if religious orientation is ancillary to ethnic identity. Indeed, immigrant groups differ in the ways they focus on and integrate their religious and ethnic identities. Some immigrant communities emphasize their members’ religious identity more than their ethnic foundation, whereas others stress ethnic identity and rely on religious institutions primarily to preserve cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries (Yang and Ebaugh 2001: 367).

Various theories have been advanced regarding why certain individuals and communities highlight and develop religious identities, as opposed to other forms of personal and social identity such as race, ethnicity, or nationality. According to Smith (1978: 1175), immigration itself is often a theologizing experience, as immigrants frequently react to the stress, alienation, and confusion that result from their arrival in a new country by turning to religion. In an attempt to resolve adjustment issues, they build religious institutions and re-establish familiar social and cultural activities in the new host society (Kurien 1998; Rayaprol 1997). Consequently, religion can assume greater importance for immigrants’ definition of self and group affiliations than was the case in their homelands, where religion may have been taken for granted or at least been of lesser importance. This is particularly true if the immigrants come from a society where they were part of the religious majority and then move to a host society where they become a religious minority – for example, Indian Hindus, Israeli Jews, Pakistani Muslims, or Vietnamese Buddhists coming to the United States.

Another closely related explanation of why religion may become an important basis for identity recognizes the functions that religion plays in society. In addition to
meeting spiritual needs, membership in a religious organization offers many non-
religious material, psychological, and social benefits, including community networks,
economic opportunities, educational resources, and peer trust and support (Chen
2002; Hurh and Kim 1990). As these positive benefits increase, it is more likely that
individuals will affiliate religiously.

A third explanation maintains that religious identity and expression ease the
tensions caused by incongruent immigrant, ethnic, and American identities (Feher
1998; Yang 1999), while also helping the individual to overcome social isolation
(Kwon 2000). Sullivan (2000) asserts that when church members define themselves
first and foremost in religious terms, their ethnic variation and national differences
become less problematic, and diverse communities are brought together through
shared worship.

A fourth explanation contends that religion may be used to maintain personal
and social distinctiveness in the multicultural American context (Rayaprol 1997). As
strong religious orientation is less and less taken for granted in the pluralistic and
secular United States, adherents of a faith become more conscious of their traditions
and often more determined to transmit those beliefs, values, and behaviors (Warner
1998: 17). Religious dress, practices, and organizational affiliations serve as
important identity markers that help to promote individual self-awareness and
preserve group cohesion (Williams 1988). Religious, ethnic, and national heritage is
displayed and thus maintained (Kurien 1998). In sum, for a variety of reasons, for
many immigrants religion remains or becomes an important element in the hierarchy
of identities that compose the self.
Muslim American Identity

The religious landscape of the United States has changed markedly over the past four decades, due, in part, to the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which repealed country-of-origin quotas established in the 1920s that predominantly favored Western European, mostly Judeo-Christian, immigrants. This change in federal immigration policy led to an unprecedented diversification of the American population over the subsequent years, as millions of immigrants and refugees arrived from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, driven here by economic opportunity, political turmoil, wars, revolutions, and environmental disasters (Ebaugh 2000; Warner 1998). These and other social, political, and economic forces have made the United States the most religiously diverse nation on earth (Eck 2001; Melton 2003). Indeed, the post-1965 “new” immigrants are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously more heterogeneous than the immigrants of a century ago (Warner 1993: 1061).

Muslims constitute an important part of this increasingly diverse religious landscape. While estimates vary regarding the current population, and at times there is disagreement concerning who should be identified as Muslim, it is generally accepted that approximately five to seven million Muslims live permanently in America and the community is growing steadily⁴ (Armstrong 2000; Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001; Smith 1999). According to Leonard (2003), Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States and is poised to surpass Judaism and become

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⁴ Precise figures for the number of Muslims living in the United States do not exist because the Census Bureau and the Immigration and Naturalization Service are not legally allowed to collect data on the religious affiliation of citizens or immigrants.
second only to Christianity in the number of adherents. Muslims reside in every state, with the largest populations in California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Maryland (Bagby et al. 2001). The Muslim community is strikingly diverse and includes large percentages of African Americans as well as many first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants of South Asian and Arab descent. Additionally, a small but gradually increasing number of Anglos, Latinos, and Native Americans has converted to Islam over the past several decades (Smith 1999). Thus, the adherents to the faith represent a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, and Islamic ideologies.

A number of studies have investigated various aspects of personal and social identity among Muslim Americans, including gender role attitudes and identities of Muslim women (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Hermansen 1991; Read 2003; Read and Bartkowski 2000); identity politics of Muslims (Khan 2000; Marshall and Read 2003; Shryock 2002); issues of religious identity transmission and retention (Abu-Laban 1989; Barazangi 1989); and the distinct identities and religious practices of Sunni and Shi’a Muslims in America (Sachedina 1994; Walbridge 1999). Additionally, several research projects have examined the intersections of religious, racial, and ethnic identities among Arab American Muslims (Abraham, Abraham, and Aswad 1983; Haddad 1994; Naber 2000), African American Muslims (Ailen 2000; Kahera 2002; Nuruddin 2000), and Iranian Muslims (Bozorgmehr 2000; Mostofi 2003; Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1994). In an ambitious undertaking, Haddad (2000) investigated the

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5 The U.S. Department of State (2004) estimates that the ethnic composition of the Muslim American community is 33% South Asian (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan), 30% African American, and 25% Arab. The population also includes immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines), the Caribbean, Turkey, and Iran.
broader social dynamics that shape Islamic identity in North America, exploring the factors that affected various identities prior to emigration, the immigrant experience in America, and the options immigrants find as they struggle to make their home in a new, sometimes hostile, environment.

Despite the aforementioned studies and other research that explores the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of Muslims (see Denny 1994; Haddad 1991; Haddad and Esposito 2000; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Haddad and Smith 2002; Leonard 2003; Smith 1999; Waugh, Abu-Laban, and Qureshi 1991), little is known regarding the process of identity formation among Muslim Americans, particularly for the second generation (Hermansen 2003; Leonard 2003; Moaddel 2002). Ajrouch (1999, 2000, 2004) has closely examined the identity development of young Muslim Arabs in Dearborn, Michigan. Although she does not specifically focus on religious identification, Ajrouch does explore the intersection of ethnic and religious identity, the significance of gender relations, and how religious teachings and parental influence shape the identities of second-generation Arab American adolescents. Hermansen (2003) has also written about the second generation and what she calls “identity Islam” among that group, a form of identity assertion that concerns her greatly because she sees Muslim youth in America becoming rigidly conservative and condemnatory. Hermansen considers this particular ideological version of Islam antithetical to progressive interpretations within the religion.

Among the work on the lives of Muslim American youth, no studies appear to have specifically documented and analyzed the ways that diverse forms of identity are constructed, developed, and enacted by the second generation. This area merits
increased scholarly attention given that, relative to the first generation, the process of identity formation among second-generation immigrant children is more complex and often entails the management and negotiation of competing allegiances and attachments. Situated within two cultural worlds, the second generation must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and so on) and, likewise, be defined according to the classification systems of their peers, schools, communities, and the larger society (see Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001; Rumbaut 1994; Rumbaut and Portes 2001).

IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION FOLLOWING CRISIS EVENTS

In addition to the paucity of research on second-generation Muslim American identity formation, very little theoretical or empirical work has examined identity change in response to crisis events. This dissertation constitutes one effort to systematically analyze how the personal and social identities of the members of a stigmatized minority group were transformed as a result of a human-initiated catastrophe.

In one of the first comprehensive sociological statements regarding adult transformations of self, Strauss (1959) notes that most early theoretical formulations of identity change focused on linear and progressive developmental models, rather than capturing the sometimes arbitrary, tentative, complex, and only partly unified character of human development throughout the life course (also see Becker 1964; Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin 1975: 423-462). Strauss (1962: 66) uses the term

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6 I am referring specifically to large-scale social catastrophes such as environmental and technological disasters, terrorist attacks, and wars (see Hewitt 1997; Quarantelli 1998), not to micro-level individual or personal “crises” (see Berger and Luckmann 1967; Erikson 1968).

7 See for example Erikson (1963, 1968); Freud (1949, 1960); and Mead (1934).
“transformation” to describe “revisions in form and realignment of self-concept, including changes in identity and psychological status.” Strauss (1959) maintains that some transformations of personal and social identity and perspective are planned, or at least fostered, by institutional representatives; other changes happen despite, rather than because of, such anticipations or pressures by society; and yet other identity shifts take place outside the influence of the more visible social structure. He argues that these critical moments and incidents constitute “turning points” in the onward movement of personal identity careers, as someone becomes something other than who he or she once was (1962: 67).

More recently, researchers have explored various aspects of identity transformation among a variety of groups, including, for example, young adults leaving home for college (Karp, Holmstrom, and Gray 1998); ethnic minorities (Brodkin 1998; Cornell 1996; Nagel 1994; Root 1997); religious minorities (Jacobs 2002); lesbians and gays (Bernstein 1997; Cass 1979; Kaufman and Johnson 2004); feminists (Downing and Roush 1985); and deviants (Becker 1963; Goffman 1963; Kitsuse 1980; Lemert 1972). This work captures the complexity of identity discovery, affirmation, reconstruction, and change throughout an individual’s life. Furthermore, these findings show how personal choice, group consciousness, external ascription, institutions, social structures, and social and historical change intersect and jointly influence processes of identity development and transformation.

Despite this emerging scholarship on identity transformation for diverse groups in various social contexts, we still know relatively little about how personal and social identities may be altered and shaped in response to large-scale social
catastrophes, although notable exceptions exist. For example, increasingly researchers are studying the enduring traumatic effects for survivors of ethnic conflict, genocide, and war (Dower 1986; Herman 1992; Prince 1985; Robben and Suárez-Orozco 2000). Much of this work focuses on the disruptive psychological impacts of these atrocities for the victims and their families. However, more recently there have been calls to examine the consequences of catastrophic events on the shifting social identities of entire groups, by integrating more thorough analyses of the impacts of disasters and collective violence on group identity transformation (Alexander et al. 2004; Ewing 2000; Eyerman 2001; Suárez-Orozco 2000).

Over the past several decades, a growing number of studies have specifically investigated post-Holocaust Jewish identity formation in the United States (see for example Bergmann and Jucovy 1982; Gans 1979; Hogman 1998; Prince 1980, 1985). Through in-depth interviews and systematic analysis, researchers have gathered and evaluated numerous first-person accounts of Holocaust survivors, their children, and their grandchildren. Scholars have also explored identity development and change through the study of secondary documents such as diaries, letters, memoirs, and novels (see Berger 1991). This research demonstrates how the suffering and loss inflicted by a catastrophe of enormous scope and complexity can be transmitted across generations and ultimately channeled into the construction of an individual’s sense of self (Hogman 1998). Beyond shedding light on personal identity formation, these studies also illustrate how enduring trauma can influence the development and expression of religious and ethnic social identities. Indeed, Jacobs (2002: 134) argues
that as a transnational and transhistorical symbol of Jewish identity, the Holocaust reinforces ethnic and religious minority group membership.

Another area of research on identity development and transformation in response to crises has explored the experiences of ethnic minorities during times of war. This work has shown that domestic minority groups may be substituted for “the enemy” and attacked, a behavior pattern Mazón (1984) called symbolic annihilation. Historians and social scientists have documented many instances of anti-German sentiment and propaganda and subsequent civil rights violations in the United States during World War I (see Jensen 1968; Johnson 1963; Scheiber 1960). For example, at the beginning of the War, German Americans were legally declared “enemy aliens” and thousands were arrested and later interned (Nagler 2000); over 260,000 male and 220,000 female German Americans were forced to register with the U.S. government, and they were required to carry a registration card at all times (Nagler 2000); and the use of the German language was forbidden in schools, churches, over the telephone, and in public places ⁸ (LeMay 2005). These and other forms of institutionalized and overt discrimination and social exclusion contributed to the rapid assimilation of German Americans into mainstream U.S. culture and hence accelerated the subsequent decline in German American ethnic identification and allegiance.⁹

Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II, approximately 110,000 Japanese Americans, over two-thirds of whom were native-

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⁸ An example of this anti-German sentiment is captured in the text of a sign from World War I (exhibited at the Colorado Historical Society), which reads, “There Are Two Places You Can Speak German. In Germany, And In Hell.”

⁹ Other important factors, such as intermarriage and upward educational, occupational, and economic mobility also obviously impacted the cultural and structural assimilation of this group.
born U.S. citizens, were forcibly evacuated from their homes and detained in internment camps across the United States (Daniels 2000; Petonito 2000). In addition to the detentions, anti-Japanese propaganda and activities were particularly widespread and intense throughout the Second World War. Newspaper stories, editorials, cartoons, and political speeches, as well as mob actions and the efforts of nativist organizations all reflected widespread prejudice against the Japanese (Dower 1985; LeMay 2005; Thiesmeyer 1995). Despite the legal, economic, and social discrimination that Japanese Americans suffered both prior to and during World War II, they rapidly acculturated into mainstream society following the conflict.

Although Japanese Americans have become largely structurally assimilated (LeMay 2005), they have maintained high levels of ethnic identity and group membership (Fujita and O’Brien 1985; Montero 1981).

Several events in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries appear to have significantly affected the formation of Muslim identity in the United States (Haddad 2004). Recent incidents that have contributed to Americans’ negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims include the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979; several kidnappings, bombings, and hostage-takings in the Middle East throughout the 1980s and 1990s; the Salman Rushdie Affair of 1989; the Gulf Wars; and, of course, the September 11 terrorist attacks (Alexander 1998; Human Rights Watch 2002). Indeed, a relationship between crisis events, an upsurge in anti-Muslim

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10 Additionally, over 7,000 German Americans and approximately 4,000 Italian Americans were arrested and incarcerated for varying lengths of time (Nagler 2000; Pozzetta 2000). These numbers notwithstanding, not a single Japanese, German, or Italian American was convicted of espionage, sabotage, or related criminal activity during the war (Daniels 2000; LeMay 2005; Nagler 2000).

11 See LeMay (2005: 81-89) for a discussion of several of the factors that led to the rapid structural assimilation of Japanese Americans following World War II.
incidents, and increased Muslim group mobilization and activity has become evident over the past three decades. Haddad (2004: 40) contends that while scholars have been studying the immigration and integration of Muslims into the United States and comparing their adjustment to that of other initially ostracized religious groups such as Catholics and Jews, in the aftermath of September 11 it may be more appropriate and instructive to compare the treatment of Muslims and Arabs to the treatment of Germans during World War I and Japanese during World War II. This assertion underscores the need to record the experiences of Muslim Americans and to analyze subsequent identity formation processes. Again, this dissertation is one attempt to do just that – to explore how the religious, ethnic, and gender identities of a sample of young Muslim Americans changed following September 11.

DISASTERS AND ISSUES OF INEQUALITY, BLAME, AND HOSTILITY

Another issue addressed by this study is social inequality and disasters. Although disasters may be financially, physically, and emotionally devastating to any individual, family, or community, these events do not affect everyone in the same way. Indeed, recent studies have identified a broad range of sociocultural and sociodemographic factors that may influence disaster preparedness, response, and recovery for individuals and groups (Bolin and Stanford 1998; Mileti 1999; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001).

Specifically, researchers have taken stock of what is known concerning how gender (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Fothergill 1996, 2004), race and ethnicity (Fothergill, Maestas, and Darlington 1999; Peacock, Morrow, and Gladwin 1997) and socioeconomic status (Fothergill and Peek 2003) play a role in disaster vulnerability
in the United States, and their findings have consistently shown that disasters disproportionately affect more marginalized groups, including the poor, people of color, and women (Blaikie et al. 1994; Hewitt 1997). Personal attributes such as age, language, and physical ability are also likely to affect disaster vulnerability, although these are areas in which little research currently exists (Tierney et al. 2001). Studies focusing on the experiences of religious minority groups in the United States and their responses to disaster are extremely rare.

Beyond furthering understanding about issues of social vulnerability and inequality in disaster, this study also augments what is known regarding blame and hostility following catastrophic events. As discussed with respect to Germans and Japanese, the United States has a long history of intolerance toward racial, ethnic, national, and religious minorities during times of war, crisis, and national insecurity. Indeed, individuals and groups perceived as different or foreign have frequently been characterized as the enemy or as a threat to national security (Dower 1986; Mazón 1984). In fact, most minority groups in the United States, including Native Americans, African Americans, Irish, Italians, Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Latinos, Jews, and Catholics have been the targets of hostility during times of social, economic, and political crisis (see for example Brodkin 1998; Deloria 1999; Eyerman 2001; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1999). This tendency to blame and stigmatize minority groups has been an enduring feature of United States— and, indeed, world—history.

Prior research on blame and disasters has tended to focus on issues of culpability and blame assignment. For instance, studies have examined whether individuals attribute natural disasters to human choices or to indiscriminate forces
external to human choice and the social system (Steinberg 2000), while other research
has documented which individuals or organizations were actually blamed following
various technological disasters (Bucher 1957; Couch and Kroll-Smith 1991; Neal
1984). Numerous scholars have explored blame assignment and enemy construction
during times of war (Dower 1985; Gray 1959; Grossman 1995; Keen 1991; Petonito
2000; Rieber 1991), while other studies have examined community responses
following disasters that involve real or perceived human culpability (Couch and
Kroll-Smith 1985; Erikson 1976, 1994). Specifically, researchers have argued that
civil disturbances (Hewitt 1997; Warheit 1976), riots (Quarantelli 1993; Scanlon
Kroll-Smith and Couch 1990; Neal 1984), and terrorist attacks (Peek and Sutton
2003) are likely to result in conflict, longer-term negative social impacts, and anti-
social behavior. In this dissertation, blame is examined from the unique perspectives
of those implicated (albeit falsely because of their shared religious affiliation)
following the September 11 attacks. Theoretically, aspects of blame and social stigma
(Goffman 1963) are integrated into questions of identity development and
negotiation.
CHAPTER III

SETTINGS AND METHODS

From September 2001 through October 2003, I conducted 106 qualitative interviews with 127 young Muslim Americans in New York and Colorado. In this chapter, I describe the events leading to this project, explain why I chose to pursue this topic, and outline my research design. Next, I discuss how I entered the research settings and describe the sample population. I also provide an overview of my data collection methods, which included focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observation. Then, I outline the steps I took to analyze the data. I conclude with a discussion of the methodological issues and challenges I faced during the course of this research.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

For me, the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, began like most other days. I woke up around 7:15 a.m.¹ and got ready for work. I gathered my books and laptop computer, packed my lunch, and prepared for my 25-minute commute to the University of Colorado. Just as I was turning to walk out of the house, I noticed that I had a new message on my answering machine. I remember thinking that it was odd that I had a message, since my friends and family members never call me in the morning. I pressed the play button and heard my best friends’ voice. She said, “Lori, I don’t know what’s happening. Turn on your television. I think we’re being attacked.

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¹ I was living in Colorado in the fall of 2001, which is two time zones behind the eastern United States. Therefore, when I awoke that morning, both of the hijacked airplanes had already crashed into the World Trade Center towers.
We might be at war. Oh my God, the World Trade Center is on fire. Please get in touch with me as soon as you can.”

At first, I thought that my friend might be joking. I had no idea what she was talking about, or why she would leave such a bizarre message. I hit the playback button and listened to her message again, and this time, I could tell that she was both serious and afraid. I did not own a television at the time, so I rushed upstairs and turned on a radio. By then, it was almost 10:15 a.m. on the east coast of the United States, and the south tower of the World Trade Center had already collapsed. I listened to the radio for several minutes and still could not grasp what was happening. It was at this point that I decided to go to work and listen to the radio on my way to campus.

I grabbed my things, hopped in the car, and turned on the radio. As I was driving, I heard that the north tower of the World Trade Center had collapsed. Traveling on the highway that morning was eerie. When I looked around I could see that all of the commuters were shocked or bewildered and some were crying. The traffic was slow, but no one honked or shouted. There was only the steady movement of vehicles containing drivers and passengers who were, like me, trying to comprehend the tragedies that were simultaneously unfolding in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.

In the fall of 2001, I was a graduate student in sociology and was employed as a research assistant at the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center at the University of Colorado. The Hazards Center is a world-renowned institution dedicated to the understanding of the social science aspects of hazards and
disasters, and so I assumed that the Center would be extremely busy by the time I arrived the morning of September 11. I was right. The Center’s Director was popping in and out of his office,fielding numerous calls from various media outlets.\(^2\)

Meanwhile, the Co-Director of the Center was on the telephone talking to staff at the National Science Foundation and other government agencies attempting to secure supplementary funding for research teams to travel to the disaster sites.\(^3\) I spoke with my co-workers for a while, and we speculated about the source of the attacks, about how many people might have died when the World Trade Center towers collapsed, and about how local, state, and federal officials would respond to the emergency. The talk did not last long, though, as there was much work to be done. The Co-Director asked me to go to the Hazards Center Library and compile a list of relevant resources, including journal articles, books, and reports, that explored the response to various types of large-scale disasters and complex emergencies. She also asked me to search for library holdings on responses to terrorism, although she noted that the collection would probably only contain a few references dealing specifically with this topic.

For several decades, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in the United States have worked to understand the causes and consequences of natural and technological risks (see Mileti 1999; Quarantelli 1998; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry

\(^2\) Because of the long history of natural disasters and disaster research in the United States, it is understandable that the media would turn to natural disaster experts to try to make sense of a large-scale terrorist attack. Although “terrorism experts” have proliferated since September 11, prior to those events, the study of terrorism was a narrow and seldom-recognized subspecialty within the disaster research community.

\(^3\) Since 1982, the Hazards Center has administered the National Science Foundation-funded Quick Response Research Program. This program was initiated to support and broaden multi-disciplinary post-disaster research. Funds provided by this program enable researchers to go quickly to the site of a disaster and to avoid a lengthy grant application process that would preclude the capture of time-dependent, perishable information immediately after the impact of a disaster (see Michaels 2003).
The senior staff members at the Hazards Center quickly recognized that many of the lessons learned from prior natural and technological disasters could help people and communities respond, cope, and recover following September 11. At the same time, they also realized that these unprecedented attacks presented many new questions, issues, and challenges.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The afternoon of the September 11 attacks, the National Science Foundation and the Hazards Center issued a call for proposals from researchers to conduct field investigations in the immediate aftermath of the events. The intent of these Quick Response Research Grants was to collect valuable information that would be lost if it were not captured in the short time frame following the attacks (Monday 2003). Ultimately, the findings were to be used to improve the nation’s ability to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate future damaging events and to advance scientific knowledge about disasters generally (Michaels 2003: 15).

With encouragement from the Director and Co-Director of the Hazards Center, I began working on my own research plan the evening of September 11. I submitted a proposal three days later, and the next day was notified that I had received funding to study the response of Muslim university students to the terrorist attacks.\(^4\) My desire and decision to pursue this topic was both professional and personal. It was an explicit understanding of my employment as a graduate research assistant at the Hazards Center that my dissertation research would involve the

\(^4\) In addition to my proposal, the National Science Foundation and the Hazards Center funded 16 other projects. Individual researchers and research teams traveled to New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. to examine the social, psychological, political, and economic repercussions of the terrorist attacks as well as the impacts on the built and natural environments. For a summary of this work, see Monday (2003).
sociological examination of some aspect of the response to or recovery from a
disaster or other extreme event. Personally, I wanted to study how gender, social
class, race and ethnicity, and religion affect post-disaster behavior and social
vulnerability. The events and aftermath of September 11 provided an opportunity to
focus on these issues. On an even more personal level, one of my closest friends in
Colorado was a young woman who had come to America as a refugee from
Afghanistan when she was 13 years old. My friend was visibly identifiable as Muslim
because of her manner of dress, and as events unfolded, I became extremely
concerned for her well-being, as well as for the safety of her family with whom I had
become very close over the years. Therefore, I viewed this research as an opportunity
to combine my academic requirements and scholarly interests with a deep personal
concern for Muslims living in the United States.

Post-Disaster Research

Sociologists studying disasters have made important theoretical and applied
contributions to our understanding of the social world through the examination of
human behavior and organizational response under extreme circumstances (Fothergill
2004; Stallings 2002). Indeed, according to Merton (1969), disasters provide critical
opportunities for developing certain sociological theories because conditions of

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5 I never imagined that my dissertation would explore responses to a terrorist event. Terrorist attacks
on U.S. soil are relatively uncommon, particularly compared to the numerous floods, tornados,
hurricanes, earthquakes, forest fires, and other environmental extremes that can occur in any given year
in the United States. Because of this prevalence of natural disasters, as well as the precedent set by
former graduate students at the Hazards Center (see Fothergill 2001; Passerini 1999), I assumed that I
too would examine the consequences of a natural disaster for my dissertation.

6 See Lofland and Lofland (1995: 11-15) for a discussion of the importance of interest and concern
when preparing to engage in social science fieldwork.

7 Again, although there has been significantly less research that explicitly examines human-initiated
events, much of the knowledge gained from disaster research is relevant to the study of terrorist events.
collective stress highlight issues and aspects of social systems that are much less apparent under the less stressful conditions of everyday life. Similarly, Fritz (1961) contends that social processes may become more visible in times of disaster because they are compressed into a very dramatic and short time span.

In attempting to explore, describe, and explain social processes both during and following extreme events, researchers have used a range of quantitative, qualitative, and quasi-experimental methods (Drabek 2002; Michaels 2003). Mileti (1987: 69), in a review of research methods used in sociological studies of disasters, concluded that from a methodological perspective, disaster research is hardly distinguishable from the general sociological enterprise. Indeed, the types of data collection techniques used in social science research on disasters – for example, survey questionnaires, document analysis, observation, and in-depth interviews – are not unique. Yet, according to Stallings (2002: 21), what makes disaster research distinct is, not surprisingly, the circumstances in which otherwise conventional methods are employed. Put differently, it is the context of research, not the methods of research, that makes disaster research unique and challenging in particular ways. Certainly, designing and conducting studies in communities just struck by major disasters presents researchers with some special problems (Drabek 1970; Killian 1956). For example, since most disasters are unpredictable, it is almost impossible to know where or when the next event will occur, or, from the standpoint of a social scientist, what sort of research questions will emerge. Consequently, researchers must be prepared to move quickly into the field and be flexible about both the methods they use and the questions they pursue.
My research strategy was definitely shaped by the post-disaster context as well as by the type of event I was preparing to study. Because it is usually desirable to begin field investigations of disasters as soon after impact as feasible, I began my study, as mentioned earlier, the day of the September 11 attacks by constructing a research plan, which proposed to explore the “reactions of and responses toward Muslim university students in the aftermath of September 11.” Given this extraordinarily broad mission, I realized that I needed to carefully refine what I specifically wanted to examine. Hence, my initial research was exploratory (Babbie 1998; Michaels 2003); it was intended to help me gain some insight into the everyday experiences of young Muslim Americans, as well as to help me establish precise research questions to pursue in the later phases of my study.

**Qualitative Methods**

Because the first stage of my project was exploratory, qualitative research, which is grounded in people’s actual experiences, was particularly useful in identifying new, relevant questions (Blumer 1969; Phillips 2002). In fact, in ethnographic research, the development of research problems is rarely completed before fieldwork begins (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Indeed, the initial collection of primary data is often key to developing more focused research questions (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Qualitative methods are valuable in examining a previously unexplored subject such as this one, because they allow for and focus on the “naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to

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8 Killian (1956) argues that it is important to begin research as soon as possible because the longer it takes to get into the field the more remote the disaster experiences becomes for the subjects.
experience,” something that is much less possible in quantitative research (Berg 2004: 11).

Furthermore, as the study progressed and I developed a more clearly defined research agenda and began to specifically examine issues of religious, ethnic, and gender identity formation and change, the initial qualitative data helped me to develop a comprehensive description and understanding of the interviewees’ attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and emotions. By listening to conversations, observing actions and behaviors, and investigating the thoughts and experiences of the research participants, I developed a “firsthand familiarity” with their everyday social worlds (Blumer 1969: 37).

I employed three qualitative methods during this two-year study: focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observation. I discuss why I chose these methods, when I used them, and how I analyzed the data later in this chapter.

**Longitudinal Design**

In a review of qualitative methods and disaster research, Phillips (2002: 207) argues that disaster researchers use the one-time case study method study far too frequently, particularly when intensive immersion in the field over long periods of time could meaningfully augment our understanding of human behavior in periods of crisis. In light of the significant lack of such longitudinal research in this field, and also because of my own intellectual curiosity and personal interest, I extended my study over two years. More specifically, because I decided to study identity formation and change in response to crisis, a longitudinal design offered the obvious advantage of enabling me to gather in-depth information regarding such transformations over a
relatively prolonged period (Babbie 1998; Lofland and Lofland 1995). The longitudinal dimension of my research was especially important, because, although this study began as a post-September 11 project, much broader questions than simply those related to the aftermath of the disaster emerged as fundamental issues.

**RESEARCH SETTINGS**

During my two-years of fieldwork, from September 2001 through October 2003, I traveled to New York City four times, conducting over six weeks of study and observation while gathering an extensive set of qualitative interview data from a sample of young Muslim Americans. Additionally, during this same period, I regularly conducted comparative research in Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado.

**New York**

I arrived in New York City and began recording ethnographic field observations and conducting interviews on September 29, 2001, less than three weeks after the terrorist attacks. Several interesting themes, both related and unrelated to the aftermath of September 11, emerged during this first set of interviews. As discussed previously, the lack of sociological research on identity formation processes among Muslim Americans (Hermansen 2003; Leonard 2003; Moaddel 2002), combined with my personal interest in this topic, motivated me to conduct this research as an in-depth, longitudinal study. After my first trip to New York City in the fall of 2001, I returned in December 2001, April 2002, and October 2003 to

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9 I was originally scheduled to fly from Denver to New York City on Saturday, September 15, 2001. However, due to the post-September 11 closure of U.S. airports and subsequent delays, my flight was cancelled. Although I was anxious to enter the field, in retrospect I realize that my postponed departure was fortunate, because it gave me additional time to prepare for my trip, arrange interviews, and finalize my research schedule.
conduct follow-up interviews with the original participants. These additional interviews and subsequent observations helped me gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of September 11 on this group, and allowed me to explore in greater detail the everyday experiences of Muslims living in the United States.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 36), the setting or settings chosen for study often play a significant role in shaping the way in which research questions are developed in ethnographic investigations. This was certainly true in the case of my research, because the setting was defined first – by the tragedy of September 11 – with methods and research questions to follow. In the tradition of disaster research (Quarantelli 2002), I originally intended to engage in data collection only in New York City because it was the “epicenter” – physically, economically, and socially – of the September 11 attacks. However, because of my distance from the east coast, the diffuse and enduring nature of the impacts of September 11, the population I was studying, and the research questions I chose to explore, I decided to extend my project to Colorado as well.

**Colorado**

Because I was living in Colorado during this research, I had the opportunity to establish relationships with a group of Muslim participants in that state. My close physical proximity to the Colorado interviewees allowed me to ask follow up

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10 See Riemer (1977) for a discussion of various forms of opportunistic research.

11 Naturally, most disaster research explores questions that are directly related to the preparation for, response to, or recovery from a specific event. Therefore, it is not surprising that most data is collected at the actual site of a disaster. For example, it would be impossible to observe the organizational adaptation of an emergency response team, a popular topic among many disaster researchers (see for example Quarantelli 2002; Sutton 2003), if the researcher were not at the scene. However, the research topics I chose to examine did not require that the participants be present at the actual site of the September 11 disaster.
questions more frequently as new issues emerged, engage more consistently in face-to-face discussions, and observe and participate in a wider variety of activities than I could have with the New York participants. Furthermore, having two research settings allowed me to compare and contrast the information I collected and to determine if the two sites were differentially impacted by the events of September 11.

In addition to collecting observational data, I conducted interviews with a sample of Colorado Muslim students in October and November 2001, February and March 2002, June 2002, and May 2003. I asked similar questions of both sets of participants, with some later questions modified based on interviews and observational data from New York City.

**Gaining Entrée**

For this study, I interviewed Muslim undergraduate and graduate students at seven colleges and universities in the New York City region. I also conducted interviews with students at four universities in Colorado. I contacted most of my research participants through the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on their respective college and university campuses. Since there is no official record of Muslims living in the United States, one of the most viable ways to find participants was through the network of MSAs, a nationally recognized organization with over 500 chapters nationwide (Schmidt 1998: 119).

Initially, to gain acceptance and permission to conduct the interviews, I called the MSA offices and asked to speak to the president or leader of the group. These telephone conversations were often quite lengthy, as I attempted to explain why I was calling, who I was, what I was doing, and answer questions regarding why someone
from Colorado would want to come to New York and study Muslims. After calling the offices, I faxed or e-mailed a detailed description of my research to each of the contacts at the colleges and universities. This description defined the purpose and goals of the project, described the sample population I was seeking, and outlined the broad sociological themes I intended to explore. I also included a cover letter verifying my credentials as a doctoral student and research assistant at the University of Colorado. Once I had received approval to conduct interviews, I sent a shortened version of the research description that could be posted to e-mail lists and fliers to be placed in the MSA offices.

Within each MSA, I established a close relationship with at least one or two contact persons, or key informants (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), who were usually the leaders of the MSAs or other well-known student members. I relied heavily on these individuals in each of the organizations. They helped recruit participants for this study, posted fliers and sent e-mail messages to group lists on my behalf, and arranged the times and locations for many of the group interviews. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, they vouched for me as an individual and a researcher, and generally encouraged their peers to let me interview them. The initial sample was self-selected, and everyone who responded to the recruitment efforts was interviewed.

The contact persons at the MSAs were vital in helping me gain entrée to the research settings and in securing access to, indeed, acceptance by, the study population. Logistically, it would have been very difficult for me to schedule the interviews and find such a large sample population in such a short period of time.
without the assistance and support of these individuals. This was particularly true in New York, where I had no prior connections with Muslim students. In Colorado, my Muslim friends were the primary informants throughout this research, and they helped me to gain entrée to Muslim groups, introduced me to other students and potential interviewees, and frequently invited me to meetings and other important religious and community events. Whereas the MSAs served as the initial point of entry to my sample population, later I also secured interviews through a referral snowball sample technique (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981).

My Role in the Settings

Sociologists have defined a variety of roles that ethnographic researchers can adopt in the field (see for example Adler and Adler 1987; Gold 1958; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Junker 1960). These roles are ideal types and are used to describe the status of researchers who are the least to the most involved in the studied group and its activities. Researchers can and often do progress through various stages of involvement with setting members, and they may eventually attain a more insider status from which they can better gather data (Adler 1993; Adler and Adler 1987; Lois 2003). In fact, during this study, my role as a researcher evolved from being an observer-as-participant to becoming a more intimate participant-as-observer (Gold 1958).

Observer-as-Participant. In New York City, I was initially a stranger to all the interviewees, whereas in Colorado I had known some of the students prior to the start of this project. As an observer-as-participant (Gold 1958), I identified myself as a researcher immediately, and I made no pretense of being a group member.
However, most of the participants already knew that I was not Muslim by the time I began conducting interviews because they asked me at the outset about my religious orientation; they deduced that I was not Muslim from my name; or upon seeing me, they realized that I was most likely not Muslim because I was not wearing a headscarf or other religious attire.

As the observer-as-participant role dictates (Gold 1958), almost all of my early interactions with the Muslim students were formal and revolved around scheduling or actually conducting qualitative interviews. I had very little time to establish deeper interpersonal relationships (Becker 1963) because of the pressure to quickly enter the field following the events of September 11. In the words of Adler and Adler (1987: 12), I did not have time to “hang out” with the New York City participants during my first site visit, as I only had one week to meet the respondents and conduct interviews in various locations around the city. Although I engaged in some additional activities with the interviewees during my early fieldwork, including attending inter-faith services, an academic lecture, and a peace rally, I remained relatively detached and participated minimally.

Participant-as-Observer. As the months passed, I took on a participant-as-observer role (Gold 1958). I spent as much time as possible with the students in both New York and Colorado and established relationships with several participants who trusted me and interacted with me as a friend. Interviewees began to share more intimate knowledge and feelings, such as their awareness of “illegal immigrants” living in their neighborhoods, their private fears of being deported or placed in internment camps, and their stories regarding involvement with members of the
opposite sex. At the same time, I also began to share more personal thoughts with the interviewees and participated in more informal activities such as going out for lunch or dinner, sharing a cup of coffee, and attending “girls night” parties on occasion.

Although I did not share a common religion with the participants in this study, just like them I was a student. We often connected in this regard, and because I was a graduate student, I tried to use my education and experience to help the participants – not only in recognition of the “norms of reciprocity and exchange inherent in the fieldwork process” (Adler and Adler 1987: 40), but also because I truly wanted to lend a hand to the interviewees, many of whom I had begun to consider friends. For example, I read and commented on some of the students’ term papers, advised several individuals regarding applying for jobs or graduate school, and wrote letters of recommendation for two of the participants.

I frequently felt that I wanted to be more involved with the participants and their world, not because of pressure from the research subjects (see Rochford 1985), but because of my own uneasiness with being a participant-as-observer (Adler and Adler 1987; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). At times I believed I had taken on a peripheral membership role (Adler and Adler 1987: 36-37), particularly with the women, as I interacted “closely, significantly, and frequently enough” to be “with” but not “part of” or “like” the group, and did not take on the role of an active or complete member. At the same time, I think that my personal biography (I am not Muslim), ethical convictions (I would not pretend to convert to Islam), and physical

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12 A strict interpretation of Islam mandates that women and men not “date” (in the American sense of the term) prior to marriage. Thus, as the participants came to reveal these more personal feelings and actions, I knew that I had begun to gain their trust.
distance from one setting (New York), precluded my being fully accepted as a
member of the group (see Peshkin 1986). I discuss the issue of being an “outsider” in
more detail later in this chapter.

SAMPLE POPULATION

During the course of this research, I interviewed 127 Muslim students from
New York and Colorado. I interviewed most of the participants two or three times
over the two-year duration of this study. Respondents were chosen based on their
religious affiliation. Thus, while all interviewees were Muslim, the sample population
was composed of a diverse group of individuals, both female and male, from various
ethnic, national, and social class backgrounds.

Demographic Information

Eighty-two of the participants were women and 45 were men.13 Twenty-four
were graduate students and 103 were undergraduates. The students ranged in age
from 18 to 33. Twenty-three were married and 104 were single.14 The participants
came from a mixture of upper-middle class, middle class, working class, and lower
class economic backgrounds. Eighty-seven of the interviewees were United States
citizens, and the other 40 had student visas or were permanent residents. Most of the
participants in this study were 1.5 or second-generation immigrants15 who were

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13 More women than men were interviewed for two reasons. First, as with many on-campus student
organizations, most of the MSAs that I visited had a majority female membership. Second, my position
as a female researcher allowed me more access to the women than the men.

14 Six of the original interviewees married while I was conducting this research. I include them as part
of the married sample here.

15 Some researchers include in the second generation those children born abroad who came to the
United States before the age of 12 (Portes and Zhou 1993). However, most scholars now make a
distinction between the second and 1.5 generation to differentiate American-born children (second
generation) from those who moved to the United States before reaching adulthood (1.5 generation)
primarily raised in the United States and planned to stay in this country. I also interviewed ten converts to Islam and spoke with a number of foreign students who intended to return to their countries of origin upon graduation from American universities. All of the participants were fluent in English, and over 75 percent spoke at least one other language (including Arabic, Bengali, Cambodian, Farsi, French, Indonesian, Japanese, Pashtun, Persian, Punjabi, Turkish, and Urdu).

The interviewees reported a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The majority, 65 students, were of South or Southeast Asian descent. Forty-one students identified as Arab or Arab American, ten were Anglo, six were Latino/a, and five were African American. However, standard ethnic categories do not depict the true diversity of the sample population, as the interviewees identified with over 30 different nationalities and a variety of cultures. The following are just some of those backgrounds as reported by the participants: Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, Egypt, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Trinidad, Turkey, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

Most of the subjects in this study would be considered highly religious. This religious identification is based on both the self-characterization of the participants, and my own observations. Almost all reported praying five times a day (one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam), fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan (another fundamental pillar of Islam), being active members of religious

(Gans 1992; Min and Kim 2000; Rumbaut 1991). I found no significant differences between the two groups in terms of their sense of identity; so for the sake of brevity, in the text I refer to my sample as the second generation.
organizations, having Muslim first and last names, and abstaining from religiously prohibited activities (such as drinking alcohol or eating pork). Regardless of gender, most of the interviewees chose to dress modestly. The vast majority of women (over 90 percent) wore the *hijab*, and two women wore the *niqaab*. The level of religious affiliation and manner of dress of most of the interviewees – the fact that they were visibly identifiable as Muslim – certainly affected their individual experiences, and their interpretations of those experiences, both prior to and following the events of September 11. Although my sample was not randomly selected and is not representative, the narratives provided by the interviewees suggest important insights about other second-generation Muslim Americans.

**DATA COLLECTION**

I gathered data from September 2001 to October 2003, and during this time I employed three data collection methods: focus group interviews, individual interviews, and participant observation. I conducted focus groups during the first three months of this study and then shifted to gathering personal narratives through semi-structured and unstructured one-on-one interviews. Combining the focus groups (n = 23) and individual interviews (n = 83) conducted in New York and Colorado, I carried out a total of 106 qualitative interviews over those two years. In addition to the interviews, I also engaged in participant observation throughout and recorded detailed fieldnotes. These methods allowed me to gather a wide range of in-depth information from a diverse group of subjects across multiple situations.

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16 The word *hijab* comes from the Arabic word for hiding or concealing, and for women, also denotes covering the body completely with loose clothing. The headscarf typically drapes around the neck and also covers the bosom.

17 The *niqaab* is a veil that covers the hair, neck, and face, leaving only the eyes visible.
Focus Groups

I used focus group interviews as the primary means of data collection during the initial phase of this study. During the three months following the September 11 attacks, I conducted 23 focus groups in New York and Colorado. They ranged in size from three to 15 participants and lasted between one and four hours. I conducted almost all of the group interviews on the university campuses where the participants attended school, most often in the MSA offices or in designated meeting rooms. After the formal interviews were completed, the students always asked me to stay and talk with them, which resulted in many additional hours of informal conversation.

My decision to use the focus group method was somewhat fortuitous. In fact, when I wrote the research proposal for the first phase of this project, I intended to conduct only in-depth, individual interviews and engage in participant observation. However, as I was talking on the telephone to a student at a university in New York, my first contact soon after the September 11 attacks, he asked if I would like him to invite several other members of the MSA so I could interview them as a group and “talk to a bunch of people all at once.” After some consideration, I recognized that

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18 Focus groups have recently become a more commonly used research method within the social sciences (Morgan 1996; Wilkinson 2004). As a form of qualitative research, focus groups are basically group interviews, although not in the sense of a researcher asking questions and participants supplying responses. Rather, the researcher relies on in-group interaction and discussion, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who often takes the role of a moderator (Morgan 1997: 2).

19 I conducted nine mixed-gender focus groups, eleven all-female groups, and three all-male groups. According to Krueger (1988), under certain circumstances it can be unwise to mix males and females in focus groups, particularly if the topic of discussion is experienced differently by the sexes. The MSAs I visited varied a great deal on the issue of gendered separation. Some of the groups said it would be easier to meet as a mixed group, while others requested that I interview an all-female or all-male group. One student told me over the telephone that she did not think the Muslim women would be comfortable talking about some of the things that had happened to them in front of their male counterparts. Thus, I segregated the groups according to gender in part because of the request of the students. However, in the end I tried to conduct all-female or all-male groups if possible because I quickly realized that the students in the gender-segregated groups seemed more comfortable and talked more openly about sensitive topics.
focus groups could serve as an efficient and appropriate research technique under these circumstances. Indeed, according to Blumer (1969: 41), during the exploratory phase of data collection, “a small number of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample.” I realized that conducting interviews in a group setting would allow me to speak with several students at once, more efficiently using my limited time and resources to gather perishable data and formulate specific research questions (Babbie 1998; Krueger 1988; Morgan 1997).

I worked with my student contacts at each of the universities to organize the focus group interviews. I began each session by welcoming the participants and thanking them for their time. Next I introduced myself and briefly described the purpose of the focus group and the larger research project. I then explained that the interview would last approximately two hours, that it would be recorded for transcription purposes only, and that all names would be kept confidential. I also gave two written consent forms to each of the participants, one to sign and return, the other to keep.20 This form provided an overview of the project and informed the interviewees that the focus groups were voluntary and that they had the right to end their participation at any time. None of the interviewees seemed reluctant to sign the form, although some who had never participated in a sociological study were curious about why such a document was necessary. I also gave each respondent a personal information form to complete, which I designed and used to gather relevant

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20 See Appendix A for a copy of the focus group consent form.
demographic information. This form enabled me to collect important confidential information without taking up valuable interview time.

After the participants completed the forms, I explained that my role as facilitator was to pose questions and to keep the discussion flowing. I then discussed their roles and the ground rules for participation. I found that it was particularly useful to remind the interviewees that all members of the group should be allowed to participate equally and also to mention that things would go more smoothly (and the interview transcriptions would be much easier!) if only one person spoke at a time. Finally, I asked the students if they had questions and then answered any inquiries before beginning with the first question for the group.

Depending on time constraints and how talkative the participants were, I was typically able to ask anywhere from five to ten open-ended questions during the focus groups. I also had several “interview probes” prepared, in case the group members were not talkative or if a question was unclear. I prioritized the questions in order of their relative importance to me, so that if time ran out, I could be sure that the students had discussed the topics that I most wanted addressed.

After the discussion of the final question was finished, or when we only had about 15 minutes left, I asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add. I also asked the interviewees if there was anything that I did not ask that they thought I would or should. These final questions often led to some interesting and unexpected conversations. Additionally, during this time the students would often ask me, “What do you think about all of this?” They seemed very curious about what kind

21 See Appendix C for a copy of the demographic information form.
of person I was and how I became interested in these issues. I always answered their questions as truthfully and completely as possible.

I ended the group sessions by thanking the participants and giving each student my contact information. I asked them to please get in touch with me if they thought of anything that they had forgotten to say, or if they came across anything that might be of use in my research. I also asked the participants to fill out a sheet with their contact information, if they were willing to let me interview them individually. All of the students who participated in the focus groups, in both New York and Colorado, completed the form and agreed to be a part of my follow-up interviews. I later wrote a thank you note to each participant and also mailed Colorado postcards to the MSA offices in New York.

As with any research method, qualitative or quantitative, I found there were advantages and disadvantages to conducting focus group interviews. One clear benefit is that focus groups are time efficient, allowing a researcher to speak with several interviewees relatively quickly. For example, during my first trip to New York City, I contacted and interviewed 68 students in the course of one week. Additionally, focus groups can produce a breadth of information (Krueger 1988) as well as concentrated data on a specific area of interest. I had not anticipated most of the responses I received, and the data I gathered from the group interviews helped me

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22 See Appendix D for a copy of the contact information form.

23 When I returned to New York two years after my first visit, a student at one of the colleges pointed out that the postcard I had sent in 2001 was still hanging on the MSA bulletin board. She said that they decided to keep it there as a reminder that someone in Colorado cared about them and wanted to share their stories and experiences with others.
develop the themes that I subsequently explored more systematically during the individual interviews.

The focus group setting also seemed to provide a comfortable forum for some participants. Indeed, the group dynamic that resulted from the open-ended questions and the ensuing discussion proved to be quite fascinating. At times, I felt as if the participants had forgotten that I was even in the room. With the participants sometimes arguing with one another, other times joking and laughing, the group sessions often resembled a typical conversation among friends more than a formal interview. According to Morgan (1997: 2), a hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce information and insights that would be much less accessible if the group interaction did not occur.

Focus groups also present disadvantages as a qualitative research method. For example, the researcher has less control of the discussion in the group setting. In the case of this research, at times more talkative participants dominated the conversation, causing others to lose interest. For me personally, it took a great deal of effort and tact to minimize domination by individual “talkers” and to bring the quieter members into the discussion. In addition, sensitive subjects are sometimes difficult to discuss in groups, whether the participants are friends or total strangers (Krueger 1988). I found that this problem was more pronounced in mixed-gender groups. Also, when sensitive topics did arise and I wanted to probe further, it was difficult to know how much the students were willing to disclose and at what point they would feel uncomfortable. Thus, most often I tried not to probe too deeply, because it was more important to me that the participants felt comfortable than that I get every detail of their stories.
Because I realized that some people would prefer not to participate in a group discussion, I always indicated on fliers, in e-mails, during phone conversations, and prior to starting the focus groups that I would be willing to conduct one-on-one interviews with anyone who would rather meet individually. Only two participants accepted this offer during the first phase of data collection, although during subsequent individual interviews, several students said that though the focus groups were fun, they preferred to be interviewed individually.

Overall, I was pleased with the focus groups because they allowed me to collect a wide range of data and meet many people, although the participants’ responses were not as detailed as the information I later gathered through individual interviews. Hence, while the focus groups were effective and helpful in setting the agenda for the larger research project, I found that the individual interviews were much more useful for gathering in-depth and sensitive information.

**Individual Interviews**

From December 2001 through the conclusion of my data gathering in October 2003, I used one-on-one, semi-structured (Berg 2004) and unstructured (Fontana and Frey 1994) interviews as the primary form of data collection. In total, I conducted 83 individual interviews in New York and Colorado, each lasting between one and three hours. With only a few exceptions, all of the individual interviewees had participated in earlier focus groups.

After receiving additional funding to continue my research, I scheduled a second visit to New York City in December 2001. By this time, I had completed a preliminary analysis of the initial focus group interview transcripts and had
determined a more precise set of questions and themes – regarding both responses to September 11 and issues of identity development and change – that I wanted to explore further. I had also decided that I would discontinue using focus groups and begin conducting individual in-depth interviews so that I could pursue these emerging themes and examine the interviewees’ feelings, experiences, and perceptions in greater depth (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Reinharz 1992).

As soon as I set the dates for my second trip to New York City, I contacted several of the original focus group participants via e-mail and telephone and arranged as many follow-up interviews as my schedule would permit.24 I conducted individual interviews at a variety of locations across the city, including Brooklyn, Harlem, Manhattan, and Queens. Sometimes I interviewed students on their university campuses, but frequently the participants asked me to meet them at a more convenient or informal setting, such as their place of work, a city park, a restaurant, or a café.25 Additionally, some students invited me to their dorms, apartments, or homes for the interviews so I could see where they lived and, if possible, meet their families.

The individual interviews were less formal than the focus groups, and they typically included more personal conversation and socializing before and after the interview. However, I did follow an informal protocol, similar to the one I used with the focus groups, at the beginning of the individual interviews. I presented a brief overview of the study, gave the participant an updated informed consent form to read

24 Even though my second trip to New York City coincided with final examination week for most of the participants, every person I contacted agreed to meet with me.

25 When I conducted interviews in such settings, I always paid for the interviewees’ meal or coffee. This seemed appropriate, considering the time and effort expended by the participants.
and sign, and reminded the interviewee that I would tape record the session but that his or her identity would be kept confidential.

During these interviews, I asked the young men and women to tell me their story of September 11. I began by asking, “Tell me what you remember from that morning,” and continued with “and what happened next” as the interview progressed. By asking for the entire story, listening carefully, inquiring about specific details, and seeking explanations (see Fothergill 2004), I learned what the subjects remembered most clearly about the events of September 11. Moreover, I was able to distinguish the most salient features of the event from their perspectives (Blumer 1969), while learning about each informant’s unique experience (Heyl 2001; Lofland and Lofland 1995).

Beyond questions regarding September 11, I also gathered life history and other in-depth information from the interviewees (Rubin and Rubin 1995). I asked them to describe where they were born and raised, their family members, their religious and ethnic backgrounds, and so on. I also inquired about their current interests and hobbies, academic pursuits, living arrangements, and organizational involvements. In essence, I tried to find out as much as possible about each interviewee (Berg 2004).

After returning from my second trip to New York City in December 2001, I scheduled and conducted a set of individual interviews with participants in Colorado in February and March 2002. The Colorado interviews followed the same basic format as those conducted in New York City and included similar questions. The

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26 See Appendix B for a copy of the individual interview consent form.
Colorado interviews were also carried out in similar locations – on campuses or in restaurants, coffee shops, or participants’ homes.

I returned to New York City in April 2002 and conducted another round of interviews, followed by more individual interviews in Colorado in June 2002 and May 2003. This set of interviews included follow-up questions regarding the aftermath of September 11, as well as more detailed inquiries about the interviewees’ personal and social identities. In particular, I asked the participants about their religious beliefs, cultural practices and traditions, and ethnic backgrounds. Because I interviewed both women and men, I was careful to note variation between genders in responses and to adapt or modify certain questions depending on whether the interviewee was male or female. I returned to New York City for a fourth and final visit in October 2003. I used this trip as an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to further explore themes that had emerged in my preliminary analysis of the earlier interviews. This visit marked the end of the interviewing stage of my research. (See Table 1 for a timeline of my fieldwork and summary of my interviewing methods.)
Table 1

Timeline of Fieldwork Research and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September-October 2001</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-November 2001</td>
<td>Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2001</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February-March 2002</td>
<td>Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2002</td>
<td>Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td>Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2003</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Observation

Although the focus groups and individual interviews were my primary data collection methods, I also used participant observation as an important secondary means to gather additional information. Most qualitative researchers engage in some form of observation, i.e., they gain understanding of a groups’ social world through systematic watching, careful listening, scrutiny, inquiry, and investigation (Berg 2004; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2001), although the method is rarely used solely on its own (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

I observed and participated in various aspects of the interviewees’ lives throughout the two-year period of this research. For example, I attended political and religious speeches and MSA meetings, attended college classes with the students,
observed Friday prayers at mosques, and ate Ramadan dinners\(^{27}\) at religious centers and at participants’ homes. I also visited the dorms, apartments, and homes of the interviewees and met their families, toured and observed college and university campuses, traveled on subways and buses with the students, went to local shops, and often shared a cup of coffee, lunch, or dinner. In addition to these activities, I was invited to and attended various social occasions, including parties, baby showers, bridal showers, and weddings.\(^{28}\)

Participating in these events, as well as simply spending time with the students, helped me to both verify and better understand the experiences and information that came to light in the interviews (Bogdan and Taylor 1998; Lofland and Lofland 1995). For example, one of the greatest fears expressed by the participants in New York immediately following September 11, particularly among the women, was traveling on a subway alone (Peek 2003). As I walked through subway stations and sat on trains with these young women, it quickly became clear that the suspicious and angry looks they reported unquestionably occurred.

I recorded detailed fieldnotes regarding these activities, conversations, observations, or any other events that I deemed significant (Atkinson 1992: 17). In my written accounts, I described the scene, noted relevant dialogue, and recorded

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\(^{27}\) One of the five fundamental pillars of Islam requires that adherents fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan. From before dawn until sunset, those who are observing the fast are forbidden to eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual relations. The Muslim lunar year is shorter than the solar year by approximately 11 days. Thus, Ramadan occurs at slightly different times each year according to the Gregorian calendar used in the United States (Denny 1994: 126-130). My second site visit to New York City, in December 2001, coincided with Ramadan. Therefore, I was able to break the fast, listen to calls to prayer, and eat Ramadan dinners with the interviewees.

\(^{28}\) Six of the participants in this study got married during the course of this research. I was invited to all of their weddings. I was able to be a part of those that were held in Colorado but unfortunately was not able to attend the ceremonies in New York.
details regarding the people present, including their mannerisms, behavior, and appearance. In addition, I wrote about my own personal feelings, emotions, and anxieties (see Emerson et al. 2001). For instance, during the early phases of this research, when I was a stranger to most of the participants and felt like a complete outsider, I often recorded both my perceptions and feelings about others, as well as observations about how I believed others reacted toward me. Although keeping these records was sometimes tedious and difficult, I found that writing fieldnotes became a therapeutic activity after physically and emotionally exhausting periods of interviewing and interacting with numerous participants.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

This research was designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of the experiences of a group of young Muslim Americans following the events of September 11 and to lay the groundwork for inductive theory construction (see Charmaz and Mitchell 2001). I did not engage in this research to test a set of pre-existing hypotheses or an established theory. Rather, I began with broad sensitizing questions and intended to create a theoretical model based on the narratives and experiences of the interviewees. To fulfill this goal, I analyzed the focus group, interview, and observational data to find patterns and establish conceptual categories.

In most qualitative studies, the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Rather, in this type of research, data collection and data analysis are dynamic, interconnected, iterative processes (Lofland and Lofland 1995). In other words, the interviews and the analysis of the data are
ongoing and simultaneous (Fothergill 2004); the analysis determines new questions and the subsequent answers become data for further analysis.

In this study, following each phase of data collection in New York and Colorado, all interviews were transcribed in their entirety. As soon as the transcripts were completed, I read, analyzed, and open coded (Berg 2004) the interview data and my fieldnotes. During the initial analytic coding, I looked for concepts, themes, patterns, or categories that could be inferred from the data (Charmaz 1983: 113), and, indeed, I was able to identify several consistent ideas that emerged from the narratives. I then constructed new interview questions to verify and further explore these themes in subsequent interviews. This ultimately resulted in more detailed and varied concepts than the simpler ideas that first emerged in the early analyses. During subsequent analyses, as themes reappeared I confirmed and refined some concepts and discarded other less useful categories.

As the research progressed, I continued to code the interview transcripts and fieldnotes according to the different concepts and themes that had emerged. I looked for relationships among categories and began to develop theoretical typologies, which were consequently modified and refined based on later interviews (Goetz and LeCompte 1981). I also attempted to link the emerging concepts and theories to those in existing research literature.

I did not use any specialized computer program to assist with the analysis of this qualitative data. Instead, I read and hand-coded all interview transcripts three times in their entirety and then returned to re-analyze certain sections or portions as

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29 I typed almost all of my fieldnotes on my laptop computer and transferred any handwritten notes to my computer as soon as possible. Therefore, I did not have to transcribe these notes in order to systematically analyze them.
necessary. As I was coding the data, I developed an intricate system of color-coding
(using bright pens, hi-liters, and colored post-it notes) to mark new concepts, identify
primary and secondary themes, and indicate negative instances of a concept (i.e.,
accounts that did not fit an analytical category).

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

During this project, I encountered several methodological challenges. Below, I
first address issues that emerged with the research design, largely because of the brief
time I had to develop and implement this study and enter the field after September 11.
Second, I discuss the challenges related to conducting research in a geographically
distant setting. Third, I explore the emotional nature of the interviews and the
reactions of the respondents, as well as my own personal reactions. Finally, I outline
some of the negative and positive aspects of conducting qualitative research as an
“outsider.”

Research Design

As noted earlier, I began designing this research the day of the September 11
attacks. Although my work as a research assistant at the Hazards Center and my
resultant familiarity with the nature of post-disaster fieldwork prepared me for the
need to rapidly enter field, I remained uncomfortable with the short time I had to
develop my research plan, establish contacts, and consult my academic advisors. In
addition, it was a significant challenge to secure approval to conduct this research
from the Human Research Committee at the University of Colorado prior to my
departure. Given more time, I would surely have done some things differently at the
outset of this project, including assembling a more systematic and representative
sample of respondents and developing research questions based on prior studies. However, as noted, the early stages of this project were exploratory, and as the research progressed I used multiple methods, snowball sampling, and follow-up interviews to ensure sample diversity and enrich my initial findings.

The short time between the events of September 11 and the beginning of my fieldwork led to personal reservations regarding the importance of gathering perishable data so soon after the catastrophe (Michaels 2003) and undertaking what could be considered opportunistic or intrusive research (Jacobs 2004; Riemer 1977; Stacey 1988). When I started conducting interviews in New York City only weeks after September 11, I realized that it was an intense, traumatic time for many of the participants. Many of the students missed days or weeks of classes and were attempting to catch up on coursework while also dealing with personal and family problems resulting from the attacks. Additionally, there was an increasing demand for their already limited time from reporters, professors, and community leaders who wanted the students to share their “Muslim perspective” for media stories, in the classroom, or at local events. I recognized and respected the student’s time constraints, but my own time constraints and logistics dictated that the interviews be scheduled in advance and during certain days. Although this frequently proved a challenge, interviewees often convinced others to participate by saying things such as, “She’s come here all the way from Colorado. Just help her out.”

This was largely because of their personal fear of returning to college or the insistence of their parents that they not leave home. I discuss this issue in greater depth in Chapter Four.

According to Quarantelli (2002: 111), it is common for disaster survivors to be impressed that a researcher has traveled from afar to learn from their experiences, and these reactions increase the likelihood that the researcher will be able to gather data from impacted populations. Hence, on some levels, my distance from New York was advantageous; the students were accommodating and helpful.
also wanted their voices heard at a time when they felt vilified by the media and much of the public. Thus, even though some of the interviewees were overwhelmed by both the events themselves and their own subsequent problems, they told me that they “had to do this interview because it is so important to share with others what is going on in the Muslim community.”

**Research Settings**

Being physically distant from one of my research settings posed some distinct methodological challenges. I had only been to New York City once prior to this research, so it took time and effort to become acclimated to the unfamiliar surroundings. Moreover, it was costly to travel between my home and a research setting almost 2,000 miles away. Beyond these logistical issues, another clear disadvantage of not living in or near one of the research settings was that I could only gather data, at least initially, with the substantial assistance of several key contacts, and only when I made trips to New York City. In addition, because I began collecting my data through interviews with people I had never met before, I was concerned that I might not be able to gain the trust of the participants, a key element of any effective ethnographic investigation (Adler 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1995). Furthermore, my distance from New York City contributed to my inability to take on a more active membership role in this research (Adler and Adler 1987; Fothergill 2004).

Clearly, not living in New York restricted my contact with the interviewees, but I tried to address the consequent methodological issues in several ways. First, I traveled to the city on four separate occasions for extended periods in order to collect
additional data and to spend more time with the participants. Through these actions, not only did I enhance the depth and quality of the data set, I also demonstrated my commitment to the research subjects. During the follow-up trips, some of the interviewees even made remarks such as, “You must really care about us to come this far again.” Because of my geographic distance from New York, I chose to extend my study to Colorado, which made it possible to interact more frequently and deeply with half of the sample population and permitted me to observe and participate in more local activities and events.

I worked very hard to build and maintain close relationships with the participants in both research settings. Between site visits to New York and interviews in Colorado, I spoke on the phone, sent cards and letters, and corresponded via e-mail with most of the interviewees. Staying in contact with the respondents in both settings helped me to secure follow-up interviews, provided new themes for exploration, and ultimately resulted in my adopting a more personal researcher role.

**Emotional Issues**

A third methodological challenge was the emotional nature of the topics addressed in this study. In many of the interviews, the respondents would cry at some point while discussing particularly sensitive issues, such as feeling stigmatized, suffering discrimination, or addressing problems with friends or family members that emerged following September 11.³² I was very concerned about upsetting the respondents, and always apologized and let them know that we could end the interview at any time. Although the participants usually asked me to stop the tape

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³² None of the male interviewees cried in front of me, though many expressed very personal fears and emotions during the interviews.
recorder so they could regain composure, in all cases they wanted to continue. Some of the participants were surprised that they broke down in tears and later remarked that they were “not sure where that came from.” Others said that until that moment during the interview, they had not cried about September 11 and its consequences.

Despite my concerns about these emotional responses, most respondents thanked me for conducting the interviews and giving them the opportunity to tell their stories. Others said that the interviews were like therapy, and some commented that they truly appreciated having the opportunity to talk to someone about their thoughts and experiences. Several researchers have documented that respondents may actually receive emotional benefits from participating in interviews following catastrophic events (see for example Fothergill 2004; Phillips 2002; Tierney 2002a), and thus I felt it was particularly important that I serve as a sympathetic and active listener.

I also had to deal with my own emotional ups and downs throughout this study. In the beginning, I felt awkward and out of place as I entered the new research settings as a non-Muslim and a stranger to almost all of the participants. I was self-conscious of my mannerisms and appearance, though I worked to adapt to the conventions of the settings, and I was particularly careful to observe cultural and religious norms. For example, I always removed my shoes when entering the participants’ homes or the MSA offices, observed gendered seating arrangements, and wore modest clothing that covered my arms and legs. In addition, because I deeply

33 A few of the interviewees gave me gifts, which they indicated were in appreciation of my time and efforts.

34 Leonard (2003: 74) suggests that as non-Muslims in the United States are increasingly being invited into Muslim spaces, the patterns of interaction between non-Muslims and Muslims deserve increased scholarly attention.
empathized with the respondents, I would commonly feel sad or upset after an interview, and I worried a lot about the physical safety and emotional well-being of the participants. Killian (1956) notes that it is easy for researchers to be affected by the drama and tragedy that affects their subjects. Hence, some scholars warn that becoming overly involved with victims and interviewees and subsequent interview bias can become an issue in the field (see Stallings 2002). However, to me my empathy was not a problem, but rather an important part of the give and take process of qualitative interviewing (Fontana and Frey 1994). Indeed, many researchers now reject traditional notions regarding interviewing that emphasize distance and “objectivity.” Instead, they advocate answering participants’ questions, providing important information, treating interviewees as equals, and maintaining friendships with participants (see Nielsen 1990).

During site visits, I completely disengaged from my own family, friends, and normal routines, and totally immersed myself in the lives of the participants. When I returned from my trips to New York, I was always physically and emotionally exhausted. Being an ethnographic researcher is often difficult and emotionally stressful (see Shaffir and Stebbins 1991; Wax 1971). Therefore, I depended on friends and family members for support, and I relied on them to listen to my own experiences and concerns when I returned from the field.

Outsider Status

Another methodological issue during this research involved my personal identity as a non-Muslim “outsider.” The question of whether it is more effective to conduct fieldwork as an “insider” or an “outsider” has been the subject of substantial
scholarly debate (see for example Adler and Adler 1987; Coffey 1999; Naples 2004; Smith 1987). Indeed, many writings on fieldwork have, with increasing attention and sensitivity, documented the myriad contexts and situations in which the ascribed statuses of the interviewer and interviewees\(^{35}\) can hinder or facilitate the acquisition of rich data (Lofland and Lofland 1995: 24). For example, feminist theorists contend that the researcher’s identity and social location affect all aspects of the research process – from the articulation of a research question to the analysis and presentation of data – and therefore they encourage “strong reflexivity” and argue that researchers should subject themselves to the same level of scrutiny they direct toward the subjects of their inquiry (McCorkel and Myers 2003: 203).

When I began this research, I truly was an outsider entering new and unfamiliar settings. Moreover, I was a religious outsider; I am a non-denominational Christian, and all of the interviewees were Muslim. In most cases, I was also an ethnic outsider; I am Anglo and the majority of the participants were not. Despite these differences, I was never strongly concerned about finding interviewees or being accepted by the participants. Because I had a group of close Muslim friends in Colorado, I felt no alienation toward the respondents and did not view them as “different” or “strange.” Although my religious background was different, I shared many values with the participants, as well as other important characteristics, such as being a student and being of a similar age. I also shared a regional background with the participants from the Midwest (where I was born and raised) and those from Colorado (where I had lived for several years). Also, I am female, as were the

\(^{35}\) Many social characteristics define ascriptive categories – such as gender, age, social class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and religion – as important points of difference and similarity among people (Lofland and Lofland 1995: 23).
majority of the participants; although gender was an obvious difference and possible barrier with the male respondents (see Gurney 1985). The point here is not to demonstrate that I did or did not share certain characteristics with the participants; rather it is to emphasize that the notions of “insider” and “outsider” are fluid and depend on situational contexts and social settings. Indeed, in the field, differences and similarities are evaluated by the observer and the observed in many ways (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Sharing certain characteristics does not guarantee that a researcher will become an “insider,” nor does having differences mean that the researcher will always be an “outsider” (Naples 2004; Rayaprol 1997).

My primary concern regarding my status as a non-Muslim was related to launching this research following the worst terrorist attacks in U.S. history. By the time I began conducting interviews, hundreds of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians living in the United States had already been questioned or detained by federal authorities (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2004). I assumed that some of the people I approached for interviews would be reluctant to talk to an unfamiliar researcher, but my fears were mostly baseless. I found that individuals were very open to talking and participating in the study. However, in two cases, I was asked to show my university identification card before the students would begin their discussions in focus groups (one group was all male, the other was all female). Because I was a stranger, because I was aware of the hostile social climate, and because I knew that several of the interviewees had friends and family members who had been questioned by authorities after September 11, I was not offended by their request to see my identification, and I told them so. Afterwards, the students seemed
embarrassed that they did not trust me, but I emphatically reassured them that I understood.

Sometimes my not being Muslim was beneficial, because the interviewees would take additional time to explain things about their religion or ethnic background that they believed I would not be familiar with or would not understand. In Lofland and Lofland’s (1995: 40) terms I was viewed as a “learner” or “incompetent,” which can be advantageous in qualitative interviewing because subjects often feel they must describe or explain things in greater detail. Moreover, when subjects believe that it will not offend the researcher to be told obvious things, they frequently provide information that would otherwise be taken for granted or simply forgotten. Many of the students told me that they wanted to tell their stories to me because they thought my eventual readers and audience would perceive me as “unbiased” because I am not Muslim. After the participants said such things, I would take the opportunity to talk to them (in non-sociological terms) about the “insider-outsider” debate in the discipline, and to ask their thoughts on the subject. In essence, I tried to make myself the object of inquiry (McCorkel and Myers 2003).
CHAPTER IV
COMMUNITY ISOLATION AND GROUP SOLIDARITY

This chapter provides an overview of the experiences of the Muslim American students I interviewed following September 11. I begin by briefly discussing what is known regarding post-disaster communities, specifically focusing on patterns of social cohesion and instances of community isolation. Next I discuss several reasons why the Muslim students in New York and Colorado often felt excluded from the larger community and could not share the feelings of national unity that emerged after the September 11 attacks. Finally, I describe the group consciousness and solidarity that developed among these young Muslim Americans in response to that exclusion.

THE POST-DISASTER COMMUNITY

Social scientists recognize that disasters provide unique occasions to examine how individuals and groups behave under extreme circumstances (see Quarantelli 1998; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001). Fritz (1961: 654) posits that disasters offer a real-world laboratory for testing the integration, stamina, and recuperative power of communities and large-scale social systems. The study of human response to disaster has resulted in a general consensus that along with destruction and devastation, opportunities for social change also arise out of catastrophes (Quarantelli and Dynes 1977). In fact, Kutak (1938) argues that crises can be valuable to a community because they may promote a stronger social order, the pursuit of common interests, and ultimately, a sense of community cohesion that does not exist when life is more secure.
Steinberg (2000) notes that most natural disasters represent clearly defined, sudden-onset risks that are largely viewed by the public as indiscriminate and external to social systems and human control. The consequent human propensity to blame the damage and loss caused by natural disasters on nature, fate, or some divine force often results in feelings of community solidarity as well as post-disaster pro-social behavior. Indeed, heightened levels of solidarity and cooperation have been repeatedly reported in the aftermath of natural disasters (Dacy and Kunreuther 1969; Drabek 1986a; Dynes 1970; Tierney et al. 2001; Webb 2002) as people come together and help one another recover from these unforeseen, but mutually experienced events. In fact, the emergence of altruistic norms and the willingness of people to help with response efforts have led some scholars to refer to the emergency period following disasters as a kind of “therapeutic community” (Barton 1969; Fritz 1961). After a disaster strikes, there is an almost immediate focus on the urgent needs of victims and their families, which brings together the community, albeit typically for a relatively short time (Demerath and Wallace 1957; Drabek 1986a; Oliver-Smith 1979).

Although it has been well documented that natural disasters can bring people together, there has been less examination of why communities break down in certain post-disaster situations, or why some individuals or groups may become isolated from an emergent therapeutic community. Scholars have shown that the disaster agent (whether natural, technological, or human initiated) may directly affect whether consensus or conflict follows the event (Barton 1969; Couch and Kroll-Smith 1985; Drabek 1970, 1986b; Quarantelli and Dynes 1976). Specifically, as discussed in

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1 Conflict certainly may occur following natural disasters. However, it is usually much less widespread – at least immediately following an event – than the discord that follows technological disasters or acts of violence (see Peek and Sutton 2003; Quarantelli 1993).
Chapter Two, crises that involve some sort of perceived human culpability are more likely to result in blame, the failure of community solidarity to materialize, or disintegration of that solidarity if it does arise.

Erikson (1994) posited that “a new species of trouble” emerged with the advent of disasters resulting from the actions of humankind, versus the more conventional forms of calamity, traditionally considered acts of nature (also see Perrow 1999). In their examination of an underground mine fire, Kroll-Smith and Couch (1990) discovered that the extreme, stressful environment created by this chronic disaster resulted in the destruction of social bonds within the community. Edelstein (1988) reported that victims of residential toxic exposure came to feel stigmatized and isolated from relatives, friends, and co-workers living outside the contaminated community. Examining two separate technological catastrophes, Cuthbertson and Nigg (1987) found that the factors that promote a therapeutic community were not present in these instances, and therefore conflict, rather than solidarity, ensued. Baum, Fleming, and Davidson (1983) concluded that technological catastrophes are more likely to cause chronic stress and therefore have more widespread and long-term social impacts than natural disasters. In sum, researchers maintain that because human beings are usually perceived as the cause of technological disasters, these types of incidents are more likely to result in conflict, blame, dissension, and other negative responses. Yet, even following technological disasters, on some occasions the affected population can perceive such events as “accidents,” and mutually supportive, community-oriented behavior can occur (Couch and Kroll-Smith 1985).
Beyond natural catastrophes and technological disasters, there is a third type of disaster, and under no circumstances are these types of events attributed to natural forces or human error. These acts – most often labeled terrorism – are human-conceived, violent, and purposely designed to cause destruction, widespread fear, and physical, psychological, and social trauma. Hence, one of the most obvious characteristics that distinguishes September 11 from most other large-scale catastrophes that have impacted the United States is that a group of individuals could be quickly and clearly identified as directly responsible for the physical destruction and subsequent loss of life. The type of disaster – a planned, coordinated attack – certainly determined in large part the psychological, social, political, and military responses that followed. In turn, these responses, which included an upsurge in patriotism (Collins 2004; Turkel 2002) and subsequent assignment of blame to groups perceived as similar ethnically or religiously to the hijackers, led to strong feelings of group isolation for the Muslims interviewed in this study.

**ISOLATION FROM THE POST-SEPTEMBER 11 COMMUNITY**

As Taylor (1983) has argued, disasters may differ considerably in their range of impacts and the “victims” affected – either immediately or tangentially. The most obvious victims of September 11 were the individuals who died as a direct result of the attacks – the airplane passengers, building occupants, firefighters, police officers, and other emergency response personnel who perished when the hijacked airplanes exploded or when the buildings in Manhattan and Washington, D.C. collapsed. People who lost family members, friends, or co-workers were also victims, as were those who were injured and those who lost their jobs. More generally, because of the
widespread devastation caused by the tragic events of September 11 and the consequent strong emotional affect on almost all U.S. citizens, the American people as a whole have been labeled and portrayed as victims by the media and the U.S. government (Collins 2004; Newman 2003; Sutton 2004). In fact, studies show that most Americans, regardless of their proximity to the actual disaster sites, viewed themselves as victims of the September 11 attacks because they identified with those who were harmed, and they experienced the attacks as if they were perpetrated against themselves (Alexander 2004: 98).

Additionally, to understand the full scope of the effects of September 11, one must consider the consequences for other “hidden victims” of the attacks — namely, the religious and ethnic minorities who were the targets of blame, hostility, and social isolation in the aftermath of September 11. Over the past five decades, social scientists have systematically investigated the social and behavioral responses to natural and technological disasters (see Tierney et al. 2001 for an overview). However, as discussed previously, intentional acts of violence can result in fundamentally different and less predictable social outcomes than other types of catastrophic events (Drabek and Quarantelli 1967; Hewitt 1997; Quarantelli 1993). Therefore, it is important to carefully examine the effects of terrorist acts and other conflict events for a range of individuals and communities that may be impacted in various ways by the events and responses that follow.

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2 The notion of “hidden victims” in this context is my own, and, indeed, is not a perspective that was shared by all of the students I interviewed. In fact, several of the participants in this study maintained that the only true victims of September 11 were the individuals who died and those who lost loved ones. Indeed, many of the subjects noted that no matter how difficult circumstances were for Muslims following September 11, the issues they faced paled in comparison to the actual loss of life and the pain and suffering of the relatives and friends of those who died as a result of the terrorist attacks.
The discussion below presents qualitative data – reflections and words that demonstrate the feelings of the Muslim American students interviewed and the consequences of those feelings. The data reveal four primary factors that led to their perceptions and experiences of exclusion from the post-September 11 national therapeutic community. These included feeling blamed; being excluded from mourning, bonding, and helping behaviors; experiencing significant concern for personal safety; and suffering stigmatization, harassment, and discrimination.

**Blame**

As discussed above, disasters often motivate individuals and groups to behave in altruistic ways, yet catastrophic events can also result in a search for scapegoats to blame for the destruction and loss of life (Drabek and Quarantelli 1967; Neal 1984). Again, this is particularly true following events resulting from intentional human action (Bucher 1957). Hence, in addition to the onset of wars, human-induced disasters, such as the September 11 attacks, are very likely to result in fear and blame attribution and related negative behaviors, such as individual and group exclusion, harassment, stigmatization, discrimination, and violence. At the same time, perhaps in a more positive light, sudden, dramatic conflict also tends to promote social solidarity as communities come together to respond to perceived external threats. Such post-event solidarity is generated both by spontaneous group interaction and official processes. It typically is manifested in high levels of support for political leaders; a sharp rise in ritual behavior, such as church going and expressions of national allegiance; increased public displays of national symbols such as flags; other strong expressions of nationalism and a one-sided sense of idealism; and pressure within
society to conform to these current social norms (Alexander 2004; Collins 2004). Turkel (2002: 73) claims that Americans were shocked into collective solidarity following September 11, as individuals were “drawn together in shared grief and pride.”

Despite their U.S. citizenship, most of the Muslim interviewees did not feel connected to the larger, unified national community that emerged immediately after September 11. Because they shared a common religion with the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks, many of the participants believed that they were being blamed for the horrific events. Indeed, on the morning of the attacks, some of the students were blamed before they had even learned what had transpired. Habeel, whose family immigrated to the United States from Bangladesh when he was a young child, discussed what happened to him on the morning of September 11:

I heard it from the bus operator. The first thing he told me was, “Your people have done this thing.” I was like, “What?” I didn’t even know anything at that point. I could see the clouds of dust. He said, “They took the planes and hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Your people did that. The President is going to attack.” I thought he was just making fun of me. Then I went home and saw the TV. From the first minute I felt like they have cut off the Muslims.

During one of the focus group sessions, several participants discussed their initial reactions after learning of the terrorist attacks. These young women not only quickly realized the magnitude of the disaster; they also assumed that Muslims would be held responsible for what had happened. In fact, for some of the students, the

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3 Collins (2004: 86) argues that an extremely high level of collective solidarity is also collective hysteria; at such time, people are more heroic and altruistic, as well as more fearful and vindictive than at other times. During these crisis periods, individuals do not see their actions as falling into normal standards of behavior.

4 To ensure anonymity, all interviewee names have been changed. Pseudonyms are used throughout this document.
shock of learning of the attacks coincided with their recognition that the entire
Muslim American community would likely come under intense scrutiny.

Sadaf: The first thing I thought was, there are a lot of people who may
be dead. This is so horrible. Right after that, it was, we’re going to get
blamed. [everyone agrees] We’ve always been blamed, so this time,
obviously we’re going to be blamed too.

Iffat: This was such a big thing, the Twin Towers. It was the biggest
thing we had seen on American soil.

Anna: We have this feel for it. We are American. I was born here. The
Twin Towers meant a lot to me. They represent New York.

Sara: I was just as surprised and saddened as anyone else. I was angry
at the fact that people could do such a thing, angry that so many people
were killed, and I was hurt and frustrated that people were blaming us.
You feel so bad about what happened, but you’re pinpointed as the
evil one.

Over the past several decades, Muslim Americans have endured various forms
of bigotry, intolerance, and discrimination during periods of national and international
crisis. Partly in response to that stigmatization, and like many minority groups before
them, Muslims have worked to both establish their legitimacy and become more
integrated into the American social and political landscape by forming advocacy
groups, civil rights organizations, political action committees, and other Islamic
outreach groups. The efforts of these institutions are primarily geared toward
educating the American public about Islam, correcting stereotypes, diminishing
intolerance, and unifying Muslim Americans. Despite progress made over the years,
September 11 has been and continues to be a major setback for the acceptance of
Muslims in the United States. Recognizing the potentially serious repercussions of
September 11, some of the interviewees admitted that they originally hoped that some
other group was responsible for the acts of terrorism. For instance, one interviewee said:

Imani: When I heard there was an attack, when I turned on the television and saw the plane hit the building, the first thing I said was, I hope it’s not a Muslim. I just remember, I had this mental thing going. I kept thinking, I hope this is an American anarchist group. I hope this is an American anarchist group.

Lori: Why were you thinking that?

Imani: A lot of it was that I was remembering the Oklahoma City bombings. I was hoping there wouldn’t be that violence toward Arabs and Muslims before anyone knew who had done it. And I was hoping it hadn’t been a Muslim group because I knew it would come back on the community and lots more people would be hurt.

As Allport (1954: 258), in his discussion of scapegoating stated so succinctly: “Anger wants a personal victim, and it wants it now.” Despite attempts to stem irrational blame and positive outreach from many community leaders, law enforcement officers, and ordinary citizens to minority groups, some people in the United States still directed their anger at innocent civilians following the September 11 attacks. This misdirected animosity and blame caused many Muslims to feel disconnected, even alienated, from the rest of the U.S. population. As time passed, a number of the students I talked to indicated that they continued to feel as if non-Muslims were holding them responsible for the events of September 11. Fatima, a native of New York City, commented:

Even now, weeks after it happened, we still get looks. People still look at you like, you know, you did something wrong. You just have to smile back and then they’re surprised… I’m a person just like you. I didn’t do anything.

In the aftermath of September 11, anti-Islamic rhetoric from media pundits as well as Christian evangelists such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Franklin
Graham further added to the students’ feelings of being blamed and isolated. Robertson made headlines when he said Muslims were “worse than Nazis” (Daifallah 2002), and Falwell prompted deadly Hindu-Muslim clashes in India in 2002 when he called the Prophet Muhammad$^5$ a “terrorist” (Abdo 2003). Graham, who gave the sermon at President Bush’s 2001 inauguration, angered many after the September 11 attacks when he described Islam as a “very evil and wicked religion” (Fitzpatrick 2004).

Evangelists were not the only ones to blame Muslims and the Islamic faith and to counterpose Islam with Christianity. Speaking in military uniform at several U.S. churches, Lt. General William G. Boykin discussed his efforts to capture a Muslim Somali warlord: “I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol” (Mishra 2003). In a radio appearance promoting his new novel, New York Congressional Representative Peter King claimed the vast majority of American Muslim community leaders are “an enemy living amongst us” and that “no American Muslims” have cooperated in the war on terror. He added that “about 80-85 percent of the mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists” (Povich 2004).

The participants in this study were keenly aware of these and many other cases of so-called “Muslim-bashing.”$^6$ They felt strongly that the reduction of their religion to a handful of rules and overgeneralizations about the faith, its founder, and its people only served to reinforce and perpetuate the many negative stereotypes

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$^5$ Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad was the Messenger of God and that the verses of the Qur’an were revealed through him.

$^6$ Said (1997) claims that malicious overgeneralizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of a foreign culture in the West.
associated with Islam – for example, that it is violent, primitive, autocratic, and a threat to other faiths (see Shaheen 2001). Hence, the inflammatory comments made by media pundits, evangelists, military leaders, and politicians further promoted the participants’ feelings of social isolation. Following September 11, Marwan, whose parents immigrated to the United States from Egypt before he was born, commented:

With all the negative things that were said after 9/11, for the first time in my life, I felt like I wasn’t part of this society. I felt like we were being marginalized. It’s really frustrating to have these feelings right after your country has been attacked. I was born here, I’m not any different. The color of my skin, maybe, and I have a different culture, but so does everybody. Just because someone is White or they have been here for another generation or two, they think that makes them more American. But what they fail to realize is that I love living here.

Unlike Marwan and others who were shocked and disillusioned by the negative reactions that followed September 11, some of the interviewees said that they had always felt different and therefore were not surprised by the intolerance and backlash. Indeed, for some, the aftermath of the terrorist attacks only served to strengthen already existing feelings of otherness. Salman, who came to the United States from Afghanistan when he was a child, expressed a different view from Marwan:

I always felt kind of isolated. When this [September 11] happened, it wasn’t like a further isolation. It didn’t surprise me. The media was talking about Islamic extremism, Islamic terrorism way before this happened. I was aware of that, and it always caused me to feel isolated. So, September 11 wasn’t anything shocking. I did notice that others were affected and seemed to become more closed off. But I personally didn’t feel any more isolated than I already was.

As the comments from Marwan and Salman demonstrate, the interviewees varied widely regarding their feelings of being integrated into U.S. society prior to September 11. These perceptions of inclusion or exclusion were influenced somewhat
by whether the participant was born in the United States; those who were born and raised in America tended to report higher levels of perceived integration, although this was not always the case. Nonetheless, despite the variation in pre-September 11 perceptions and experiences, the students commonly reported that following the terrorist attacks, they became highly aware of their “difference” and disconnection from the rest of the American public.

**Exclusion**

One way that disasters strengthen community identification is by providing community members opportunities to participate in response and recovery activities (Lowe and Fothergill 2003; Quarantelli and Dynes 1976). Indeed, providing and receiving emotional support, as well as physically assisting fellow victims, seem to enable healing, and are thus characteristic of the therapeutic community (Barton 1969). After the September 11 attacks, Muslims in this study reported feeling largely excluded from the processes of both social bonding and mourning. The participants in New York also felt excluded from helping with post-disaster recovery. The perceived or actual inability to participate in such important therapeutic processes and behaviors naturally resulted in increased feelings of individual and group isolation.

Interviewees commented that they could not talk about the events of September 11 as a “normal” person to non-Muslim Americans, but rather had to respond as a “Muslim” and had to provide an “Islamic perspective” on all issues related to the terrorist attacks. Therefore, the students often did not have the opportunity to simply grieve or tell the stories of what happened to them on that day. Instead, they had to answer questions about their religious beliefs and practices, the
meaning of jihad,\(^7\) and whether or not they personally condoned violence. When I asked Yasmin, a Pakistani Muslim who was raised in Great Britain, what was difficult for her following September 11, she stated:

One thing is the lack of regular conversations with people. A lot of other people I could see were having conversations with each other about what happened and how it happened and where they were. I’ll have a conversation like that with my friends that know me, but with other people that I don’t necessarily know that well, the only conversation we’ll have is something about Muslims. We can’t have a normal conversation about, Yeah, this is where I was when it happened. It’s always about, How do you feel about this? How do you feel about that? Because we have to look at it differently. We can’t just sit there and go, Oh my God, this happened, it’s so sad. All of the sudden we’re called to duty. Oh, Muslims are crazy lunatics, so we have to go do something about it. No, no, we’re not. I just want to sit here and mourn what happened.

Anticipating possible hostile repercussions following September 11, Muslim Americans had to mobilize quickly to defend themselves and their religion. Islamic advocacy groups and scholars disseminated statements condemning the terrorist attacks (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a), and local groups across the nation initiated interfaith awareness campaigns, organized community education efforts, and held open houses at mosques and Islamic centers.\(^8\) Many of the participants in this study felt good about these efforts because they furthered public awareness of Islam and Muslim life. However, again, the interviewees felt that this intense focus on their religion kept them from reflecting on what had happened the

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\(^7\) Since September 11, the word *jihad* has been used frequently in the U.S. media, often translated as “holy war.” However, the word *jihad* actually means “exertion” or “to strive for a better way of life.” In its spiritual sense, it is an inner striving to rid the self from debased ideas, inclinations, and actions and to exercise constancy and perseverance in achieving a higher moral standard. *Jihad* can involve, if necessary, armed struggle against the enemies of Islam, but only in self defense (Denny 1994: 136).

\(^8\) The Council on American-Islamic Relations initiated the “Mosque Open House Project,” encouraging Muslims to invite community members to visit local mosques and Islamic centers to learn about the faith. Their fundamental goal was to open channels of communication between Muslims and people of other faiths (URL: http://www.cair-net.org/).
morning of September 11. Iffat, a native of New York City, discussed the inability to adequately express her grief, which ultimately led to feelings of being “different” and excluded from “mainstream” U.S. society:

I’m so sad about it, but you can’t really show that you’re sad because you have to be more defensive. We can’t express how we were just as sad as anyone else. I don’t think I felt included as one of them who were affected by it. I had to defend myself and defend my religion, more than being a New Yorker who was affected by it.

Many of the interviewees said that they wanted to participate in post-September 11 memorial services and volunteer activities so that they could grieve for the victims who died, show support for the rescue workers, and feel comradeship with other survivors. However, the students said they felt uncomfortable participating in such events because they were either worried for their own safety or concerned that their presence might upset others. For example, Leila, whose family moved to the United States from Pakistan when she was 13 years old, was acutely aware of her Muslim appearance, and the feelings that she might provoke:

In my neighborhood, there’s a fire station, and every time I would pass by it, there was a picture of one of the firefighters who passed away. It was so sad. All I wanted to do was go inside and hug every firefighter and tell them, “You guys are wow, amazing. I’m supporting and praying for you.” But then I was like, if I do that... Every time they see me, probably I remind them of September 11. Every time. Even every time I pass by, I’m like, oh God, I hope I don’t remind them. And I know I do with my headscarf. Sometimes I feel ashamed. I really do.

Because of their personal apprehension and fears of upsetting others, the interviewees who lived in New York decided not to help with the recovery efforts, despite their qualifications. For example, most of the subjects in this study were not only fluent in English but also spoke at least one other language. Several of the
participants said that they wanted to volunteer at the victim assistance center near Ground Zero, especially because there was such a high demand for translators, but they chose not to go or their parents asked that they not travel to the site of the attacks.\textsuperscript{9} Henna, a graduate student in New York whose educational background qualified her to volunteer at the World Trade Center site, declined out of fear for her personal safety, although she wanted to be involved in the disaster recovery:

For me, I wanted to join those people who were volunteering downtown and do stuff. My undergraduate degree was in engineering, and they needed engineers there to help with excavation at the site. They also needed people who could translate. To me, that was the American community coming together and trying to do what they can. But I didn’t feel like I could for my own safety. I wear a headscarf. I wanted to be a part of that community, but I’m not really.

Just like their fellow Americans, Muslims needed to heal the psychological wounds of the September 11 attacks (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a). However, because of actual or perceived exclusion, many of the Muslims interviewed did not have the opportunities that others had to participate in activities that would help them recover from the devastation.

\textbf{Concern for Safety}

Following the events of September 11, Muslims were worried about their personal safety and the security of the United States, as were other Americans. No one knew whether subsequent attacks were planned, and virtually everyone felt uncertainty and fear. However, Muslims experienced a second level of fear. It was quickly reported that the September 11 attacks had been carried out by a group of Muslim men. In light of the history of backlash and violence against Muslims in the

\textsuperscript{9} I interviewed one woman in New York who did volunteer to be a translator at Ground Zero just days after September 11. She was the sole exception.
United States following other acts of terrorism, the interviewees recognized the imminent possibility of hostile repercussions against individuals and groups perceived as similar to the hijackers. These fears were confirmed when soon after the September 11 attacks, rumors as well as substantiated reports of acts of violence against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians began to circulate.

In response to these reports, the participants became concerned for the well being of family members and friends who were Muslim, as well as for themselves. Najah, a native of Trinidad who moved to the United States as an adolescent, described her reaction after learning of the September 11 attacks:

When it happened, I didn’t even look out my windows for three days. I was really scared that people could see me from the outside. I’m the only person in my neighborhood that wears a scarf. People really know us. My father has a big beard. It was very scary the first day I went out. Even now when I’m on the street, sometimes I feel like crying. People just keep staring at me. They stop a block away, groups of men, and they just look at me. I have to hold it together because if I cry they’re going to see that I’m weak. I just get home and I have a lot of headaches every day. It’s really frustrating.

Janan, the daughter of a West African immigrant and an African American convert to Islam, was born and raised in the United States. When I first met Janan, she had just begun her first semester of college, and she was obviously a very vibrant and outgoing young woman. However, because Janan wore a headscarf, and therefore was highly visible, she was frightened to leave her home after the September 11 attacks:

I was getting a lot of e-mails that were saying “Stay in the house, don’t go out if you don’t have to.” It was freaking me out. I remember somebody was on the news talking about how they should put all the Muslims in concentration camps. When people are saying stuff like that, they were talking about it like it was a valid viewpoint, when
people are talking about things like that, you’re like… How can I leave the house? How can I go anywhere? I’m scared out of my wits.

On September 11, Najah and Janan were both at home when then they heard the news of the terrorist attacks, and they chose to stay in their houses with their families until they felt safe enough to leave. However, many of the interviewees were already at school the morning of September 11 and discovered what had happened through their friends or professors. Sadiyah, a native of Syria, described her response after learning of the attacks:

I was on campus. I heard about it through a professor who happened to pass by our classroom. There was panic. Everybody got up and went to make phone calls. My immediate reaction was first, I couldn’t believe it. I was shocked. Then I was like, safety. What’s going to happen to me? I’m walking around the halls and people are giving me really dirty looks. So I came down here [to the Muslim Student Association office]. There were Muslims gathered and a couple of other groups like the Puerto Rican Alliance. They came over to us and said, “We advise that you guys go home. We don’t know what’s going to happen around campus.”

Peers, professors, and college administrators were among those who encouraged the Muslim students to leave campus and go home on September 11. Yet almost all of the participants said that they felt safer on their college and university campuses than they did in other areas around the cities where they lived. One of the greatest concerns for the students in New York was having to take public transportation (specifically, the subways and buses) in the days and weeks immediately following the terrorist attacks. Halah, a young woman who was visibly identifiable as a Muslim because of her clothing and headscarf, said:

I felt very safe coming to college. But the commute was another thing. However you came, it was dangerous. There are a lot of ignorant people out there. Some of the [Muslim] sisters faced worse things than
others. In one way or another, we all at the very least had to deal with looks. We all get the looks.

Selma, another young woman I interviewed, had missed three weeks of school following September 11 because of her fear of taking the subway. She said:

This is my first day back on campus. I haven’t been to school because I was afraid to take the train. Today my husband brought me to school.

The thought of walking or traveling alone was frightening to many of the participants, women and men alike, so they often relied on one another for support and personal safety. Although many of the colleges offered special security escorts to the Muslim students who had to travel at night, the students had already developed their own systems. Rajah, an undergraduate student in New York City, described how she and several of her Muslim friends worked together to try to ensure their mutual safety:

We set up a buddy system. A lot of [Muslim] brothers and sisters were in need of help. They were scared of traveling alone. Either that or their parents wouldn’t let them travel alone. I know one sister who didn’t come into campus for a week because her parents wouldn’t let her. She started classes a week after. We did try to set something up for her; brothers who were commuting from the same area met up with her and she traveled with them.

Another interviewee from a different university, Habeel, told me how his travel patterns changed after September 11:

I used to go out with my friends. We stopped and said nobody can go out alone. We have to go out in the full group, six people. We can only go out in groups and come back in groups. That’s it. No single person can go out.

Many of the interviewees talked at length about how not only they, but also their family members, particularly their mothers and fathers, changed their routines in response to the events of September 11. As one might expect, the parents were
extremely worried for the safety of their children. Several of the participants noted that, regardless of whether they still lived at home with their families or were living on their own, their parents asked them to stay out of classes for several days, and a few parents even asked their children to quit school for the semester. Leena, who was born in the United States to parents from India, said:

My parents told me to drop the semester. I said it would take a few weeks or so and it would calm down. Everybody’s angry at first and they have to get their anger and frustration out. I knew it would calm down eventually. I stayed home a lot, though. It was really hard. I stayed home for a week and a half. That was so hard. I’ve never done that.

In addition to asking them to stay home from school, some of the parents also told their children that they should not attend unnecessary extracurricular activities, particularly those associated with the Muslim student groups on the college and university campuses. Kamilah, a second generation American of Egyptian descent, described how her mother did not want her to take part in events associated with the Women in Islam club at her college, even though Kamilah was the president of the organization:

My mom has always been supportive. They have always let me do whatever I want to do with my life. They’ve never butted in. Except for now. My mom won’t let me go to food sales, fundraisers for Women in Islam. She’s like, “No. People would know. They’ll follow you around.” She’s not scared of me getting killed. I’m not scared of getting killed. But I’m scared of getting harassed.

One of the pressures that the participants most often reported receiving from their parents and family members was to change their appearance. The men talked about family members asking them to trim or shave their beards so they would appear less “Arab” or “Muslim.” The women described their parents wanting them either to
start wearing their hijab in a less “Muslim” way (i.e., instead of letting the headscarf drape around their shoulders and bosom, tying the headscarf back tightly around their heads) or to quit wearing the hijab entirely. Even though the participants realized that their parents were making these requests out of concern, being asked to shave their beards or remove their headscarves offended many of the young men and women; they felt that it was important to visibly display their Muslim identity and their faith in God. Leila described the reaction of her family members after the attacks:

> With me, my parents, when the whole thing happened, after two hours I’m getting phone calls from my relatives saying that I should take off my headscarf, from New York saying, “No way in hell. You shouldn’t even go out. Take off your headscarf. You’re going to get yourself killed.” I’m like, “What are you talking about?” They’re giving lectures to my parents telling them, “You should stop your daughter from wearing a headscarf.” I’m the only child living with my mom and dad right now. They’re like, “No way. No headscarf.”

Leila quit wearing her headscarf to appease her parents. However, she was distressed that she was unable to express herself or display her identity as a Muslim. When I interviewed her just weeks after September 11, she was again wearing the headscarf, unbeknownst to her parents. She said, “I go to school, I put it on, and then I take it off when I leave.” This was clearly not an ideal solution, however. Leila felt extremely guilty about doing something against her parents’ wishes and without their knowledge. At the same time, she was not willing to stop wearing the hijab.

Beyond the conflicts with their parents regarding their clothing and appearance, many of the students also were required to adhere to stricter curfews and had to report where they would be and whom they would be with during all evening and weekend outings. Some of the interviewees with the most protective mothers and
fathers also had to endure their parents checking up on them constantly. Iffat detailed the lengths her parents had gone to following September 11:

My parents got me a cell phone. Yesterday I went to the library to study in school. I checked my voicemail and there were nine messages from my parents at two minute intervals! I turned it off after a while. [laughter and nods from the rest of the women in the focus group]

Even though the interviewees sometimes joked about their highly cautious parents, they understood their apprehension, and actually shared many of their parents’ concerns. Although the students generally thought that engaging in extra precautionary measures was largely a nuisance, they also felt that it was necessary during the uncertain period following September 11. These added concerns about safety heightened their feelings of exclusion from the larger American community.

**Stigmatization, Harassment, and Discrimination**

The apprehension the Muslim students expressed regarding their safety was not unfounded. Following the September 11 attacks, the media, minority advocacy groups, and local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies reported numerous incidents of bias-motivated harassment and discrimination. Indeed, the September 11 disaster was followed by the most dramatic rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes to date (Anderson 2002; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a; Human Rights Watch 2002; Watanabe 2004; Yee 2005).

Whether the students were personally victimized or not, they were emotionally disturbed and frightened knowing that relatives, friends, or members of their community had been the targets of some form of backlash. In fact, one characteristic of a hate-crime is that not only does the immediate victim suffer, but non-victim members of the targeted group do as well (Cogan 2002; Cogan and
Marcus-Newhall 2002; Ferber, Grattet, and Jenness 2000). The extent and severity of anti-Muslim acts and subsequent civil rights violations by the U.S. government (Braber 2002; Gould 2002) further isolated and alienated members of this already marginalized religious minority.

The students in this study reported various forms of harassment, stigmatization, and discrimination following September 11. For example, a few said they had a difficult time finding or keeping a place to live. This was particularly true for those international students who arrived in the United States just prior to the terrorist attacks. Khalid, a graduate student from Turkey who had moved to New York City only days before September 11, was unable to secure a place to live for several weeks after the disaster. He was forced to sleep in the library at his university (which fortunately was open 24 hours a day) and to shower at an on-campus gym. Although Khalid initially blamed his problem on the general lack of affordable housing in the city, he later revealed that several of the people he had contacted in his attempt to find an apartment had hung up on him when they heard his Middle Eastern accent. Khalid eventually found an apartment and he completed his master’s degree, but soon after graduation he returned to Turkey. The last time I interviewed him, he remarked:

Before I came to this country, I was always thinking to stay here and continue my life here because when I moved here I saw that you can easily live your life however you like. But after September 11, I thought to myself that I shouldn’t stay here, I should go back to my country. It has become very hard for me to continue here.

Over 70 percent of the interviewees reported being verbally harassed in some way in the days and weeks following the attacks. These verbal attacks ranged from...
someone muttering “terrorist” as they passed by on the street, to shouts and overt
threats. Additionally, some of the respondents described physical incidents, such as
being spit on, shoved in the subway, or having things thrown at them while walking
down the street. Some of the women reported having their headscarves yanked or
pulled off. However, simply being stared at or given “dirty looks” was the most
common form of harassment reported. Janan discussed her experiences following
September 11:

I was so upset. I said, Please, God, don’t let it be a Muslim. I think it
was really hard for me in my freshman year, because this was my
second week of being a freshman in college. I was adjusting. I was
really loving being here. And all of the sudden, having to defend
myself in classrooms, getting dirty looks from people, even my
neighbors. I remember people staring at me. There were these guys
who kept driving past me and giving me these looks, just for no
reason, just to freak me out when I was walking in town. So I was
even scared to go out of my house. I was thinking about taking off my
headscarf. That was the initial thing.

During a focus group, two women described their frustration with the stares they
received while commuting to and from school on the subway:

Selma: Right after September 11, I was scared of looking into people’s
eyes in the subway. That’s why I was always looking down. I didn’t
want to see that they were staring at me. Now I’ll look around a little
more. When I’m studying for class, I can see they try to see what I’m
studying. They’ll look at my books.

Najah: I hate that, especially when I’m trying to study chemical
engineering. They’re probably thinking, “That’s her bomb manual.”
They literally look and try to read. I look at their faces and they don’t
feel ashamed. They just keep looking at what I’m studying.

Many of the interviewees also reported varying levels of fear, tension,
depression, and psychological strain. Because of this emotional stress, some of the
participants, most of whom were women, missed several days or even weeks of their
college classes. Physical manifestations of stress included problems with sleeping, weight loss, and recurring headaches. When asked about the effects of being excluded and stigmatized, Najah, a first generation immigrant from Trinidad, said:

It ruins my day. Sometimes it ruins my week. Last semester I got extremely, extremely depressed. When I hear the stuff on the news that’s happening, the portrayal that the media is giving of Muslims, I wish I could have a microphone and tell people, “We’re not like that.” It would really, really aggravate me. I was so tired, I was having headaches every day. It definitely hurts. It made me feel like, I wanted to do something, tell people more.

Another form of bias, which was less salient for some of the interviewees given that the majority were full-time students, was employment discrimination. However, those who were actively seeking part-time or full-time jobs expressed some anxiety about their ability to compete in the employment market because of their religious orientation. One participant, Badia, graduated with an undergraduate degree in business management in May 2002. During a follow-up interview with her, I asked how her job search was going, and she responded:

When I was looking for a job it was really hard. I didn’t think it would be, because I’ve never had a hard time getting a job before. I know the economy is down, so I’m not saying that people are discriminating against me. I’ve always disliked people blaming their shortcomings on discrimination. So I really didn’t like to look at that, and I didn’t for months. My career counselor was the one who brought it up. She was like, “Why haven’t you gotten a job yet?” I graduated with a 3.9 GPA, and I had a lot of good things on my record. She said I should have gotten a job before the other people she was helping. There were companies I think may have discriminated against me because I’m female. One was asking if I had kids. All three of the places I interviewed asked about my religion and what country I was from.

Badia knew that it was illegal for employers to ask her some of these questions. However, she answered anyway because she said she would have felt more uncomfortable confronting the interviewer.
Although many of the interviewees did face harassment and discrimination following September 11, these students often remarked that although the backlash was bad, it was not nearly as bad as it might have been. However, their definition of “bad” should be placed in context. For example, I considered the harassment, verbal threats, and physical confrontations reported by the interviewees very significant and certainly worthy of concern. On the other hand, within the context of the larger fears that many interviewees expressed – such as the possibility of being detained, deported (even though most were U.S. citizens), or “placed in internment camps like the Japanese during World War II” – perhaps the less substantial acts of intolerance seemed less significant. Moreover, given that the Muslim American community had braced itself for waves of backlash and recrimination following September 11, Haddad (2004) contends that many Muslims were pleasantly surprised by the numerous acts of kindness and support they received from both friends and strangers.

During the interviews, the students would often recount something bad that had happened to them (e.g., a man yelling at them on the street), but then would tell a story of someone being kind to them (e.g., a neighbor bringing cookies to their home or a stranger offering them a seat on the bus). In fact, there were many positive actions directed toward individuals and the Muslim community generally following September 11, and the participants wanted to make sure that these acts were documented as well. Some of those interviewed even talked about complete strangers, non-Muslims, going out of their way to stand up for the Muslim students. Rajah emphasized the actions of such people:

There are nice people out there. One of my friends traveled to Queens. She was on the subway reading a book. The guy sitting next to her
goes, “If that was a Qur’an, it would be burning.” Another person who was standing there said, “I lost my apartment, you have no right to be saying that.” So there are people standing up for Muslims.

The students also wanted to make it clear that they did not think that their fellow Americans were bad just because of the actions of a few angry people. Talib, a young man who had come to the United States from Morocco to attend college in Colorado, expressed the following sentiment:

I think the American people, most of them are not ignorant. They know that if someone does one thing, it doesn’t mean that everybody is bad. They don’t go and stereotype people. Only ignorant people have been doing this. Luckily, in the university, people tend to become intellectual and educated, and they know what is going on.

INCREASED GROUP SOLIDARITY

Following September 11, one of the major themes that emerged in my conversations with the interviewees was that isolation from the larger U.S. community led to an increased sense of group solidarity and identity among Muslims. This response is not unique. Several scholars have noted that one reaction to real or perceived group threats is increased collective solidarity (Bozorgmehr 2000; Coser 1964; Doosje and Ellemers 1997; Durkheim [1893] 1984; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Simmel 1955; Turkel 2002; Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976). Furthermore, many social scientists have documented ethnic and religious minority groups coming together in the face of adversity throughout U.S. history, such as Japanese Americans during and following World War II (Bonacich and Modell 1980; Fujita and O’Brien 1985; Montero 1981), and the Irish who immigrated during the great potato famine of the mid-nineteenth century (Ignatiev 1995).
Similarly, Goffman (1963) argues that members of a stigmatized group tend to come together into small social groups as a direct result of the stigmatization. Malik, who was raised in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States for college, anticipated that pre-existing stereotypes, social exclusion, and post-September 11 alienation from the larger U.S. community would bring Muslims together:

You can see that it’s only natural that something like this would foster group cohesion. You’re being identified in a particular way. When that is the case, in order to feel stronger, you’ll identify with that group. You want to get closer to that group. It’s a natural urge.

Hafeez, a second-generation Pakistani Muslim, expressed a similar sentiment regarding the aftermath of September 11 and increased Muslim group cohesion. He remarked that if a person were being identified in a particular way, as a member of a particular sub-population, he or she would probably associate more closely with that group:

It’s like, if you’re Muslim you’re feeling the heat. When people have pressure put on them, they identify with what that pressure is directed towards. So if a lot of kids are getting crap because they’re Muslim, they have a tendency to identify themselves more strongly with that.

As Tajfel (1978) states, the internal cohesion and structure of a minority group is frequently determined as the group becomes aware that it is considered different. In this regard, a distinct form of collective solidarity emerged among Muslims following the terrorist attacks. Because they felt, and often were, excluded from much of the broader post-September 11 response and patriotic sentiment, they began to rely more heavily on fellow Muslims for social support.

During the interviews, the students reported that although they were close friends with other Muslims prior to September 11, there was an increased level of
bonding within the community following the disaster. The participants said that this was primarily because of the common level of understanding among Muslims; many Muslims came to share similar fears and uncertainties, on personal, local, national, and international levels. Hanan explained how her relationships changed after September 11:

Everyone was so concerned and so understanding, especially my Muslim friends. They were scared, too. That made me realize that they’re really there for me. Because of that I feel a lot closer to them than I did before. I think whenever people go through something like that, it’s a bonding process. Now I see them a lot more than I used to.

Because the students felt largely isolated from the non-Muslim community, other Muslims served as important sources of emotional support. Moreover, Muslim student groups offered a safe space within which the interviewees could express sorrow, fear, and anger, and receive empathy.\(^\text{10}\) The enhanced sense of community among Muslims also resulted from the increased time the students spent together. Much of this time was dedicated to responding to inquiries from outsiders and establishing efforts to educate non-Muslims about Islamic practices and beliefs. The interviewees described a multitude of activities that they had developed and implemented to improve the public’s awareness of their faith and religious practices. Most of the students helped organize or chose to participate in some of these activities, including presenting guest lectures to their university classes; visiting local

\(^{10}\text{This response is similar to the victim reactions reported by Edelstein (1988:110-117) in his study of a community residential area contaminated toxins. He found that, as the victims came to feel increasingly isolated from friends, relatives, and co-workers living outside the area, they became more reliant on fellow victims as sources of social support. Edelstein refers to this phenomenon as “outsiders don’t know what we went through,” and reports that this sentiment has been echoed in virtually every toxic exposure incident he has investigated.}\)
churches, synagogues, and schools as part of community outreach projects; or speaking at campus-wide educational events.

Several participants attributed, at least in part, the coming together of Muslims and the increased sense of community within the group to these additional efforts by the student organizations. Henna, who was the president of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) on her university campus, remarked:

After being so shocked at what did happen, we started hearing about Muslims being harassed. I think that did bring a lot of Muslim people together. We had several meetings for people to discuss how they were feeling. It brought a lot of people together.

Henna also said that there had been a large increase in the number of Muslims who were attending regular MSA meetings, Friday prayers on campus, and special events. The leaders of the MSAs on other campuses I visited reported a similar rise in Muslim student participation in MSA-sponsored events. Most of the subjects in this study had already been involved in their on-campus Muslim student organizations prior to September 11, but not all. Some of the individuals I interviewed had only become active in Muslim groups following September 11. For example, Saba described how she had become increasingly involved in the Muslim community following the terrorist attacks:

I’m much more involved in the Muslim community now. Initially, I wasn’t. I’d go to lectures, to Islamic Club once in a while. But now I’m the vice president, trying to get involved more, trying to establish a citywide MSA. There are times when you need to get active, and right now is the best time for Muslims. I think that every community in the U.S. has had to fight for their rights. Look at the women. The

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11 According to an article in the New York University (NYU) newspaper, over the past few years, the Islamic Center at NYU has gone from accommodating about 20 Muslim students to more than 250, and even greater numbers during Ramadan and other special events. Muslim students at that university were trying to raise several million dollars to establish a permanent meeting space for the increasing population of active Muslim students (Gunja 2005).
females had to fight for their rights, the African American community too. Now it’s the Muslim community’s turn to fight for their rights.

Beyond an increased participation of Muslims in various activities centered around their faith, the September 11 terrorist attacks were also followed by a surge of public interest in Islam and Muslims. For example, many newspapers, television stations, and radio programs ran special features on Muslims in America after September 11, providing overviews of various aspects of Muslim life, including discussions of proper dress, prayer, marriage practices, and eating habits. Moreover, it was widely reported that after September 11, the Qur’an became a bestseller at bookstores across the United States (Lampman 2002). Nationwide, enrollment in college Arabic language courses nearly doubled in 2002 (Associated Press 2005). According to the interviewees, one of the most encouraging aspects of September 11, at least for the Muslim community, was that more people seemed to be genuinely interested in learning about Islam and understanding Muslims and their faith. The participants talked about how they believed much of the anger and blame they initially received from others was beginning to be replaced by interest and engagement. When I interviewed Sanae seven months after September 11, she discussed this shift:

Initially things were very rough, like when you came last time. People were cursing you out. Every time they saw us they’d make this face. Then it slowly got better, but it’s still not back to normal. Even now, sometimes when you’re sitting in the subway, you do get looks. But now it’s more interest than anything else. Before it was fear, like, “Oh, my God, I hope she doesn’t have a bomb.” Now it’s more like interest, “Okay, so she’s a Muslim.” They observe what I’m wearing, how I’m talking. If I’m with my friend and I’m talking English, or if I talk about something, we’re business majors, we talk about finance and this and that all the time. They’re kind of, I can see surprise on their face, like, “Oh, these are really normal people.” It’s getting better now.
The interviewees agreed that some of their concerns and fears had gradually decreased over time, particularly after the worst of the ethnic and religious backlash subsided. Most of the students assumed that the aftermath of September 11 would continue to result in some negative consequences for Muslims, though they also believed that the Muslim American community had become more strongly connected than ever before. Many participants thought that the solidarity that developed among Muslims after September 11 was a very positive thing. However, a few were concerned that the solidarity could serve to further isolate Muslims, rather than help them become an accepted and integrated group in mainstream society. Malik expressed this point of view during a focus group:

One thing I would like to say regarding the Muslim community in the U.S. is that they should take advantage of the pluralism in this country. They should be less isolationist, especially now. They should try to assert themselves and educate people. They don't usually get this kind of opportunity where you have a large audience that’s willing to listen and very, very interested in what you have to say.

Some of the participants in this study wondered whether things would ever “return to normal” for the Muslim community, or if September 11 would continue to impact their lives, relationships, and futures in America. Ahmad, a second generation American of Palestinian descent, worried not only about his future, but also about the prospects for his children:

Our main concern here is what is our future? That’s what it comes down to. You get these new history books: “Muslims Attack America.” What’s going to happen when kids in school read them? Your people attacked my culture. How do you raise children in such an environment? It all comes into effect in the long run. You’ve really got to look into the future perspective rather than what’s just now, about what’s going to happen a month, a year, ten years, a few generations from now. What is this country going to fall back on?
CONCLUSION

The Muslim students I interviewed were isolated from the national therapeutic community that emerged following September 11 for four primary reasons: they felt blamed for the attacks; they felt they were excluded from specific mourning, bonding, and helping behaviors that would have allowed them to respond to and recover from the tragic events; they felt increased concern regarding their personal safety; and they were stigmatized and experienced and witnessed acts of harassment and discrimination. This social exclusion led to increased group solidarity among and identification with the Muslim community.

Like all citizens, Muslim Americans were significantly affected by the events and aftermath of September 11. As a group, they suffered the same shock, anger, and grief as the rest of the nation. However, because they were immediately associated with the perpetrators of those attacks and thus placed on the defensive, they were victims not only of the disaster itself (as were virtually all Americans), but also of the public reaction that followed.
CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

In this chapter I examine the factors and processes contributing to the development and maintenance of a religious identity among second-generation immigrants. Specifically, I explore why and how religion became the most salient source of personal and social identity for the Muslim American students I interviewed for this study. I present three stages of identity development, illustrating how a Muslim religious identity emerged and gained saliency for the participants. I also discuss the individual and social factors that contributed to this religious identity becoming paramount and describe how this particular group of young Muslims understand and assert their religious identities.

The concept of identity salience is particularly useful for examining the role of religion in the lives of these participants; it helps one understand how a specific identity – in this case, being Muslim – can assume greater importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities that comprise a sense of self. Stryker (1968, 1980) argues that discrete personal and social identities may be thought of as ordered in a salience hierarchy. As individuals become more committed to a given role, that role assumes higher identity salience. Moreover, the higher the identity in the salience hierarchy, the more likely that identity will be enacted in a given situation, or in many situations. In essence, this probability of invoking a particular identity, whether intentionally or not, defines identity salience and thus commitment to that identity. Although personal and social identities and salience hierarchies tend to be stable, individuals sometimes
take on new identities, alter or shed old ones, or rearrange the relative salience of aspects of their identity (Vryan, Adler, and Adler 2003: 381).

A MODEL OF MUSLIM RELIGIOUS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

My research with Muslim university students revealed three stages of religious identity development among this group: religion as ascribed identity; religion as chosen identity; and religion as declared identity. As the participants moved through each of the stages, their faith became more intense and their religious practice increased. They identified more and more strongly with Islam and the individual characteristic of being Muslim. The identity formation model presented below is based on three broad assumptions: that identity is acquired through a social and developmental process; that the length of time taken to proceed through the stages differs from person to person; and that this model applies to a particular group of individuals in a specific social and historical context and is not meant to serve as a universal model for all Muslim Americans during all time periods.

To avoid a reductionistic account of the self, I recognize the necessity of conceiving identity through multiple frames of reference, that is, the need to examine the interconnections of religion, race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, and sexuality, as well as the myriad other identities that compose the self (see Vertovec and Rogers 1998). Moreover, I agree with Halliday (1999) that while all those who are Muslim certainly consider Islam as part of their identity, Islam is never the sole source of identity. However, the focus here is why and how the individuals interviewed for this study came to identify themselves as Muslims first and foremost, while often minimizing or disregarding other identities.
Religion as Ascribed Identity

Of the 127 individuals interviewed for this study, 117 were born into Muslim families (the other 10 participants converted to Islam as young adults).\(^1\) Because the vast majority of the interviewees were raised in Muslim homes,\(^2\) most felt that religion was initially an ascribed characteristic of their individual selves and social worlds. Being Muslim was a given, a fact of life, not a chosen path. Study participants reported that in this stage of identity development, which for many encompassed their childhood up until they entered college, they engaged in very little critical reflection about their religion. As children they seldom thought about the meaning of “being Muslim” because, again, their religious identity was taken for granted as part of their everyday lives. Whereas most adults have the capacity to select and therefore assert a variety of social and individual identities, children are more likely to adhere to assigned identities (Adams and Marshall 1996). Indeed, most of the participants did not consider issues of identity when they were young; they were “just kids like everyone else” who simply “did what their parents told them to.”

Alisha, whose family immigrated to the United States from Syria when she was an infant, discussed her experiences growing up in a Muslim family:

> I have never really strayed from the religion. I have never really had a boyfriend or anything like that, or gone out with friends much. I have pretty much stayed within the family. It is just things like, I believed in

\(^{1}\) This section relies on interview data from second-generation immigrants who spent most or all of their formative years in the United States. The converts, first-generation immigrants, and those who were only in the country to obtain a college education obviously could not discuss what it was like to grow up as a Muslim in America.

\(^{2}\) Although most of the interviewees were born into Muslim homes, they reported a wide range of familial religious involvement during their upbringing. For example, some of the interviewees said that their family members were not religious at all, while others reported that their parents and siblings were highly devout. See Wuthnow (1999) for a comprehensive analysis of the impact on adults of religious influences (both familial and institutional) during childhood.
God and stuff. I would pray, but not well. I would do the things, but not do them well.

Although questions regarding religious identity were not necessarily important when they were younger, the participants sometimes had difficulties when their religion prevented them from participating in activities or engaging in certain behaviors and they could not understand why. Many of the students pointed out that just because they were born into a certain religion did not mean that they comprehended or appreciated the belief system and practices, particularly when they were children. Selina, a second-generation immigrant from Pakistan, talked about her experience being raised in a Muslim home:

Just because I was born in a Muslim family, I really didn’t have any knowledge of what it was. I was like, okay, I’m in America. I live here. Just like all these other people. Celebrate anything. My group of friends were doing Christmas, Thanksgiving, I would just go over. Things like that.

Similarly, Ali, whose family moved to the United States from Indonesia when he was seven years old, said:

Junior high school I think there were some Muslims, but I wasn’t really practicing, so I didn’t know anything. I had many friends. You didn’t think about religion that much. It was sports or cartoon characters or whatever. In high school, I think there were at least two more Muslims in my graduating class. I didn’t know them that well. I wasn’t really practicing as a Muslim. It wasn’t my main concern. It was my own personal thing.

Most of the participants stated that religion was just one of many aspects that defined who they were during their formative years. For example, because the majority of the students were the children of immigrants, they often identified with their parents’ national or ethnic backgrounds, at least when they were younger. After some consideration, several of the interviewees concluded that they were more likely
to identify themselves this way because of social norms and external pressure in the United States to define oneself by race, ethnicity, or nationality rather than religion. Almost all of the students who were visibly identifiable as Muslim or as an ethnic minority reported being asked about their country of origin quite frequently. Salma, a native of New York City, related her thoughts on that subject:

People would say to me, “Where are you from?” Then I’d say, “I was born and raised here. I was born here. I’m an American.” And they would say, “No, where are you really from?” Once I told my mother that and I said, “I just say I’m Indian.” She said, “Why do you say that? You’re not Indian.” I’m like, “You guys are Indian and so I’m Indian.” She’s like, “We’re Indian because we were born and raised in India. We’re Indian citizens. You were born and raised here. You’re American. You have Indian background. Your culture is Indian. Your religion is Islam. You’re an American citizen.” Nowadays, I just say, “I was born here. My parents are from India.” It clears up every question.

Although the students often reported not really thinking about their religious background early on, some of the practices required by their parents, such as dressing modestly or attending religion classes at a mosque, clearly reinforced their early Muslim religious identity. Individuals internalize many norms, values, and behaviors when they see them exhibited by their parents, peers, and others, long before they understand them intellectually. This form of socialization reflects Swidler’s (1986: 284) notion of culture as a repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies for action may be constructed. According to Swidler, even if people do not explicitly consider, accept, or reject the dictates of culture, it nevertheless instills in them the rituals and traditions that regulate ordinary patterns of behavior regarding such things as authority, cooperation, and everyday interaction.
The interviewees may not have consciously contemplated their religious identities during this initial stage, but they were well aware of the pressure to assimilate to “American” values and norms. This pressure varied somewhat, depending on the environment in which the participant was raised. The students who grew up in predominantly White, Judeo-Christian towns described more frequent perceived demands to “fit in” than did those who were raised in larger urban areas. Henna, a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani and Indian descent, was raised in a small town in upstate New York. Other than her brother, she was the only Muslim in her entire school, and she was keenly aware of the consequences of being a minority:

I don’t know what it is about American high school and junior high that makes people want to be in the in crowd and do things that are considered cool. That pressure was there. When I was in high school I identified much less with being Muslim than I did after high school. You don’t want to stick out too much. You don’t want people to think you’re a weirdo. Overall, American culture is such that there is room for people to express their own identities, especially in a place like New York City. I know for people that are living in the rural areas, in smaller towns, it’s much more difficult for them to keep up their identity because they’re probably the only Muslim family in that town.

The students who were raised in metropolitan areas with more diverse populations experienced some issues, but they reported less pressure to assimilate. Leila, who attended high school in New York City, said that she did not remember experiencing peer pressure, but she did not feel included either:

When I was in high school, it was difficult for me to know where I belonged. I just didn’t know, I don’t know if I felt pressured, but my high school years were very lonely. I didn’t fit in.

Some of the interviewees felt stigmatized for various reasons, mostly due to their minority religious, ethnic, and immigrant identities. This stigmatization, in
combination with peer pressure, pressure to assimilate, and a personal lack of religious understanding resulted in a small number of the participants attempting, at one time or another, to ignore or conceal their Muslim identity. In the United States, religious beliefs are typically considered private, and therefore may be easy to disregard or hide. It is not surprising that some of the interviewees said that as children or adolescents they cast off their religious identity in an attempt to “pass” as part of mainstream society. They were not proud of this, but they explained their behavior as resulting from their need to fit in or their lack of understanding of the true meaning of Islam. Maryam, a second-generation immigrant from Trinidad who was wearing a headscarf when I interviewed her, discussed her prior fears of being mocked for wearing religious attire:

In the beginning, when I was younger. I was like, I’m not going to be seen with the hijab. The kids are going to make fun of me. I was completely against all of this. I had to dress in the newest jeans that came out, have the nicest sneakers. In the beginning, when I was younger, it was really a big deal.

In some respects, the stories above probably reflect the early stages of identity development for most children and adolescents, regardless of religious affiliation. Very young children typically do not think about their identities and ascribed statuses (Adams and Marshall 1996; Elkind 1964). Moreover, as children age, there is significant pressure to fit in or “be cool” (Adler and Adler 1998), which results in various identity management strategies.

**Religion as Chosen Identity**

Prior research has documented that as children age, they begin to develop a more concrete, cognitive conception of their religious identity (Elkind 1964;
Likewise, the participants in this study reported that as they matured, they began to view religion not as an assumed, ascribed characteristic, but as a chosen identity. When the students told stories regarding how their identity developed and evolved, they frequently mentioned various personal and social factors that led to their choosing first and foremost to be identified as Muslim.

Becoming more introspective and aware of values, goals, and beliefs is a normal part of human development (Erikson 1963; Parks 1986). Some of the interviewees believed it was “only natural” that as they matured, they would begin to contemplate more important life questions and hence re-examine their religious backgrounds. Asma, who was originally from Guyana, explained:

Even though on the exterior I was practicing since I was young, it doesn’t mean necessarily that I was spiritually, I don’t know, thinking about God, into the faith. It doesn’t really happen until you’ve become an adult, until you learn about the world. You never really get to live on your own, to get a chance to think about what you want for yourself and what kind of person you are until you get to college. In high school, you always have people telling you what to think.

Asma touches on an important factor in this stage of religious identity development: entering college. Every society and culture includes points in life and development when rites, rituals, institutional expectations, or regulations cause individuals to reflect on their behavior and identity (Adams and Marshall 1996). Leaving home for college is one such transition for many young adults in the United States (Karp, Holmstrom, and Gray 1998). During college, young men and women become increasingly independent and responsible and receive cultural permission to participate in adult behaviors. Although some of the interviewees noted that high school was the time when they started becoming more religious, the majority agreed
that entering college marked the beginning of their most critical period of reflection and identity salience change. For the subjects in this study, the campus setting provided space and time to explore their identities and make choices about who they wanted to be and how they wanted to live their lives. Ultimately, it enabled them to further construct a Muslim religious identity. Zoya, who was raised in the New York City region, discussed the religious transition she experienced after entering college:

My Islamic aspect has been a lot more important to me since college. When you go into college, everything’s on you. It’s not like your parents are telling you what to do and what not to do. It’s up to you to make your decisions. That makes it a lot harder. Once you put your foot down on certain things in the beginning, it gets a lot easier. You start to know yourself better and realize what you really care about and what you don’t.

When I last interviewed Zoya in the spring of 2002, she had decided to quit her business school honors program so that she could focus on serving the on-campus Islamic Center where she had recently been elected president. Her parents were not pleased with this decision, as they had consistently stressed the importance of receiving a good education and getting a high-paying job in business. However, Zoya felt that it was much more important that she devote her time to her religious community, even though it was difficult for her to defy the wishes of her parents.

The peers that students found in college were another factor that contributed to their increased religiosity. During elementary school, junior high, and sometimes even high school, the participants were often one of only a handful of Muslim students and thus had very few Muslim friends while growing up. However, all of the interviewees spoke about connecting with other Muslims in college, most frequently through the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on their campuses. In college, it
became easier for these students to identify as Muslim simply because they had discovered a larger Muslim peer group to associate with and new friends with whom they could relate. Much of the pressure to conform to non-Muslim society seemed to subside as they found others with similar interests who adhered to the same religious tenets and social norms. Ali discussed the impact of finding Muslim friends at his university:

In high school I was not very religious. It was in college that I developed a renewed interest in Islam. Being with other Muslims was a factor. People are open as Muslims. In high school they weren’t. In college you have more freedom. You’re exposed to different ideas and cultures. You’re encouraged to experiment. I experimented with Islam. The importance of Islam, being a Muslim, is my main identity and prioritizing that in my life came after I came to college, when I was more integrated in the community here. I knew more Muslims and became more active, learned more about Islam and myself.

Peers and close friends played a significant role in constructing, reinforcing, and affirming the strong emerging religious identity of almost all participants. The interviewees often told me that they began to learn about Islam with their friends since they were going through similar processes of religious exploration.

In addition to providing introductions and links to new Muslim friends, the MSAs also offered an organizational and social setting in which the interviewees could collectively examine specific aspects of the religion of Islam and the meaning of being Muslim. Indeed, scholars have noted that religious organizations generally provide a safe environment for discussing and practicing beliefs and, ultimately, constructing religious identities (Ammerman 2003; Schmidt 1998; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). According to Somers (1994: 619), religious organizations are one supplier of “public narratives,” which are collective accounts that are constructed and
shared and exist beyond the consciousness of any single individual. Just as research on religious converts has shown that their stories often tend to be formed in accordance with group-specific guidelines (Snow and Machalek 1984; Stromberg 1993) and “appropriate” verbal accounts of religious development (Beckford 1978: 251), the interviewees in this study undoubtedly learned common narratives regarding their beliefs and identities in their MSAs. Their involvement with the MSAs clearly affected the course of their religious development and commitment because the associations provided just such a social context and narrative space in which to develop a religious identity.  

Schmidt (1998: 119) suggests that engagement in religious activities on college and university campuses may for some young Muslims cause a “religious revival” induced by an encounter with new religious responsibilities and distinct formulations of a “young” Muslim American identity.

In this study, some of the interviewees indicated that they turned to their on-campus religious organizations and friends because they felt they were not receiving enough religious education at home. Their parents were the ones who taught them the fundamentals of Islam, but the interviewees sometimes complained that their parents were “too cultural” because they mixed cultural norms with religious practices and values. As they matured, it became increasingly important for these students to develop their own religious identity. Ariana, a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani descent, discussed this:

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3 In her review of research on Muslims in America, Leonard (2003: 135) calls for a broader understanding of Muslim student groups and what is being taught about Islam and Muslims in America’s higher educational institutions in order to understand not only the present but also the future of the next generation of American Muslims. Clearly, such research should further examine the role of MSAs in strengthening the religious identities and social networks of Muslim students.
At first, even though my parents lived in Saudi Arabia, they weren’t very religious. They took it for granted. We have pictures of my mom with tight dresses in Saudi Arabia. I was like, “Mom, you wore that in public?!” [laughter] She was like, “There was no religious belief where I was.” She wore shorts. She was so fashionable. She was like, “There was no Islam back then.” Then when they came here, they realized that we have to hold on to the religion, but they wanted us to talk English. They wanted us to assimilate, kind of. They think they should have taught us more from the beginning. We actually taught ourselves. We started looking into Islam. For them, Islam and the culture are so infused together, some things, my mom had this thing where if you eat fish, then you can’t drink milk. All this weird stuff. She’s like, “It’s true. The prophets say so.” [laughter]

Many of the interviewees had parents who were born and raised in Muslim-majority countries and then immigrated to the United States during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Their children, these second-generation immigrants, came to recognize that they were part of a small, highly visible religious minority in the United States. This awareness was another factor that led to the assertion of their Muslim identity. As they matured, it became increasingly important not only to maintain their religious identity, but also to develop that aspect of themselves. Henna, a second-year law student who was raised in the United States, stated the following:

Definitely in my generation, I’ve noticed that there’s that return to Islam among Muslim Americans. Maybe it’s because where our parents grew up, they didn’t have to think twice about their identity. They were Muslims. They took it for granted. They never had to question it or explore it. It was a given. Whereas here, for us, it’s something we have to work at because there’s no one in our high school or elementary school who teaches us about Islam. We have to go and find out about it on our own. Maybe that’s the motivation that’s making our generation more religious.

Most of the participants also said that not only was it important to maintain their Muslim identity for themselves, it was also of utmost importance to teach the religion
to their children in the future. Passing on their parents’ native language was also vital for those who were still bilingual.

For the interviewees who came to the United States as adolescents or teenagers, their own migration was a significant event that led to stronger religious identification. As Smith (1978) notes, immigrants often turn to religion to resolve adjustment issues, re-establish familiar cultural activities, and define a sense of personal and social identity in a new geographic and social context. Consequently, religion can assume greater importance for immigrants’ definition of self and group affiliations than was the case in their homelands, where religion may have been taken for granted or been of lesser importance. This was certainly the case for Leila, who moved to New York City with her family when she was a teenager. When I asked her about the people or experiences that had the most influence on her faith, she cited coming to America as an important event affecting her personal religious development and identity as a Muslim:

Migration to America has had an influence on me. When I was in Pakistan, the culture over there is, if they see you with a headscarf, they’re like, “Why are you wearing it?” It’s out of style. It’s backwards. It’s very shameful and looked down upon. Sometimes I think if I hadn’t migrated to America I wouldn’t have been the person I am now. It really, really, really helped me grow. It was a whole self-discovery of Islam that I had to do when I came here. When I was in Pakistan I didn’t care. All I knew was that I was Muslim. I didn’t know about other cultures, other religions. I read about them, but I never met anyone, because the population there is like 99 percent Muslims. Over here, especially in New York, there was a whole new group of people. Migration has really been a blessing. When I came here and started life over with my parents, the first years were so hard, I hated it. But now when I look upon it, it really made me strong. If I hadn’t come here, I wouldn’t have prayed five times a day or dressed the way I want to. It took me out of my ethnic culture into Islamic culture. I think America has made me become a better Muslim. I used to hear people say that when they came to America they became really
loose, doing bad stuff, being drunk, going all wasted. When I came here, I never felt like that at all. Here I have more freedom.

The students sometimes chose to assert their religious identity in order to reject ethnic, national, or cultural identities that they viewed as un-Islamic. Most interpreted Islamic tenets to say that people should not segregate themselves based on national borders or racial categories. As the interviewees learned more about Islam and drew closer to the religion, they became more likely to disregard or downplay other aspects of their identity. Two young women discussed this issue during a focus group:

Famina: The whole issue of identity. In Islam, you don’t support nationalism in the first place. That’s what brings community. Right now you see so many different colors here among the [Muslim] sisters. If your brother or sister is not Muslim, but a stranger is, you’re closer to that stranger than your own brother or sister.

Mina: Right. What you believe is how you behave. Your belief affects your behavior. It’s your way of life. Being Muslim is a way of life. That’s what it is. Islam doesn’t only not support nationalism, it’s against nationalism.

For Saba, who was born in the United States, but spent her junior high and high school years living and studying in Pakistan, the relationship between ethnicity, nationalism, and religion was challenged as she began to assert her Muslim identity during college. Her experience demonstrates how identities can shift through time and across various social contexts:

If you had asked me before, my identity would be Pakistani. I identified myself more with my ethnic background than with my religious background. With time, I think that in America you can’t be attached

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4 This particular interpretation of Islam that eschews nationalism led to the formation of the MSA in the United States in 1963. The founders of the MSA were alienated by the “Americanization” of Arab mosques, so they established the MSA as an alternative umbrella organization with a mandate to promulgate “true Islam” and to discourage allegiance to something other than the religion (Haddad 1994: 75).
with your ethnic background, especially since our ethnic background, being a Pakistani, they don’t really associate that much with their religion. They put their religion on hold, you could say, until old age comes their way, which I as a person really cannot do. With time I disassociated myself with my ethnic background and I have become more and more Muslim.

As religion became an increasingly salient source of personal and social identity for the students, they subsequently altered their beliefs, practices, behaviors, appearances, and relationships. Their faith in Islam and identity as Muslims were the most important influences shaping these choices and changes. When I asked one of the interviewees what it meant to her to say that she was Muslim, she responded, “It is a comforting blueprint of being who I want to be.” Another said, “It’s basically how I would identify myself. It’s the first trait. I consider myself Muslim foremost, above any other identifying factor. For me it’s a way of life.”

**Religion as Declared Identity**

For the participants in this study, the third stage of religious identity development occurred in response to a crisis – the events and aftermath of September 11. Within hours of the attacks, an unprecedented rash of xenophobic incidents began (Eck 2001). In the months following September 11, thousands of Muslims and Arabs endured harassment, threats, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault. Despite this reaction, most of the Muslim students continued to publicly affirm their religious identities. Indeed, many participants reported that their religious identity became even stronger during this time.

The magnitude of the events of September 11 led many students to pray more often and increased their need for a spiritual anchor, just as the events did for
numerous other Americans of various faiths. Although religious before September 11, many of those interviewed reported becoming even more reliant on God as they became more aware of their own mortality. Kaori, a Muslim convert originally from Japan, remarked:

I think prayers are much more serious than before. We are supposed to pray seriously every time. Usually we pray five times, but we want to do more and more. When you have free time, maybe you do one more. It’s like more sincere.

Kaori’s friend Sadiya agreed. “We’re definitely more focused now.”

The increasingly negative portrayal of Islam following the attacks (Haddad 2004) and participants’ perceptions of how non-Muslims now viewed them and their religion caused the students to become even more aware of their religious orientation and ultimately to embrace Islam more strongly. Hafeez, who was a second-generation Pakistani Muslim, commented:

Religiously, every Muslim I’ve met became at least in some form more conscious of their religiosity after September 11. Whether that’s meaningful for the sake of religion’s interests, I don’t know, since becoming more conscious of one’s religion doesn’t always correlate in the sense of being more practicing or devout.

When I asked Noreen, who was born and raised in the United States and whose parents were from India, how September 11 had affected her daily life, she responded:

Just the need to assert my religious identity. For me, religion was always at the front part of my life. But now that Islam is on the forefront of everything, it seems there’s the need to use that as my defining characteristic, a greater need to do that, now more than ever.

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5 See Meisenhelder and Marcum (2004) and Schuster et al. (2001) for information regarding increased religious practice and rising church attendance rates following September 11.
Jeena, a native of Afghanistan who came to the United States from Pakistan as a refugee when she was a teenager, discussed how, after September 11, she felt more secure in her Muslim identity and more likely to defend that aspect of herself:

In that spectrum, I think my religious identity became stronger. I became more like, “Don’t say anything against Islam.” Giving an analogy, especially being female, in college or high school, if I saw someone being picked on, I would become her friend. Seeing Islam go through that, being so different from what it was portrayed to be by the media or just by assumption, I became more strong in needing to speak out against that and change that. This is not what it is. This is Islam. This is reality.

Following September 11, the students were frequently questioned about their faith and religious beliefs. To help them respond to these inquiries from both friends and strangers, they studied the Qur’an and other religious documents. As they searched for answers, they felt they were becoming “better Muslims” and drawing even closer to the faith. Thus, the tragedy of September 11 had the inadvertent effect of causing many Muslims to learn more about Islam, which over time further strengthened their religious identities. Hassan, who was born in the United States and lived in several different Arab nations while growing up, described how he had come closer to Islam:

For me, since September 11, I do feel more obligated to know my religion more, for the reasons that I gave before: to communicate who Muslims are better, to understand for myself what are the problems within the community, to be able to evaluate the Muslim identity and be able to say, “These are flaws and these are strengths, and we should fix the flaws and build the strengths further.” I have become more religious. And it’s a daily struggle. I wanted to become more religious. I feel comfortable with who I am when I’m more religious.

Sanae, who had recently moved to the United States from India, echoed a similar sentiment:
After 9/11, Muslims were so criticized for it, we all turned in. We were like, “What’s happening? Let’s read up.” After 9/11 when we were subjected to the questions, like, “Tell us, what the hell is jihad?” Then we started reading more. We turned in and came together and started attending more meetings. We read up more and more and became stronger Muslims.

Along with learning more about the religion, the interviewees noted the increasing importance of positively representing Muslims and Islam to others. Because the students believed that their religion was now viewed negatively by many of their fellow citizens, they felt a need to both explain and demonstrate their faith more strongly than before. Many of the participants remarked that if they could just show people what a “good Muslim” and the “true Islam” were, some of the stereotyping and antipathy would end. Kamila, who was of Syrian descent and was raised in Colorado, said:

I have also just become more religious, especially now after everything. I want to teach others about my religion, more than before September 11, because now people are hearing a lot of lies and stereotypes and stuff like that. So I take it more upon myself that it is my duty especially since I grew up in America and I have the language, and I have some of the knowledge of Islam too. because some people grew up here but they don’t really know that much about Islam, so it is harder for them to speak about it. So since I have some knowledge too, I think it is my responsibility to be talking about it and letting people know how my religion is, and I am more careful about the way I conduct myself to not do anything in front of others because they might label it with my religion, and I don’t really want that to happen. So it is kind of harder for me to conduct myself, I have to always be on my best behavior and not really messing around.

Regarding interactions and confrontations with others, some of the participants described how they attempted to react if they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Many of the young women and men said that even if

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Members of minority groups and stigmatized individuals often engage in impression management strategies intended to counter negative evaluations of their in-group (see Goffman 1963; Lyman and Douglass 1973).
someone made them angry or upset, because of a harmful comment, a dirty look, or any other such negative act, they tried not to respond because they did not want to reinforce negative stereotypes about Muslims. Sara, who came with her family to the United States from Pakistan, discussed how she managed an incident with a police officer:

This is a time when the patience of Muslims is being tested. We’re not supposed to react how we want to. I got stared down by a cop. I’ve never been stared down. I don’t mean to say racism or anything, maybe he’s from a place where he didn’t grow up with any minority people or with an ethnic background. I took that into account. He looked at me a couple of times. People had to look back to see who he’s looking at. I was very scared, embarrassed, ashamed. I thought, “Why are these people looking at me?” I looked at him and said, “Hi, everything’s okay?” He got caught by the moment that I asked him, he thought I wouldn’t ask him. He said, “Hi, how are you doing?” I said, “Fine.” If I would have had time, I would have shown him my ID and said, “Please don’t look at us like this. I don’t want to be in a situation where I’m going to be stared down and an entire block is looking at me. Look at my ID. I’m an American, just like you.”

Tamara, who came to the United States from Afghanistan, observed that some Muslims, in addition to trying to represent Islam positively and defend their religion, were altering their attitudes and behaviors to demonstrate that they were also very proud of their faith:

Everybody is trying to change for the better, and everybody is trying to let people know more about their religion, and they are more outgoing when it comes to their religion, and they want people to know that, “I am Muslim, and I am proud of it.”

A number of the interviewees reported that they had become more likely to approach others and offer information about their religion. Some of the students said that if they saw someone staring at them or giving them “looks” they would walk directly up to that person, introduce themselves, and ask if he or she had any
questions. This gave them the opportunity to explain what it means to practice Islam, including the importance of proper dress and other aspects of the religion. Conversely, others were not willing to confront people, even if they felt harassed, because they feared for their safety.

Perhaps the most difficult consequence of September 11 for the Muslim students was their being cast as an enemy “Other” following the attacks. Most of the interviewees were the victims of varying levels of mistreatment following September 11, ranging from stares to verbal and physical confrontations. As discussed in Chapter Four, these incidents confirmed these students’ feelings of being excluded from the American community and evoked various emotions, including anger, sadness, and fear. Yasmin, who was a native of Great Britain, discussed what happened to her during a peace rally:

This guy was yelling at me, telling me to go to Iraq and stuff. Later I was laughing about it. I was like, “Hey, I’ve never been to Iraq. I’d love to go there.” When he said it to me, I didn’t get angry or want to fight him. I just got really sad that he feels that way. Sad for his ignorance.

As discussed previously, one response to real or perceived group threats is increased group solidarity. Most of the interviewees agreed that, although they were terrible, the events of September 11 brought Muslims closer together and reinforced their faith in Islam. Janan, the daughter of a West African immigrant and an African American Muslim convert, described how September 11 had impacted her work, the strength of her faith, and Muslims as a group:

I would say 9/11 had a major impact personally. I’m writing about the Islamic cause. I think I’m getting more passionate about it. I’ve gotten more into going out and standing up for the rights of Muslims and really wanting to express that, whereas I kind of stopped and froze for
a while and then got back to it. I think I became more religious. I’m more serious about religion. The way that a lot of Muslims came together to help each other because of the fact that they were getting harassed. It made me think about it, the fact that people were harassed just for being a Muslim, it made me feel like… This is who I am. I have to take that more seriously. I can’t play around. I can’t pretend. I have to look to God because that’s who saved me. When all of this was happening, I kept going to God. I think a lot of people became more religious. That’s how I am right now… More religious, more reflective.

Much of the discourse surrounding September 11 involved dualities such as “good and evil” and “us and them.” The students felt that they had been targeted for suspicion and blame immediately following September 11, and they consequently believed that there was some expectation for them to choose between their American and Muslim identities. Natasha, a second-generation immigrant of Egyptian descent, talked about this duality:

I think September 11 made me feel forced to choose between identities. It was big. You’ve got to choose one or the other, and they’re not going to accept you at all. At first people weren’t going to accept us. I was like, if they’re not going to accept me as an American, meaning that I’m going to have to choose one or the other, then I’m going to have to choose Islam. If they’re not going to accept me as an American, if they’re going to tell me I don’t deserve to be here, when I am an American, if they’re going to try to make me feel that way, then, hey, I’m going to be a Muslim. No one’s going to ever tell me, “You can’t be a Muslim. You’re not a Muslim. Go back to some other planet where there isn’t Islam.” I felt like I had to choose then. I don’t think I felt like I had to choose before then. But after that it was like, well, fine. If I have to choose, I choose to be Muslim.

Indeed, another factor that resulted in a stronger declaration of Muslim identity was the demands to change that followed September 11. Some of the participants reported that they felt significant pressure to modify at least the visible aspects of their religious identity. As detailed in Chapter Four, the parents of the interviewees were often the source of these demands, invariably because they were
worried about the safety of their children. I recorded the following exchange among several Muslim women, after I asked them if they had considered altering their manner of dress following the events of September 11. All of the women I interviewed during this session wore headscarves.

Sarah: My family was like, “I knew you shouldn’t have covered.” My mom used to cover and now she doesn’t. She and my father are like, “Why are you punishing yourself? You’re not going out like that. You’re going to wear a hat.”

Mina: My father literally stood in front of me…

Raina: My family doesn’t cover. [everyone talks at once]

Mina: My dad said to stay home for a couple of days until everything calms down. He said, “You’re going to get really bad reactions if you go out that way.” But after the first week he let go. He trusted that we know what we’re going to do. No way am I going to take it off. [everyone talks at once]

Daria: My dad was yelling at me, “You take that off your head.” He actually said to me, “It’s for safety purposes.” In our religion, you are allowed to take off the headscarf if you are in danger. He was so angry at me because I wasn’t obeying him. I said, “No, I’m not taking it off.” Right now, thank God, I don’t want to jinx myself, ever since this has happened, nobody has really come up to me or said anything or physically tried to do anything to me. It’s all about how you feel inside. If you know what kind of person you are, and if you carry yourself… When people stare at me on the train, I stare right back at them. I’m not going to put my head down.

Tanisha: If you change, it’s like you’re proving them right. If somebody did try to say something to me, I would try to speak with them, educate them.

Most of the young women and men ignored their parents and other family members who asked them to stop wearing Islamic attire. They understood that their parents and relatives were simply concerned for their physical and mental well being, although some of the interviewees were hurt that their mothers and fathers would
make requests that they felt violated their religious beliefs. Anna, a native of India, was quite distressed as she discussed what happened with her family:

My mom wants me to take my headscarf off because she’s terrified that somebody is going to hurt me. This is my religion. I can override whatever my parents want. I have to do what the religion says. I told them, “Leave me alone. I want to wear it. You can’t tell me to take it off.” But it’s very hurtful, growing up in an Islamic home and then having your parents say this to you because they’re scared. It makes me feel very sad. I lock my door and think about how they’re so religious and they pray all the time. What is going through their minds? How do they feel when I leave the house in the morning? They know that they can’t stop me. If I want to do something, I’m just going to do it. It’s hard that this happened and the situation that it puts us all in as Muslim women.

A small number of the interviewees reported changing their appearance following September 11, mostly against their will, as they tried to appease their parents. A few of the men shaved their beards, and five of the women stopped wearing headscarves for a short time. Still, most participants were unwilling to alter their appearance, despite possible danger. If anything, the increased salience of their religious identity and their heightened sense of faith only strengthened their resolve. The students contended that it was more important during this time than ever before to demonstrate who they were and what they believed in. Hala, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, was particularly resolute about the importance of maintaining her religious identity as well as supporting her friends:

When we came back [to classes], I tried to call most of the sisters and contact them. I also urged them to go back to school, don’t be afraid. Some of the girls were afraid to keep on their hijab. I was like, “No, we have to keep our identity.” They said, “How do we act?” I say, “This has nothing to do with us.” They’re like, “What about the cold looks?” I’m like, “Don’t look at them. Just walk away.” I put up some signs to remind them to fear God and have strength, remember nothing can happen to us. I said, “Recite some verses from the Qur’an to get some inner strength.”
CONCLUSION

This research documents three stages of religious identity development. During the first stage – religion as ascribed identity – religion was not a salient identity for the participants. It was either taken for granted as an aspect of their individual and social selves or considered something to be denied. In the second stage – religion as chosen identity – participants consciously decided to embrace their Muslim identity, often after much self-reflection, with the support of their peers, and sometimes at the exclusion of other core identities such as ethnicity and nationality. The third stage – religion as declared identity – occurred following a crisis event, September 11, 2001. Most of the interviewees decided it was vitally important to both strengthen and assert their identities at this time in order to retain a positive self-perception and to correct public misconceptions.

As stated earlier, the model of religious identity development presented in this chapter is not a universal model. It does not represent the identity formation process of all Muslim Americans, nor is religion as declared identity likely to be the final phase of what will continue to be a complex process of identity negotiation and evolution for these young Muslims. Although many other Muslims have not emphasized their religious identity to the same extent as these interviewees, this study nonetheless reveals how religious identities can be constructed, maintained, and asserted, particularly by second-generation immigrants attempting to reconcile multiple, sometimes conflicting, forms of identity.
CHAPTER VI
THE NEGOTIATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

In this chapter I examine the complex relationship between ethnicity and religion among second-generation immigrants. In particular, I explore the challenges associated with dual ethnic and religious minority status and the consequent patterns of identity negotiation among the Muslim American students I interviewed.¹ I begin by briefly discussing evolving trends of ethnic identification in the United States. Then I describe how the participants in this study developed, disregarded, negotiated, and ultimately affirmed their ethnic identities both prior to and following the events of September 11.

The contemporary resurgence of ethnic identification in the United States—contrary to earlier assumptions and theories that predicted the inevitable assimilation of ethnic groups into a national “melting pot”—has prompted social scientists to reconsider and revise models of adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation (Gibson 1988; Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001; Song 2003). Much recent social psychological research has focused on the formation (Min and Kim 2000; Nagel 1994; Portes and MacLeod 1996; Rumbaut 1994), preservation (Gibson 1988; Jacobs 2002; Zhou 1997), revival (Alba 1990; Nagel 1995), and strategic promotion (Akiner 1997; Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins 2002; Raj 2000) of diverse ethnic identities. These studies, which employ a variety of methodological

¹This chapter relies on interview data from those participants who would be classified as ethnic and/or racial minorities in the United States. Although I did interview six individuals, all converts to Islam, who self-identified as “White,” I do not address their experiences here. Not only was that sample very small, my purpose in this chapter is to examine the issues that emerged because of dual ethnic and religious minority status. A more thorough consideration of the post-September 11 experiences of White Muslims is certainly warranted but was not the focus of this research and is beyond the scope of this discussion.
approaches and theoretical perspectives, illustrate the socially constructed nature, emergent characteristics, and varied definitions of ethnicity across historical, political, and social contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Patterson 1975; Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976).

To underscore the open-ended and ongoing process by which individuals construct a sense of self, many social scientists speak of identities as “negotiated” (Leonard 1992; Nagel 1994; Rayaprol 1997; Snow and Anderson 1987). Identity negotiation, which entails self-presentation and impression management, is both determined by and fundamental to the development of mutually held definitions of the elements and processes of society (Goffman 1959, 1963; Lyman and Douglass 1973; McCall and Simmons 1978). According to the interactionist perspective of ethnic identification, the origin, content, and form of ethnicity are established by and reflect the creative choices of individuals and groups as they function in society and define themselves and others in ethnic ways (Song 2003). Leonard (1992) argues that ethnicity is both persistent and flexible because ethnic identities are continually constructed and reconstructed by individuals and society. At the same time, interactionists acknowledge broader social constraints on individual ethnic options (Waters 1990). Key factors leading to ethnic identity include internal ethnic self-identification, a sense of belonging and acceptance by one’s ethnic group, attitudes toward one’s ethnic group, involvement in the social life and cultural practices of one’s ethnic group, and external ascription by non-members (Alba 1990; Barth 1969; Phinney 1990). Yinger (1994: 3) suggests that an ethnic group is defined based on three primary criteria: 1) the group is perceived by others in the society to be different
in some combination of the following traits: language, religion, race, and ancestral homeland with its related culture; 2) the members also perceive themselves as different; and 3) they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin and culture.

Similar to the resurgence in ethnic identification among some groups in the United States, there also appears to be a rise in national and transnational religious identification (Eck 2001; Rayaprol 1997). Perhaps this is not surprising, given that religion and ethnicity are often closely connected (see Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Min and Kim 2002; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988). The post-1965 generation of immigrants brought new cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions from around the globe to the United States. In part because of greater financial resources, increased travel capabilities, and technological advancements such as the Internet, these immigrants are maintaining country-of-origin identities while also establishing new and distinctive hyphenated American identities (Feher 1998; Waters 1994). In a sense, recent immigrants “re-create” traditional identities, which are simultaneously “reinvented” in the American social milieu (Kurien 1998: 41-42).

As the children of those post-1965 immigrants come of age, sociologists are examining the ways that these youth understand and assert their ethnic, immigrant, and American identities in various contexts, particularly in the home with family members and at school with peers and teachers (Bankston and Zhou 1995, 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001; Rumbaut 1994; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Waters 1994; Zhou 1997). In their longitudinal study of 1.5 and second-generation immigrant adolescents in California and Florida, Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 154-161) asked an
open-ended survey question to ascertain the respondent’s ethnic self-identity. From the answers, four mutually exclusive types of ethnic self-identification emerged: 1) a foreign national-origin identity (e.g., Jamaican, Nicaraguan, Cambodian); 2) a hyphenated American identity, explicitly recognizing a single foreign national origin (e.g., Cuban-American, Filipino-American, Vietnamese-American); 3) a plain American national identity, without a hyphen; and 4) a pan-ethnic minority-group identity (e.g., Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, Black, Asian). Scholars agree that various psychological traits and social forces may influence the ethnic identity formation and subsequent self-identification of the children of immigrants, including such variables as parental socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, and family composition; parental country of origin and length of U.S. citizenship; linguistic adaptation; self-esteem; context of reception, regional location, ethnic community ties, and ethnic community resources; and individual and community perceptions and experiences of discrimination (Bankston and Zhou 1995, 1996; Phinney 1990; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Song 2003).

**PATTERNS OF ETHNIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

The majority of the participants in this study, 65 students, were of South or Southeast Asian descent. Forty-one students were Arab or Arab American, ten were Anglo, six were Latino/a, and five were African American. However, these standard (and externally constructed and imposed) racial and ethnic categories do not capture

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2 The wording to the question was: “How do you identify, that is, what do you call yourself?” The question was followed by a wide array of illustrative national and ethnic designators appropriate to each research site (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 359).

3 For immigrants, the most relevant contexts of reception include the policies of the receiving government, the conditions of the host labor market, local social relationships, and the characteristics of their own ethnic communities (Portes and Rumbaut 1996: 84).
the extraordinary diversity of this sample population. The interviewees identified with over 30 different countries of origin, more than 75 percent were bilingual, and almost all of the students reported engaging in distinct ethnic and cultural traditions in their homes. Similar to the youths that Portes and Rumbaut (2001) interviewed, some of the Muslim American students in this study, when asked about their ethnicity, self-identified exclusively with their country of origin. This was especially true for those who were foreign students or first-generation immigrants, although a small number of the 1.5 and second-generation interviewees also claimed the foreign nationalities of their parents. Many of the participants chose a hyphenated American identity, which one might expect, since most of the interviewees were raised in America and were U.S. citizens. Only a few of the students identified as simply American. However, these static classifications do not capture the dynamic nature of ethnic identity, which may fluctuate both through time and across different situational and social contexts (Phinney 1990; Stepick et al. 2001; Zhou 1997).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss various personal and social factors that influenced patterns of ethnic self-identification among the Muslim American students I interviewed. The choices these young men and women made regarding their ethnic identities reveal much about their ethnic socialization, their individual social relationships, their perceived relationship to U.S. society, and the process of ethnic identity formation generally. Below, I explore how the participants developed a sense of their ethnic selves and came to question, understand, and in some instances affirm, their cultural backgrounds. I also examine the importance of ethnic group
membership for these students and describe the shifting salience of the participants’
diverse ethnic identities.

**Ethnic Identity Awareness**

Ethnic identity development may be thought of as a process that takes place
over time as people explore and make decisions about the role of ethnicity in their
lives. Phinney (1989) contends that all individuals begin with an unexamined ethnic
identity. Young people, and even some adults, may be unaware of or uninterested in
their ethnicity and consequently may give that aspect of their self little consideration
(Stepick et al. 2001). Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 151) suggest that for majority-group
youths in a socially supportive context, ethnic self-identity tends to be taken for
granted and is not salient, but a dissimilar context heightens the salience of ethnicity
and of ethnic group boundaries. Individuals whose ethnicity, race, or other social
markers place them in a minority status relative to the larger group, community, or
society are more likely to be conscious of those characteristics.

Almost all of the 1.5 and second-generation immigrants I interviewed for this
study reported that they began to become aware of their ethnicity when they were
young children. Even though they did not yet understand the social implications or
personal importance of their ethnic identities, they engaged in activities that helped
create and reinforce a distinct sense of self with unique ethnic traditions, beliefs, and
behaviors. In addition to practicing their religion and celebrating Islamic holidays, the
interviewees often recalled speaking a language other than English, eating ethnic
food, listening to ethnic music, and wearing traditional clothing as they grew up – all
significant indicators of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I asked Mina, whose
parents immigrated to the United States from Pakistan, to describe how she began to learn about her ethnicity:

   My parents never spoke English with us. They wanted us to learn Urdu, so they didn’t speak English ever. I’d communicate in English with my siblings. But with my mom and dad, it’s strict Urdu. Now, it’s been twelve years since we’ve been here, so I’ll talk to my dad in English sometimes. It sounds weird, but thankfully now I’m just as fluent in Urdu as I am in English.

Like Mina, many other interviewees said that their parents insisted that they engage in certain cultural practices while they were growing up. This occurred largely because the parents feared that their children would not learn or would lose their native language, ethnic traditions, and religious beliefs. The Muslim students also noted that their mothers and fathers frequently expressed concern that they would assimilate “too much” into American culture; the parents worried that their children would succumb to undesirable behaviors sometimes associated with life in America such as doing drugs, drinking, or dressing and acting in sexually provocative ways.

First-generation immigrant parents typically desire some Americanization for their children. However, they also struggle to ensure that their children maintain cultural values, beliefs, and traditions (Stepick et al. 2001). Rajah, who was raised in upstate New York, said that her parents did many things to make certain that she and her brothers would learn about their Pakistani background:

   Once all of us, my siblings and I, would get home from school, we would have to change into our cultural clothing. Our parents didn’t want us in pants and sweatshirts and whatever. Over the summer, my father had us practice Urdu so we wouldn’t forget the language. Now my mom packs Pakistani food and sends it with me to college. It’s in my freezer for ages. [laughter] It’s all a big part of my life.
Sociologists recognize that the family is one of the strongest institutions affecting individual socialization. Within the family, children acquire knowledge of their self and culture not only through more or less formal training, but also through countless subtle cues that provide them with an understanding of who they are and how they should conduct themselves in society (Andersen and Taylor 2004). The participants in this study acknowledged the importance of learning about their ethnic backgrounds through everyday interactions with their parents, siblings, and other relatives. However, when reflecting on the development of their ethnic identities, some of the interviewees commented that traveling to their parents’ homeland and becoming immersed in the culture represented the most profound experience that shaped their awareness and appreciation of their ethnicity. A number of the Muslim students reported that they and their families left the United States for extended periods (especially during the summer months) to live in their parents’ native countries. In many cases, their mothers and fathers made considerable sacrifices so that their children would have this opportunity to learn about their backgrounds and develop a sense of their ethnic roots. Asma, who grew up in Colorado, said that her parents could not initially afford to travel to Pakistan after immigrating to the United States, so they borrowed money to cover the expenses. Asma was thankful that she was able to live overseas and gain a better understanding of Pakistani culture:

We used to go to Pakistan every summer when we were little. That was really great, because we got to keep the cultural ties. So many people don’t have the opportunity to go back. You forget the language. You don’t even know what the country looks like. Our parents even took out loans for us to go. When they first came here [to the United States] obviously they didn’t have the money. They felt it was so important that they would take out loans for us to fly to Pakistan. We’ve been overseas since we were little kids.
Mosi, whose parents were Egyptian, came to the United States when she was five years old. Her family lived in New Jersey until she was nine and then moved to a suburban community in Massachusetts. I asked her if there were other Arab families in that area. She responded:

There was actually one other Arab family. They were Lebanese. We found out they were Lebanese just by chance because my brother was friends with one of the boys. There was certainly no Arab community. We were one of three minority families in the entire town. I was just another kid. I thought I was White.

Given this lack of an ethnic community in her town, Mosi also stressed the importance of traveling to her homeland to develop an awareness of her ethnicity, especially since, as she said, her parents “were not very cultural.” It was not until she was a teenager that she returned to Egypt and began to discover her ethnic origins. Until then, as she notes above, she considered herself “White.” As Mosi and her brother matured, their mother and father both became increasingly concerned that their children were losing the ability to speak Arabic and understand Egyptian customs. After she finished junior high school in Massachusetts, Mosi’s parents arranged for her and her brother to return to Egypt where they lived with relatives and completed their high school education. After graduation, Mosi returned to the United States and attended college in New York. She discussed the impact of living in Egypt:

My parents were worried that we had grown up not knowing where we were from, not knowing our family there [in Egypt]. We didn’t really know the language until we went back. I didn’t really learn to read or write Arabic until then. I know a lot of Arabs go to Sunday school and that’s where they learn Arabic, how a lot of Muslims learn about Islam. We didn’t really get much of that. It was my parents’ decision so that we’d learn more about our religion, our background and culture, know our roots, meet our family. It did have a big influence on shaping my self.
Some of the students I interviewed did not move to the United States until they were teenagers. For these participants, it was not returning to their parents’ country that increased their ethnic awareness, but rather the process of entering American society. Their migration was a significant experience that led to a stronger consciousness of their own ethnic identity, as well as a discovery of pre-existing racial and ethnic labels and classifications. In the United States, group differences are primarily defined according to racial and ethnic categories (Omi and Winant 1994). However, many immigrants come to the United States with different norms and categories, and they may define differences among individuals and groups according to others social markers such as religion. Maya, who was raised in Egypt and immigrated with her family to New York City when she was 15 years old, discussed how shocked she was when she learned how race is understood and described in the United States:

It struck me so hard, the different races, the racism. In Egypt, there are blondes, dark skins, tan skins. I have never, ever in my whole life called a dark skin in Egypt “Black.” I called him, if his name was Mohammed, I’d just call him Mohammed. When you fill out applications here, why do you need to know my skin color? After I first moved here [to New York City], I was in the classroom and a boy pulled my hijab. I went to the teacher and he said, “Describe him for me.” I said, “He was at the next table.” And he said, “Was he Black?” Now I understand that when people say “Black” they mean African American, not White. At that time, though, I thought literally, skin black? I don’t know. I couldn’t comprehend. I never heard of this. Was he Black? As if it was, Was he green? He was short. He was skinny. Was he Black? I couldn’t speak that fluent English, but I couldn’t comprehend. Later on, when I processed it in my mind, I found that it was because he was dark-skinned, African American. Black, not

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4 According to Naber (2000: 53), in Arab countries, new acquaintances commonly ask one another, “Are you Muslim or Christian?” as opposed to the United States where people tend to ask others about their racial, ethnic, or national backgrounds.
White. What hurts me, surprised me, is that it shouldn’t be like this in a country with this education, this technology, this advancement.

Entering school, meeting peers and teachers, and engaging in new activities were important events that also heightened the Muslim students’ awareness and perceptions of their own ethnic identity as well as the identities of others. At home, children learn lessons that reflect their family’s situation in and outlook on life (Andersen and Taylor 2004). At school, they acquire a broader perspective and encounter different behaviors, attitudes, and values. It is also at school that children may meet others of different races, ethnicities, and religions for the first time (Van Ausdale and Feagin 1996). Hafeez, who was a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani descent, was raised in a predominantly White neighborhood in Massachusetts. He described when and how he began to realize that his ethnic background and religious beliefs were different from those of his friends:

I can remember I was pretty young, in maybe second or third grade. Most of my friends were overwhelmingly White, Protestant. It was just the little things that I noticed. My parents would fast [during the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan] and no one else would. We don’t celebrate Christmas. Christmas is so big in America. Oh yeah, and we’re brown. [laughter] Do you know what I mean? I guess it was just that I knew… I look different from them, so I am different from them. I believe different things. I think that is when I figured out that to be American was to be Christian or Jewish. To be Muslim and brown was to be not American.

Immigrant children and the children of immigrants often encounter pressure to conform and racial hostility when they enter school in the United States (Gibson 1988: 8). Indeed, many of the participants in this study faced prejudice and discrimination as they were growing up. Some said they were teased because of their “strange” and difficult to pronounce first and last names. Others remembered being
mocked because of the clothing they wore or the color of their skin. A few of the young men said that they got into fights with other boys at school who ridiculed them or their siblings. The interviewees generally attributed prejudicial behaviors to a few individuals and depicted them as isolated incidents. However, they agreed that the hostility further increased their own ethnic consciousness and motivated them to consider more deeply what it means to live as a minority in America. Zoya, whose parents were Pakistani immigrants, discussed her response to being called names by other children while riding the school bus:

I lived in a mostly White town where people were pretty racist against me, especially on the school bus. Every day all the guys would call me “dot head” and “towel head” and all these things. I was always like, “You know Islam is a religion. Go and educate yourself.” They would make fun of me, call me all those names because I’m darker, because I was a different religion, because I dressed differently. At first it really got me down, but then I was like, there’s nothing for me to feel bad about. They’re just stupid. In high school I was in a multicultural community, Indo-Pak, all these things. I wanted to get rid of all those misconceptions that people think about people in our religion and culture. We don’t need that.

As the interviewees matured, they became more cognizant of externally generated ethnic classifications, and they tried to decide which label or labels to adopt. This was not always easy because the participants came from diverse backgrounds, and the categories of identity that they used to identify themselves sometimes did not correspond with the categories of identity used in the dominant U.S. society. Jamil, who grew up in New Orleans, commented on the pressure he perceived regarding racial and ethnic identification in America:

We’re not supposed to classify each other according to race or ethnicity. But you get forced to because of outside influence. That’s the way people know, by categorizing. It feels strange to me to say something like that. Personally, I really don’t care. But people care.
By the time the Muslim students reached late adolescence, they had developed a stronger awareness of their ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds. As their awareness and understanding increased, they began to wonder where they fit in U.S. society. They, like almost all other adolescents and young adults, asked questions related to their personal identity such as, Who am I? What sort of person am I? and Where do I belong? Their identity exploration, combined with their family socialization and experiences with others, resulted in the participants making deliberate claims and assertions regarding their distinct personal and social identities.

**Ethnic Identity Distancing**

Traditionally, ethnicity has been viewed as an ascribed status. The children of ethnic minorities in the United States, especially the offspring of first-generation immigrants, have been and still are often labeled as part of an ethnic subpopulation like their parents. More recently, however, sociologists have increasingly examined ethnicity as an achieved status – a characteristic that must be personally acquired, psychologically accepted, and socially invoked to have meaning (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Gans 1979; Yancey et al. 1976). Lyman and Douglass (1973: 349) argue that “despite its anchorage in ascription, there is also a very important sense in which ethnic identity, and the several saliences of any ethnic identity, are qualities of individual personification which may be inferred, assumed, manipulated, or in some cases avoided altogether.” From this perspective, individuals first develop an awareness and understanding of what it means to be a member of an ethnic group and then actively choose whether to accept and assert that particular ethnic identity.
Many of the participants in this study reported that prior to September 11 they had consciously chosen to distance themselves from their ethnic community and peers and subsequently disregarded their ethnic heritage. In this section, I examine why the students decided not to emphasize their ethnic identity to the same extent that they developed and displayed their Muslim religious identity (see Chapter Five).

As the participants gained a deeper awareness of their ethnic backgrounds, some became uncomfortable identifying themselves according to the traditional ethnic, and especially racial, categories constructed by mainstream institutions in the United States – namely, the classifications of “White; Black/African American; Asian American; Native American; and Hispanic.” For those from mixed ethnic backgrounds, this discomfort resulted from falling outside this prevailing set of categories and therefore feeling forced to choose one race/ethnicity and consequently reject another aspect of their self. Most of the interviewees, even those who claimed only one ethnicity, felt that the standardized labels were not sufficiently complex to capture the full scope of possible ethnic identification. Laila was born to Egyptian parents and raised in Kuwait. She and her family immigrated to the United States when she was a teenager. Laila described the difficulty she had in establishing her racial and ethnic identity:

When I was in Georgia there were only two or three families that were Arab in my town. One was mine, one was my aunt and uncle, and then someone else. The biggest shock for me was trying to figure out who was I going to be friends with and which group I would associate with. I was filling out my college application. The one question I had was, What race am I? They had “White, African American, Hispanic, Asian.” They didn’t have “Other.” I’m like, I like to put “Other,” but there’s no “Other” section. How can I choose one of these four? I’m Egyptian ethnically, and Egypt is in Africa. Does that mean I’m African American? But I’m not American yet. I just came and I don’t
have my citizenship. I found out Arab American is technically considered White, but I don’t feel White.\textsuperscript{5} It was such a huge dilemma. I don’t know what race I am. Just having to choose which side of the lunchroom to sit on. On the right side were all the White people, and on the left side were all the Black people. There was a huge open no-man’s-land in the middle. I’m like, okay, where do I sit?

Laila’s experience demonstrates the challenge that many minorities encounter when they attempt to define and position themselves within the racial and ethnic landscape of America. Because it is an extraordinarily diverse society, the United States faces many issues when it tries to place people from numerous nationalities and cultures, who have markedly different histories, traditions, and languages, into a limited number of racial and ethnic boxes (Lee and Bean 2004). Ameena, a second-generation immigrant, also described a predicament regarding how she should identify her ethnic background. Although she typically would mark “Asian” as her race/ethnicity, she was keenly aware that she did not fit the traditional definition of what it means, culturally and phenotypically, to be Asian American. When I asked about her ethnic identity, she said:

That’s a really tough one. I’m on a demographic for Southeast Asian American. My mom is from Guyana, so she’s Indo-Guyanese, because way back when Indians moved to Guyana as indentured slaves and then they were free but they are ethnically Indian. My dad is ethnically Indian, whatever nationality. Bangladeshi, he’s still Indian. In terms of ethnicity, it’s so funny. There’s no category for us. They say Asian or Asian American, but I don’t feel as if I fit. The cultures are totally separate. When I was a freshman, I went to Club Fair. There are a lot of Asian groups with names like Asian Initiative. I went to this Asian Initiative table and they’re a community service group. They help people around New York City, Asian communities. I thought Asian meant as a whole, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Indian, and all the others. But when I went up there it was all Korean or Chinese.

\textsuperscript{5}The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Arab Americans as Whites and/or Caucasians. However, in many social contexts they are perceived and defined as non-Whites, by others as well as by themselves (Ajrouch 2004; Naber 2000).
Most of their club members were from the East Asian sector. It was kind of uncomfortable.

Some of the interviewees grappled with issues regarding acceptance in their own ethnic communities, which ultimately resulted in them feeling out of place or “unauthentic” (Song 2003: 47). The students had varying levels of knowledge concerning their ethnic heritage, language, and practices, which affected their feelings of ethnic identity and consequent group inclusion. Additionally, a number of the participants did not grow up in ethnic neighborhoods, which is an important factor that facilitates the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity (Alba 1990; Sanders 2002). Mahmad was the son of an Iranian Muslim father and a Chicana Pentecostal Christian mother. He was born in New Mexico, lived in Iran with his family until he was four years old, and was raised in a suburban area in Colorado. He described the challenges he faced in developing and asserting his multicultural identity around members of Iranian and Chicano communities:

I don’t get to share this too often, but before accepting Islam I was very paranoid about my ethnic identities because I was socialized in the White environment. I wasn’t raised around Iranian communities. I wasn’t raised around Chicano people, besides my own family, which was in New Mexico, and I saw them periodically throughout the years, but it wasn’t my cultural base. My cultural base was White America. So when I went around Chicano communities, Mexican American communities for example, in my heart I identified with them, but my experience socially... I wasn’t them, and I am still not them. And so I was very scared to be associated with the Chicano people, just because I always felt that they would call me out for being too White, and on occasion they did. They did and that’s fine. And then on the Iranian side, it was painful because I couldn’t speak my language. My name was difficult to pronounce in the Iranian way. My mom pronounces it one way, my dad pronounces it one way, my friends pronounce it another way. So the same thing occurred on the Iran side, I was paranoid whenever I came around Iranians because they wanted to speak the language, but I couldn’t speak Iranian. I couldn’t speak Spanish either.
The majority of the Muslim students I interviewed for this study were 1.5 or second-generation immigrants. Although these individuals grew up in the United States, many did not feel they were accepted as truly American. They believed that others assumed they were foreigners because of their physical appearance or their ethnic names. These perceptions resulted in very few of the interviewees adopting a “plain American” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 154) national identity. Massoud, whose parents were Pakistani immigrants, was born and raised in the United States, and he completed his undergraduate education in Colorado. He was very popular and actively involved in several student groups on his college campus, spoke perfect unaccented English, listened to hip hop and rap music, and dressed in the latest styles. However, when I asked him if he thought of himself as American, he replied:

I’ve never really viewed myself as American, because I’ve always believed at some level to be American you have to be White. Without that essential quality, your Americanism will always be challenged and questioned, whether you’ve been around since the founding of the country. You’re still not an American. You’re an African American, an indigenous Native American, whatever. But you’re not plain old American. You can’t be Joe Schmoe.

Even those students who considered themselves American had problems with the ways that members of the dominant society identified them. Rashida, whose parents were both from Pakistan, was raised in rural Illinois. She self-identified as a Midwesterner and was proud of her small-town values. When I interviewed Rashida, she was living in New York City and completing a master’s degree in international relations. She expressed frustration that individuals, including some of her professors, would ask her if she wanted to go and live in Pakistan after she finished her graduate
studies. Because of her strong affiliation with Middle America, she was especially offended when others spoke to her as if she was a foreigner. She said:

With the younger generation, I haven’t felt like people have looked at me differently. It’s been, “Yeah, it’s cool because she has spirituality and culture.” But with older people, sometimes they’ll be like, “Do you speak your native tongue?” meaning, Urdu. “Do you want to go back to your homeland?” Would you ask a White person whose parents were from England or Switzerland, “Do you want to go back to your homeland?” No. You see them as American. The older generation will never see me as being just as American as a White American.

Ameena affirmed this point: “It’s how you see yourself and how others perceive you. I see myself as an American, but others don’t.”

Another interviewee, Alisha, was born in Syria but came to the United States as an infant. She grew up in a university town in Colorado with a population of almost 100,000. Although there were other Arabs and Arab Americans living in the community, Alisha said she and her family were the only Syrians. She was very fair skinned with light green eyes, and she wore the hijab. Because of her physical appearance and religious dress, Alisha believed that neither Arabs nor Americans recognized her as part of their communities:

I kind of am in a position where I receive stereotypes from both ways because when people come here from the Middle East, they are mostly Saudi Arabian, and they are dark skinned and things like that. So basically they meet me and think I am American, they have no clue that I am Arab and that I grew up as a Muslim and that I was born and raised as a Muslim. They think I am an American convert or something. I have received that kind of stereotyping from Arabs. “Oh you are White, you must be American, right?” Also with the other way of it, with Americans, they have the stereotype of me too because of the hijab. “You must have just come here like two weeks ago. You must not know anything about America.” That sort of thinking.
As discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, many of the students believed that others viewed them as non-American because of their religious affiliation and practices. Most of the individuals I interviewed for this study, men and women alike, wore religious garb, so they were clearly identifiable as Muslim. Despite their U.S. citizenship, their status as both religious and ethnic minorities resulted in others questioning them about their heritage. Ariana, who was born in Pakistan but moved to the United States as a young child, talked about what happened to her while she was taking her driver’s license exam:

Even when I took my road test, at the end, the instructor was very nice, he didn’t mean anything mean by it, he said, “Have you driven in the country you’re from?” I said, “I was three years old. I think I drove a bicycle.” [laughter] Sometimes the way people talk to me, they’ll think I’m from another country. They don’t mean to be rude. Some people just like to talk to you. I’ve been here 20 years. I really do consider this home. When I go back to Pakistan, over there I’m so Americanized because of my accent. They consider me a foreigner. Then I come back here and people ask where I am from. I’m like a hybrid. I don’t like that at all. It hurts sometimes.

Ariana’s comments illustrate that even if the participants did not feel fully accepted as American, some of them were not necessarily comfortable identifying solely with their parents’ nationality either. As discussed previously, most of the interviewees’ parents strived to teach their children about their ethnic origins. However, the students who spent their formative years in America obviously knew significantly less about their parents’ homelands than they did about American society. For those who were born in the United States and had never traveled abroad, America was the only home they had ever known. Some of the participants with extended family living in foreign countries emphasized that despite their ethnic ties, they would never completely “fit” if they returned to their parents’ country of origin.
Indeed, Zhou (1997: 64) argues that immigrant children and the children of immigrants lack meaningful connections to their “old” world. They are thus unlikely to consider a foreign country as either a place to return to or a point of reference. This sense of being an ethnic outsider caused some of the interviewees to further distance themselves from their ethnic identities. Henna, who was raised in northern California, said the following regarding her Arab background:

If you put me in an Arab country, they’ll think I’m a foreigner. I really grew up here. Most of my identity has been shaped here. A lot of what I think, what I say now is… the way I act. It really doesn’t jive with a lot of people from Egypt, which is where my parents are from. I feel more like I’m American because I grew up here.

Salma, a second-generation immigrant whose parents were of Indian descent, talked about her discomfort with identifying exclusively as Indian or American:

For India, people find it far-fetched to think that Muslims even live in India. They think India is Hindu. A lot of Indian culture, their underlying things are from Hinduism. For me to associate myself with Indian culture as my identity would be kind of false, just also because of the fact that I was born and raised here. So I can’t associate with a particular culture. I’m not totally American, either. I don’t do typical American things, and I don’t do typical Indian things. The one thing I stick to is my religion. You circulate around that. In my day-to-day life I implement more of my religion than I do anything else. So my culture and my identity would be Islam.

Like Salma, almost all of the individuals I interviewed for this study came to identify more closely with their religious backgrounds than their ethnic roots. In fact, their ethnic identities often were a source of confusion and even discomfort, but their religious beliefs and practices provided a firm grounding for their everyday lives and social interactions. As discussed in Chapter Five, various factors resulted in religion emerging as the most salient source of personal and social identity for these Muslim American students. However, contrary to the growing body of scholarly work that
emphasizes the role of religion in creating and reinforcing ethnic group solidarity (see Bankston and Zhou 1995, 1996; Chong 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988), the interviewees in this study said that as they began to identify more strongly with Islam and the individual characteristic of being Muslim, they became less likely to identify with a particular ethnicity. In the case of this research, a highly salient religious identity actually undermined, rather than reinforced, ethnic identity. Mina spoke of how she was not completely Pakistani, yet she did not feel totally American either. Religion subsequently became the most important influence in her life:

I came to the U.S. in 1989. I was six years old. I don’t think America has a culture in itself. America is all the cultures together. In that sense, taking that into account, I am Muslim, number one. I’m not completely Pakistani because I was raised here, but then I have the traditions, the food that we eat, for example. But then I eat American food, too. On that level, it’s both, as long as they don’t conflict with me being a Muslim first. Part of the American culture is going to beaches and wearing swimsuits. Drinking alcohol. This conflicts with me being a Muslim, so no way. But eating pizza at Pizza Hut, those kinds of things, ice skating, that’s fine. It’s not like I’m Muslim, then I’m Pakistani, then I’m American. I’m Muslim first. Once that’s secure, then I can be anything I want to be.

Saba, a second-generation Pakistani American, told me that when she was younger, she used to be more closely tied to her ethnic community. After entering college, she, like the other interviewees, met other Muslim students and became active in religious organizations. The new friendships that the participants formed, which were largely facilitated by their involvement in their on-campus Muslim Student Associations and other Islamic groups, reinforced their religious identity but further detached them from their specific ethnic communities. Religion brought these
students together and diminished the importance of their ethnic differences. Saba discussed her experience:

Maybe the first year after I was in college, I got associated with Leila. I met her and talked to her and met lots of other Muslim sisters. I got involved with Women in Islam. Through her I associated more with my religion than my ethnic background. A lot of people who are here from my ethnic background, I don’t like what they’re doing. If your ethnic background isn’t doing the right thing, you try to find another place where you can fit in more. Now I’m doing much more with the Islamic community than with my Pakistani community.

Again, as the participants adopted a more salient religious identity, defining themselves in terms of ethnicity, culture, or nationality became increasingly problematic. Snow and Anderson (1987) suggest that individuals may attempt to distance themselves from roles, associations, and institutions that imply social identities inconsistent with their actual or desired self-conceptions. In essence, some of the interviewees used religion as a “disidentifier” (Goffman 1963: 44) to separate themselves from their ethnicity.6 Although ethnic minorities cannot fully control the ways in which they are ethnically, racially, or ultimately socially constructed by others (including other fellow minority group members), they can create an individualized identity by claiming and establishing a “conditional belonging” with various groups in society, including the majority culture, their own ethnic community, or their religious group (Parker 1995: 199).

Ethnic Identity Reaffirmation

Prior to the events of September 11, for various reasons described above, many of the individuals I interviewed for this study had chosen to downplay or even

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6 Goffman (1963: 44) defines a “disidentifier” as “a sign than tends – in fact or hope – to break up an otherwise coherent picture but in this case in a positive direction desired by the actor, not so much establishing a new claim as throwing severe doubt on the validity of the virtual one.”
disregard their ethnic identity. However, the backlash that followed the September 11 attacks increased the students’ awareness of their ethnic and cultural differences from mainstream American society. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the participants attempted to redefine and assert their religious, ethnic, and national identities on their own terms. This “identity work” (Snow and Anderson 1987) emerged in response to the interviewees’ feelings of isolation from other non-Muslim Americans as the students strived to construct a new sense of self and engaged in a process of identity reaffirmation.

To some degree, the response that followed September 11 caused all of the students in this study – regardless of their ethnic backgrounds – to become more mindful of their ethnic identities. However, the participants who were of Arab descent and claimed an Arab or Arab American identity reported feeling particularly vilified following September 11. These individuals shared not only a religious affiliation, but also a common ethnic identity with the perpetrators of the attacks; they felt and experienced “double stigmatization.” Natasha, who was a second-generation Egyptian American, described how she believed others reacted toward her following September 11:

I think now when I tell someone I’m Arab and I’m Muslim, there’s an instant recognition that this is something significant. So it might trigger some questions, maybe has even made some people more suspicious of me because I have both of these traits. It might have triggered questions before, but maybe just because they thought my heritage was interesting or different. Now everyone knows what it means to be Arab and Muslim, and they know this is something significant and maybe even they think it is something threatening.

Both Arab and Muslim communities in the United States came under intense scrutiny following September 11. Media pundits, anti-immigration groups, and
government security agencies all seemed to demand that Arabs and Muslims demonstrate their patriotism and allegiance to America and its policies (Haddad 2004: 44). As Muslims, all of the participants in this study felt negative repercussions following September 11. However, some of the interviewees who were not of Arab descent acknowledged that the post-September 11 reaction was probably most difficult for Arab Muslims. Ameena, whose parents were of Southeast Asian descent, related her thoughts on this subject:

I’m not Arab, so a lot of things are not as traumatic. The events are not as traumatic to me as to Arab Americans, because when anything happens, they’re the first targets. You don’t think about Asian Americans, because we’re not in the news headlines. But it definitely hits us all, because we’re all Muslims. We’re not White. We have dark skin.

Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 2001) use the term “reactive ethnicity” to describe the process whereby groups subjected to extreme discrimination and derogation because of their national origins embrace those roots ever more fiercely. Essentially, discrimination, disparagement, and vilification lead such groups to reject things American and embrace their original immigrant identity. This process of forging a reactive ethnicity in the face of perceived threats, persecution, and exclusion is not uncommon. On the contrary, throughout U.S. history, divisive or contentious social situations have served to accentuate group differences, heighten individual and group consciousness, and promote ethnic group solidarity (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 148). Alisha, who was raised in Colorado, noted that prior to September 11, she had very little interest in her ethnic background. However, after September 11, she became more likely to assert her Arab ethnic identity and her Syrian national origin, even though she had lived in the United States since she was an infant. She said:
I feel that after the attacks I have identified more with my Syrian culture than the American culture. After all this happened in America, I felt an emptiness and a longing for my country and have a greater urge to go and visit it and experience my culture and background for the first time in my life. Before I think I would have said I was American, but now I find more and more that I tell others that I am Arab.

Alisha’s statement illustrates how external forces can increase ethnic self-identification, even among persons who were previously only marginally affiliated with an ethnic group.

Several of the Afghan students that I interviewed also became much more conscious of their ethnic identities following September 11. Because Osama bin Laden, the purported mastermind behind the terrorist attacks, was allegedly hiding in Afghanistan, it was the first nation that the United States targeted in its global “war on terror” launched in the aftermath of September 11. Afghanistan, previously an unfamiliar place to most Americans, suddenly became the focus of U.S. and global attention. Prior to and during the invasion of Afghanistan, the media offered extensive coverage and information about that country’s history, geography, economy, politics, and social situation. The subjects in this study who were of Afghan descent were affected by this increased attention; they received numerous inquiries from peers, professors, reporters, and even strangers regarding their heritage, culture, beliefs, and customs. As a result of this interest, a group of Afghan students in Colorado formed the “Afghanistan Educational Project” to inform the public about their country and to raise funds to help establish schools for women and children in the region. I attended

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7 The broad media coverage of Afghanistan did not improve the geographic proficiency of most young Americans. In 2002, National Geographic conducted a survey to see whether the urgent focus on world affairs after the September 11 attacks enhanced young adults’ knowledge of world geography. The survey showed that 86 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 could not locate Afghanistan on a map (Kennedy 2002).
the events they sponsored in Denver and Fort Collins during the fall of 2001 and spring of 2002. The meeting rooms were filled during all of the lectures and other activities, demonstrating the heightened interest in Afghanistan on the part of the general public. Jeena, a native of Afghanistan who came to the United States when she was 13 years old, was one of the individuals who helped establish the educational outreach group. She discussed her personal reasons for working on the project, as well as how it impacted her Afghan identity:

Having gone through the war, being an Afghan and going through the Russian invasion, losing my father and grandfathers, my aunts, my uncle that was lost. It’s so hard to lose family, to lose home, land that we had, the home that my mom and dad worked for forever and ever, we left all that. So when I saw the Afghans again having to flee the country, I felt more hurt and I thought, I have to help them. Because I could relate to them, I became more of an Afghan. Being in the U.S., getting scholarships to go to college, I always set as my goal to give back to the community. In that spectrum, I became more and more stronger in those areas.

I also interviewed Jeena’s younger brother, Abdul. He helped with the Afghanistan Educational Project and was the president of the Afghan Student Association on his college campus. When I asked him about the attention directed toward his native country, he mentioned that one of his college professors had asked him to focus all of his work for the course on Afghanistan:

A lot of people were more interested in Afghanistan. You saw it at the events we had. Then in my speech class this semester, every speech I have to give, my teacher is like, “You should do something about Afghanistan.” My last speech was about the national sport, Buzkashi. The speech before that was a two-minute speech. She wanted me to give a brief overview of how my life was when I lived in Afghanistan. This month she wants me to do something about Afghanistan again.

The interviewees from Afghanistan firmly believed that the coverage of the situation in that nation was a positive thing, particularly because it resulted in
increased public awareness of the plight of the Afghan people. However, they also realized that the persistent media reports probably helped create negative impressions and stereotypes that did not previously exist. Salman was born in Afghanistan and came to the United States when he was in elementary school. I first interviewed him in October of 2001, less than a week after the war in Afghanistan started. He talked about his experiences following September 11 and commented on how he felt people now viewed him because of his nationality and ethnicity:

Salman: Six months ago people hardly knew where Afghanistan was. They had never heard of it. You’d tell them where you were from and they’d be like, “Where?” Now everybody knows about my country. I never really expected something like this to happen. I’m guessing that a lot of people, if they don’t have it right now, they will develop a bad perception in the future of Afghanistan. I told someone that I’m from Afghanistan, an older woman. She was like, “Oh my God, we have bin Laden in the house.”

Lori: She said that to you?

Salman: Yes. She was laughing, but that’s one of my experiences, which didn’t shock me at all. If it’s going to be covered in the media 24/7, what are people going to think? I’m just more aware now that when I tell someone I’m from Afghanistan they’ll probably treat me in a certain way, or they’ll probably think about me in a different way than before. I probably need to explain to them and try to clear things up for them regarding how we really are. We’re not what most people think we are.

All of the Arab and Afghan interviewees reported that following September 11 they were the subjects of much attention and scrutiny because of their ethnic, national, and religious identities. The additional stigma they perceived and experienced resulted in a stronger awareness and affirmation of their ethnic identities as they attempted to dispel stereotypes about themselves and their co-ethnics.
As mentioned previously, all of the interviewees, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, to some degree became more conscious of their ethnic identities following September 11. Although the students who were not of Arab or Afghan descent by and large did not experience the same levels of stigmatization because of their ethnicity, with their heightened religious and ethnic awareness (and, as discussed earlier, heightened display of those identities) they unavoidably became more cognizant of what it meant to be a stigmatized ethnic minority. Janan, whose father was an African American Muslim convert and whose mother came from West Africa, said:

After 9/11, because of the way that people seemed to question my right to be an American, I do feel that I became a lot more interested in my West African identity. I noticed myself wanting to spend more time with distant West African relatives in the Bronx and to identify myself as West African. Before, and even now at times, if you had asked about my ethnic identity, I would have probably just said African American. But right after 9/11, my West African-ness was very important to me and would have never been omitted. I always had to tell people that I was from Guinea or a Mandingo. I don’t know what I could call the period right after 9/11. Maybe my de-Americanization. I spent most of my time with immigrants and second-generation immigrants from everywhere in general because I felt a connection with them. It was like we all could come together and understand this feeling of being not quite American enough. I think this happened with a White American Muslim friend I had too. She was always with Pakistani and Arab Americans. It didn’t matter where we were from; we were all foreigners after 9/11.

Hafeez, a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani descent, described a sort of identification “amplifying effect” that he experienced following September 11.

Essentially, because he felt others called so many aspects of his personal and social

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8 For Muslim Americans who are visibly identifiable, it is virtually impossible to know whether prejudice and discrimination results from one’s religion or ethnicity because of the conflation of the two identities.

9 Janan was born in Washington, D.C. and had never traveled or lived outside the United States.
identity into question, he began to consider his background and his future much more carefully. He said:

9/11 kind of made me think about everything more seriously. Ethnicity, religion, character, career, possibility, family, even writing. Immediately after 9/11, I was willing, as were many other Muslims, to work abroad, to give back to the Muslim world, to escape what we felt was a stifling environment. If you asked me to describe the impact of 9/11 on me as a Pakistani-American Muslim, I would say 9/11 had an amplifying effect. It increased, on the whole, my consciousness of the disparate elements of myself while also increasing my consciousness of my citizenship and its importance. My consciousness of being an American increased, and my consciousness of being a Pakistani also increased, but in a different way. Immediately after 9/11, it was more about being Muslim for me than being Pakistani. Though, over time, when I saw the Pakistani community was also being targeted, the Pakistani elements of my identity became increasingly important.

For Najah, who was born in Trinidad and came to the United States as an adolescent, the events and aftermath of September 11 also caused her to question her American identity. For the first time, she began adopting a pan-ethnic West Indian identity:

Even though I wasn’t born here, I used to believe I was an American more than anything else. I’m not very nationalistic towards Trinidad, towards anywhere. Before I would say I was a citizen of the world, because I didn’t care. But now I realize after September 11 I’m a West Indian. Now, when people ask me, I say I am West Indian.

A final point: while many of the students felt stigmatized, isolated, and “foreign” following September 11, for social and political reasons, the event also increased their need to assert their American identities. Because most of the participants were indeed U.S. citizens, they felt it was more important than ever that they let others know that they were American. They wanted people to understand that they were a part of American society, and that they planned to stay. Badia, a second-generation American of Cambodian and Malaysian descent, commented on this:
I think when I was younger if people would ask me where I was from, I would say Cambodia. But thirteen and older and now especially after September 11, if people ask me, I would say, I’m American. Or I would stress that I was two weeks old when I came here but that my family is from Cambodia. Now if somebody asked me that, that’s what I would say. You know, sometimes I even tell them I was born in America.

CONCLUSION

Lyman and Douglass (1973: 365) argue that “to view ethnicity as an unchangeable aspect, an ascriptive characteristic, is to ignore the important consideration that in living out their lives, human actors do not merely accept a given world but rather engage regularly in the construction, manipulation, and modification of social reality.” This research demonstrates that ethnic identity is indeed not static. It changes with the emotional development of the individual, and it evolves depending on historical and social events and circumstances. Three aspects of ethnic identity formation and negotiation were clear among the subjects in this study: ethnic identity awareness; ethnic identity distancing; and ethnic identity reaffirmation. As the participants moved through each of these phases, they learned about, disregarded, and ultimately reaffirmed their ethnic identities.

In the case of the Muslim students I interviewed, ethnic identity became, in effect, more or less salient depending on family socialization processes, peer group influences, religious allegiance, and perceptions and experiences of individual or group discrimination in the dominant society. Thus, numerous personal choices, social factors, and external forces influenced their ethnic awareness and changing patterns of ethnic self-identification.
CHAPTER VII

MUSLIM WOMEN: POWER AND IDENTITY

In this chapter I examine the relationship of gender and religion to the power of a marginalized group and, ultimately, that group’s sense of collective identity. Specifically, I describe the personal and social reasons that the young Muslim American women that I interviewed for this study actively chose to display and assert their religious faith through their dress and behavior. I then discuss how these women consequently gained a stronger sense of their religious identity and connection to their Muslim peers and Islamic communities. Finally, I explore how these women actively confronted and worked to dispel various stereotypes and misconceptions.

THE POWER OF THE IMAGE

In every culture, gender is a major category for the organization of social norms, behavior, and dimensions of social structure. In turn, the concept of gender is based on cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Andersen 2003). Indeed, the construction of gendered identities, relationships, and institutions is seen by many scholars as central to understanding the social order of any society (Cahill 1986; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender ideologies and resulting roles are frequently hierarchical, and sexual inequality is often deeply embedded in thought, language, everyday interaction, and social institutions (King 1995). As such, gender is a strong determinant, along with other social statuses such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, social class, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, and so forth, of cultural patterns of subordination and power (Frable 1997; Howard 2000; Howard and Hollander 2000). Thus, research that seeks to understand the social construction of
gender invariably addresses power relationships as well as the interconnection of various personal and social identities (Connell 1987; Nagel 2003).

Women are central to the image of Islam among Muslims themselves and also among non-Muslims (Ahmed 1992; Badr 2004; Timmerman 2000). From the Western standpoint, Muslim women tend to be seen in stark, unqualified terms, with little allowance for individuality and variation; they are often simultaneously viewed and portrayed as backward, oppressed, uneducated, submissive, exotic, and sexually dangerous (El Saadawi 1980; Said 1979, 1997). Research on Muslim women living in the United States has called into question such unflattering depictions and pejorative stereotypes (Haddad and Lummis 1987; Hermansen 1991) and has revealed that Muslim American women creatively negotiate their gender, religious, and ethnic identities not only based on their cultural heritage but also in light of dominant U.S. social norms and modernist discourses that often define these women as “Other” (Bartkowski and Read 2003; Hermansen 1991; Read and Bartkowski 2000; Schmidt 1998).

Particularly following September 11, Muslim women wearing the hijab were a powerful visual reminder to non-Muslims of an Islamic presence in the United States. For many Muslim American women, this increased visibility in some ways lessened their identity as Americans and heightened their sense of being Muslim and part of a marginalized population (Badr 2004: 326). With their heightened Muslim identity, these women took on new and different roles and asserted leadership in various social spheres. Immediately following September 11, Muslim women assumed important positions in the administration of Islamic institutions and became
spokespersons and defenders of their religious and cultural community (Haddad 2004).

**Representing Islam**

The Muslim community in the United States has grown markedly over the last four decades (Haddad 2004; Leonard 2003; Smith 1999). In part because of this expanding population, the rising number of mosques and Islamic centers in communities across the United States, and increased media coverage of the faith and its followers, Islam is now generally recognized as an important element of the American religious, social, and political landscape (Eck 2001; Leonard 2003). At the same time, Muslims have become noticeable participants and personalities in sports, education, business, science, the arts and entertainment, and politics. However, the most visible Muslims, on a daily basis, remain those women who wear the *hijab* (Ali 2003; Badr 2004; Read and Bartkowski 2000).

Over the past ten years, the number of young Muslim women in public schools and universities who wear headscarves has dramatically increased (Ali 2003; Hermansen 2003; Leonard 2003; Schmidt 1998). These women include foreign students, first-, 1.5-, and second-generation immigrants, American-born Muslims, and converts to the faith. They also represent a range of racial and ethnic groups and nationalities. Scholars did not anticipate this trend toward the adoption of traditional Islamic dress. In a survey of Muslims in the mid-1980s, Haddad and Lummis (1987) found that few if any of the Muslims born in the United States wore the *hijab*, and
they suggested that most immigrants who came wearing conservative clothing\(^1\) gradually changed to typical American-style clothing.

Ali (2003: 2) argues that more young Muslim American women have recently begun wearing the *hijab* because of changes within the Muslim community as well as shifts in the larger U.S. society during the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, he maintains that four factors contributed to the move toward this public display of Islamic identity among young women. These include: 1) The trend toward multiculturalism in the United States not only allows but legitimizes the public expression of ethnicity and religion; 2) Population growth among the Muslim American community and changes in the attitudes of Muslims have resulted in greater participation and acceptance in American civil society; 3) Events such as the Persian Gulf War, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and the September 11 attacks forced a collective re-evaluation of Muslim identity and Islamic practices; and 4) Changes in how Islam is being taught to, and interpreted by, young Muslims has led to a rediscovery of religion and a redefinition of what it means to be Muslim among that younger generation. In essence, as Islam has become a more salient source of personal and social identity, young women are displaying that identity by wearing the *hijab*.

Sociologists generally agree that recent generational and macro-level social changes have resulted in young Muslim women increasingly adopting external social markers of their Islamic identity. However, few sociologists have examined Muslim American women’s stated personal reasons regarding their choice to wear the *hijab*

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\(^1\) According to Haddad and Lummis (1987: 132), “conservative clothing” for a Muslim woman generally means completely covering the hair and all parts of the body except the face and hands.
and visibly identify as Muslim (see Bartkowski and Read; Read and Bartkowski 2000; and Schmidt 1998 for notable exceptions). In this section, I explore some of the factors that influenced the young Muslim women that I interviewed.

The women in this study were keenly aware that once they began wearing the headscarf, they would become highly visible representatives of the Islamic faith, and they accepted the stereotypes, challenges, and expectations that would come with that choice. Zoya, a second-generation Pakistani American, was one of the few participants who did not wear the hijab. Although she had considered covering for quite sometime, she was hesitant to start because of the many internal, peer, and societal pressures associated with the decision to become a “physical representation” of Islam. She said:

I’m always thinking about starting, but it’s difficult, because you know you become a physical representation of what Islam is about. Even though of course you have to realize that everyone makes mistakes and nobody’s perfect, when you wear the head cover, it means you wear the head cover. You don’t take it off. It’s kind of like you’re liable, you feel like you’re held more accountable for the mistakes you make. The implications of doing something that is bad are so much more. It doesn’t make you a more perfect human being. But you feel like you have to play that part of being perfect or being super-Muslim. It’s a burden in that way. Once I feel like I’m strong enough internally, and I feel like I can totally live up to it, then I want to start.

All of the women emphasized the importance of emotional strength and self-confidence when deciding to wear the hijab. Even though their community is growing rapidly, Muslims still comprise a very small portion of the U.S. population. Perhaps more importantly, because Islam has increasingly been depicted as a threat to “Western” culture, values, and ideas in recent years (Said 1997; Shaheen 2001), the young women agreed that it was difficult to wear the headscarf in America. They also
stressed that deciding to wear the *hijab* should be a personal choice that results from critical reflection and religious commitment, rather than a practice imposed on young girls and women by parents, spouses, or religious leaders. For example, Anna, whose family was from Yemen, said:

Islam is a very modest religion. When you are not ready to cover, you shouldn’t. Islam says if you don’t feel comfortable with something and you’re not doing it with your heart, don’t do it. Do it when you’re doing it with your heart and it means something to you. There are women in all these countries who cover because their parents tell them to, and then they come to America and it comes right off because they don’t know the meaning of it. When we do it in America and we grow up in college and we know what it means, we do it with the heart. If somebody asks me, “Why do you wear a *hijab*?” I tell them my reasons why. I don’t just say, “It’s my religion and my parents told me to wear it.”

As mentioned previously, almost all of the women that participated in this study wore the *hijab*. These young women began to wear the headscarf relatively early, unlike many of their mothers who, if they wore it at all, began to cover during middle age (and oftentimes only after their daughters started wearing the headscarf).² A few of the interviewees reported that they began covering when they reached puberty, anywhere between 12 and 14 years of age. However, most of the women did not start wearing the *hijab* until they were in high school or had entered college.

There are many personal and social factors that affect a Muslim woman’s choice to wear, or not to wear, the *hijab*. Religious obligation was the most commonly cited reason among the interviewees who had decided to cover. These young women began wearing the headscarf after being persuaded by their own studies of the Qur’an and other religious documents that the *hijab* is mandatory and

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² Hermansen (2003) calls this type of identity assertion, in which young women put on the *hijab* even though their mothers and grandmothers may not have worn it, “Islamic roots” or “Islam first.”
fulfills a religious commitment to God. They interpreted passages in the Qur’an as requiring modest dress for both women and men and the donning of the headscarf for women. Maya, who immigrated to the United States from Egypt as an adolescent, acknowledged that it was difficult to look and act differently from others around her, but she did not consider giving up the hijab or daily prayers as an option. Rather, she saw these things as something she had to do as part of her religion, and so she acted accordingly:

I know that I look different in everybody’s eyes, but I have to do this. This is my religion. This is my inner struggle to wear hijab. Yes I have classes back to back, but I take five-minute breaks and I have to go do my prayer. It’s hard and I might miss some class, it’s hard that I might be different from others, but what is more important? Pleasing God or going to class and being cool?

As the participants entered junior high and high school, they began receiving invitations from their friends and peers to go to parties and clubs. This was also the time when boys started asking some of the girls to attend school dances or to go out on dates. The young women recalled that this used to put them in uncomfortable positions, because many of their parents would not allow them to engage in these sorts of activities, which ran counter to their Islamic beliefs. Thus, some of the young women said another reason that they started wearing the headscarf was to minimize situations and interactions that they personally, or their parents, viewed as inappropriate. The participants said that in many ways it was actually easier to wear the headscarf, and therefore be immediately identifiable as Muslim, so that they could

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3 The contention that wearing the hijab is commanded by God is not universally accepted by Muslims or Islamic scholars. Smith (1999: 108) argues that “the Qur’an, despite what some Muslim women [and men] seem to think, does not actually specify exactly how much of the body has to be covered.”
avoid such awkward situations. This was one of the reasons that Janan, who grew up in Washington, D.C., began covering:

Once I got in high school, I started to realize that it had become very difficult for me to not be known as Muslim. Because no one would know that I was Muslim, they would invite me to do things, like to party, to get drunk, to do those kinds of things. I would say, “I’m Muslim, I can’t.” And they would say, “You’re Muslim?” I felt like, I don’t think I want to go that far pretending I’m not a Muslim, so I’m going to start wearing the scarf so people would know from the start.

Another reason that some of the women began covering was so that they could thwart the advances of men. Modesty and sexual purity are strongly emphasized in Islam (see Ahmed 1992), and therefore some of the young women said that wearing the *hijab* in mixed-gender settings made them more comfortable because they would not become the object of a man’s gaze or attention. In fact, they reported that wearing the *hijab* actually made them feel safer and more liberated and allowed them to pursue activities in public, where they could be heard and respected for their thoughts, rather than objectified. Najah, who moved to the United States from Trinidad, reflected on how men treated her before she started wearing the *hijab* and how they responded to her once she began covering:

I never wore short clothes. But I used to wear tight pants. I don’t want to brag, but when I wore the tight pants and I didn’t cover my hair, guys would call out to me in the street. They were like, “Hey, baby, you look nice.” I would get angry. I would say, “Look at me for my mind. Don’t look at me for my body.” I said, I don’t want to be like this. I want to be respected. I want them when they’re talking to me to look into my face. I’ve talked to guys, and the first thing they start looking at is your boobs. I had even one guy, an old man who was married, he came up to me in the video store and he said, “Oh, you have a nice ass.” That just hit me. I was like, I don’t need to show everybody my body. I was like, okay, I’m going to do it. I’m going to cover. This is mainly the reason why I’m doing it. I feel much more a woman now. Even if I talk to guys, they feel ashamed to look at me all over. They will mostly look into my face. They more or less listen to
what I’m saying instead of checking me out. That’s why I started covering.

A small number of the interviewees mentioned that they chose to wear the *hijab* so that they could attract attention to themselves as Muslim women. They realized that by adopting the headscarf and visibly identifying as Muslim, they could serve as representatives of the faith and answer questions that others might have about their beliefs and practices. Although this was not the only reason that Kamilah, who was a second-generation Egyptian American, began wearing the headscarf, she told me that it was a factor in her ultimate decision to cover:

> I knew people would look at me and that they would be curious. Why is she dressed like that? Why is she different from all the other girls around here? Once I started covering, people would ask questions. The *hijab* brings out curiosity in people. Or when I’m washing up for prayer, people who come in the bathroom say, “What are you doing?” They ask questions because of how we look and what we do, and I like that because it has given me a chance to talk to other people about Islam.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, for the study participants who came to the United States as adolescents or teenagers, their own migration led to a heightened awareness of their religious and ethnic identities. As a result, many of these women took up the headscarf, even if they had not previously worn it in their country of origin. Sanae, who was born and raised in Pakistan, moved to New York City with her family when she was 18 years old. After she arrived, she began studying her religion in depth and soon began covering, something she had not done while living in Pakistan. For Sanae and other interviewees who were immigrants, it was difficult to understand certain aspects of American culture after growing up in a
Muslim-majority country where Islamic norms and values were taken for granted.

She said:

I had the religion always, but before I was more of a Pakistani than I was a Muslim. When I came here, I was like, this is getting out of hand. When I came to this country and I saw people hugging and kissing in the street, I would be like, “Oh my God, what are they doing?” [laughter] I was surprised to see so many things going on. It was a tough process. I knew it was wrong for me as a Muslim because I personally could not do those sorts of things. It’s okay if they do it. They don’t have any obligations to not do it. For me as a Muslim it was wrong. I knew that if I wanted to stay on the right path, I needed to know more. I needed to have more knowledge of my own religion. I started reading up more and more. Then I was like, okay. Save yourself. A scarf. That’s how it happened.

Some of the participants had sisters or cousins who began wearing the hijab before they did. For those young Muslim women, having a close family member of a similar age who covered influenced their own decision to start wearing the headscarf.

Leena, who was of Pakistani descent, had an older sister who started covering after traveling to Saudi Arabia. She was initially shocked that her sister had adopted a conservative style of dress, but later Leena began wearing the headscarf as well:

I started covering my second semester of freshman year [of college]. Before that everybody thought I was Greek or Italian. My hair was down to my waist, I curled it, showed a little leg. [laughter] It was all about attention. My sister started covering a year before I did. Her husband passed away and she went to hajj. 4 When she came back she started covering. I was like, “Oh my God. What are you doing?” I wasn’t aware of that, of why someone would cover. It was so uncool. I didn’t grow up in a religious family. We weren’t taught the reason to wear the headscarf. We just were taught we had to pray five times a day and that’s enough.

Adopting the headscarf is a serious decision and a significant change for women at any age. However, it is perhaps most challenging for teenage girls and

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4 Performing the hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the five pillars of Islam. The hajj is required once in each Muslim’s lifetime, but only if he or she is legally an adult, as well as both physically and financially capable (Denny 1994: 130).
young women to begin publicly displaying their Islamic identity during their formative years when peer pressure is most intense. As discussed above, many of the young women contemplated this change and struggled for some time before adopting this form of dress. Once they had decided to wear the hijab, these women relied on their close female friends for encouragement and understanding. It was quite common for the interviewees to begin wearing the headscarf the same day as another Muslim friend or group of friends did so. This solidarity and support helped alleviate some of the discomfort associated with visibly altering one’s appearance. Andrea, who converted to Islam during her sophomore year in college, discussed the process she went through with her friend after they both chose to wear the headscarf:

It took maybe about four or five months to actually decide and go through with it. Me and my friend, we decided to do it together because she didn’t start covering until I did as well. We decided we would do it together, support each other. We were mostly just scared of how people would react. I was really scared of my family, obviously, and kind of about my friends. Since she had grown up with Islam, she had some different fears. It made me feel like mine weren’t so bad, because I was like, I already became Muslim, what’s worse than that? [laughter] What I mean is, people were already so shocked by the fact that I became a Muslim, so wearing the hijab was just a small hurdle compared to that. But for her I think it was a big deal in that she was Pakistani, and most women in the Pakistani culture do not cover, and so she saw it as going completely against the grain of her whole culture and most of her family. We were also scared of how non-Muslims would react obviously because growing up in this society when all you see on the news is about terrorists and this and that. You are bound to fear those stereotypes. After we really did it, it was like, this isn’t really that bad. People don’t really care all that much, they are just curious most of the time.

Like Andrea, a number of the interviewees began wearing the headscarf after entering college and becoming involved in the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on their campuses. They attributed their decision to meeting other Muslim sisters,
learning about the faith through them, and finding a community of support.

Generally, the young women in the MSAs who were wearing the *hijab* did not seem to directly pressure those women who did not wear the headscarf to begin doing so. However, there was an ongoing conversation within the MSAs regarding why individuals had chosen, or not chosen, to cover. This discussion, as well as the visible presence of so many young women who did cover, resulted in some of the women who did not yet wear the headscarf feeling an unspoken expectation that they should do so. Leila, who was raised in New York City, began covering after joining the MSA on her college campus. She also noted that after she started wearing the *hijab*, other women in her family followed suit. She said:

> I came into the MSA and saw my sisters. I was the only one not covered. They were nice to me and then the question came, “Why don’t you cover?” I thought about it. After a month of coming here, one day I was like, “Okay, I’m going to cover.” That’s really not like me. I went 180 degrees. It wasn’t even like I was leaning towards it. Then my father gave me a hard time. He was like, “No, you don’t have to do that.” In my community, there’s this whole notion of if you cover, nobody’s going to marry you. I started studying more about my religion and decided I don’t want a husband who tells me I couldn’t cover. Why would I want something that’s totally different than what I believe in, or somebody who thinks differently than I do. Then I started covering and I saw the difference in how people treated me, especially Muslim males. If I was on the train, they would get up and give me a seat. Everyone would look, like, what in the hell is he doing? After that a lot of women in my family started covering. We realize that we’re Muslims and we have to abide by these rules, and this is one of them.

The women who began wearing the *hijab* during high school received social support and encouragement through different means. Because most of these women were one of only a few Muslims in their entire high school, they did not have support groups similar to those they would find in college. Some used the Internet to talk to
other young Muslims who were considering wearing the headscarf; they used on-line forums to share what they were going through with other Muslim girls across the United States. Badia, who was raised in Colorado, started covering when she was a sophomore in high school. She specifically cited the friends that she met on the Internet as influencing her decision to wear the *hijab*:

> In ninth grade was when I first started learning about Islam, getting slightly more religious. Those are your teenage years and you are so lost anyways. But that is also when a lot of people start to realize God and stuff like that. And just slowly I started praying five times a day and I started fasting [during Ramadan]. Back then I never wanted to wear the *hijab*. I know I should have but I was like, I am just going to be so different than everybody else, and I don’t want to have that attention on me. I didn’t want to and then just a couple of months later I realized that you do things for God and not to please other people. And I am going to have to answer to God, not to the people. And a lot of my friends, not the ones here, but the ones I met on the Internet actually, they were always encouraging me to wear it. So I got support from them. My parents didn’t even know that I was considering it, but I was thinking about it for a couple of months. Then I just decided to put it on one day.

Following September 11, several newspapers and Islamic organizations reported a dramatic increase in the number of Muslim American women who started wearing the *hijab*. Although no definitive figures exist, these claims appear to be true, even if the actual numbers may have been exaggerated. Muslims feared for their safety following September 11, but they also felt a strong need to stand in solidarity with other Muslims who were being harassed. Almost all of the women that I interviewed were already wearing the headscarf prior to September 11, so the events

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5 During the fall of 2001, hundreds of non-Muslim women across the United States volunteered to wear the *hijab* for a day as a gesture of solidarity with the Muslim community. The goal of this campaign, which was named “Scarfes for Solidarity” and was largely organized via the Internet, was to diffuse the post-September 11 backlash against Muslim women (see Capeloto 2001).
did not serve as a catalyst for them to become more visible. However, the interviewees often spoke of Muslim friends and family members who started covering after September 11. For example, Shaheen, whose parents were from Afghanistan, mentioned her sister who began wearing the headscarf after the attacks because she wanted to better represent the Muslim community:

I have two sisters. The older one is 20. I’m 18. She didn’t wear the scarf. When this happened, she said, “You know, I’m going to start wearing a scarf now.” I was like, “Of all the times, you’re going to start now?!” She says, “I’m not Muslim enough. I can’t support Muslims because I don’t seem like them to other people.” Regardless of what the consequences of that were, she was like, “I want to start now, just for this reason.”

Establishing Identity and Community

Many of the young women who participated in this study reported that they felt a great deal of anxiety and even fear when they considered wearing a headscarf. However, once they began covering, they felt a stronger sense of religious identity and a deeper connection to their peers and community. Schmidt (1998: 138), in her study of Muslim immigrant communities in Chicago, observed a similar “status transformation” among young women who started wearing the hijab during college. She found that these women were the most active and vocal young representatives of Islam at their schools and that they received the most praise and recognition from their peers.

Once they began wearing the hijab, almost all of the women that I interviewed said that on a personal level they started feeling “closer to God” and “more spiritual.” Wearing a visible marker of Islam was a constant reminder of their faith and religious

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6 I interviewed one woman who began wearing the hijab shortly after September 11. She was largely motivated to begin covering because she had a twin sister who wore the headscarf, and she wanted to support her.
devotion. At the same time, the public display of their religion also helped the women assert their Muslim identity to others and achieve a sense of difference. Sanae, who was originally from Pakistan, began wearing the headscarf after moving to the United States. She was very pleased that the hijab gave her a distinct identity and allowed others to immediately recognize her as Muslim:

One of the best aspects of covering is that now I feel that I have an identity. I feel proud of that. When others look at me they know I’m a Muslim. I feel proud that I’m recognized for what I am. If I am a Muslim and you strike out the scarf and the dress-up, nobody knows I’m a Muslim. I look very Spanish. Now they look at me and think, oh, that’s a Muslim girl. That’s a good thing, that I’m identified for what I am. It’s very difficult for other people to manage that. They work all their life to stand for something, and people don’t know what they’re standing for. With me they know within moments. They look at me and they go, she’s a Muslim.

As the young women transformed their appearance so that they were demonstrably Muslim, they also altered other personal characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. Because wearing the headscarf made these women self-conscious and heightened their awareness of how they were viewed by those around them, they tried to positively represent Islam and Muslims through their words and deeds. Salma, whose family was from India, felt that because others observed her more closely she behaved in more responsible and moral ways. She said:

Spiritually it keeps me from doing something that one might consider as non-Islamic. You don’t want to be seen doing something stupid, cursing at somebody, for example. If you do that, then people will say, “That’s how Muslims act.” By wearing the clothes, by being visibly Muslim, I have a standard that I have to fit, and I have to show people that this is how Muslims are. People will put you under the microscope as to how you act. Actions speak louder than words. People tend to focus more on how you deal with things, how you act, how you speak, more than what you tell them, what you try to teach them.
Like Salma, all of the other women were aware of the power and importance of the *hijab* as a symbol of Islam, and they felt that they had to be careful not only to present a symbol but, ultimately, to demonstrate their faith. Tamara, who came to the United States as a refugee from Afghanistan, discussed how she became more humble and deliberate in her actions toward others after she started to wear the headscarf:

Symbols are very important. When you carry a symbol, you don’t want to spoil the image of that thing. I’m very strong-headed. With wearing this I’ve become more humble and more giving. If I’m in the subway station and I’m sitting and I see an older lady or a kid standing, I’ll get up. I guess symbols do that to you. When you carry them, you want to take care of them. If you don’t have any symbols, you don’t have any obligation. Those gangsters, they have their symbols. If they didn’t have their symbols, they wouldn’t be acting as a gangster. It’s the same thing with us. You get this sense of belonging when you carry it. It’s not just a personal thing. You’re defending and standing up for this. An entire culture, an entire religion. So you have to be more careful because you’re really being recognized for that. As I said, it’s a good thing to be recognized as a Muslim, but it’s very difficult, too. If you’re recognized as a Muslim, you have to stand up to the image. Symbolism is very important.

In addition to strengthening their personal resolve and religious identity, wearing the *hijab* also resulted in an enhanced sense of community with other Muslims among the female participants in this study. When I asked the interviewees about the most positive aspects of wearing the *hijab*, they consistently noted how much they liked being recognized by other Muslims and how this made them feel closer and more connected to the Islamic faith and community. During a focus group, two young women underscored this point:

Henna: It’s good because when other Muslims see you, there’s an automatic bond with them. They say *Salam Alaikum*, which means peace be unto you. It’s nice to say that. Even just walking down the streets, I get people saying *Salam* to me all the time. They see that you wear a *hijab* so they know you’re Muslim. There’s that recognition, and it is easier to find people like yourself.
Saba: Oh definitely the good thing is that other Muslims can identify you. You’re halfway across the block and there’s a new comrade and he’ll say Salam Alaikum to you, and that really says that there is something still there, that we’re still united. That makes your day happy. For us, the important thing is to be identified as a Muslim. You have to be different from everyone else. You have to say Salam Alaikum to another Muslim when you meet one. You can only do that if you can identify that they’re Muslim.

Because they were readily identifiable to other Muslims, some of the women believed that members of the Muslim community were more likely to help them and to watch out for their safety. This reinforced their positive feelings about being Muslim and reaffirmed their decision to wear the headscarf. Janan talked about some of the communal benefits she received after she began covering:

Other Muslims see you and they know that you’re Muslim and they help you out. I remember one time during Ramadan, I was walking home. Some Muslim woman stopped her car and said, “Oh my God, you’re walking and it’s Ramadan? Get in my car. You can have a ride.” I also get a whole bunch of deals. When I go to a street vendor, I don’t have to ask, almost always they’ll give me something for free, or something for cheaper. A lot of them are Arab. They see my scarf and I just get stuff. There’s this guy who just gives me free orange juice. These are the perks. [laughter]

Again, the students I interviewed often reported that wearing the hijab strengthened their connection with the broader Islamic community, and in particular, other young Muslim women. Several of the participants emphasized the significance of the peer networks that formed around the hijab. Indeed, many close friendships among these young women developed largely as a result of the distinctive practice of wearing the headscarf. Kamilah, whose family was from Egypt, acknowledged that if she would not have started covering, she likely would not have met as many Muslim
friends as she did and subsequently developed her strong sense of “sisterhood.” She said:

When I was younger I wasn’t really focused on it. But when I got into college, thank God I decided to put on a hijab. After I put it on I started meeting other sisters, the closeness of sisterhood, being connected. Everything is because of wearing this.

Similarly, Safa, whose family moved to the United States from Bangladesh when she was a child, commented:

Now people automatically recognize me as Muslim. But one thing I noticed is that before I wore the hijab, they would not know who you are, if you’re Muslim or Christian or Hindu. The first weeks in college I didn’t wear the hijab, so nobody spoke to me. I spoke to the kids in my class, but that was it. None of the Muslims invited me to the Muslim Club during the first two weeks. But the day I wore the hijab, or two days later, these girls from the Muslim Club, they were like, Salam Alaikum, come to the Muslim Club. We have this new club. Come. Sometimes you can’t tell if guys are Muslim. They’re like, Salam Alaikum sister, how are you doing? They automatically recognize that you’re Muslim and they give you a certain respect. I think guys may wish they had what we have, that others could always know they’re Muslim too.

Once they began wearing the hijab, the young women often went from feeling isolated and “different,” at least regarding their religious beliefs, to establishing a much stronger identity, new friendships, and an increased sense of community. The social networks and community that emerged because the women wore the hijab were particularly important because of these women’s status as part of a marginalized religious minority in the United States.

**Confronting Stereotypes**

The women that I interviewed for this study described numerous personal, religious, and social benefits of wearing the hijab. However, they were also frequently subjected to stereotypes and prejudice because of their decision to publicly
display their Muslim identity. These young women were well aware of the negative views of Muslims and Islam held by many Americans. As one interviewee stated, “It’s a huge disadvantage, the fact that you feel that everyone’s looking at you and thinking all these things about you that are not always positive.”

Even though being visibly Muslim could be difficult, the young women did not consider discontinuing wearing the headscarf. Indeed, rather than undermining this practice, negative media images (see Shaheen 2001) and attacks on the hijab in many ways reinforced the importance of this particular symbol for these young Muslim American women. The interviewees used their visibility not just to assert their Muslim identity but also to confront stereotypes. Consequently, these young women were often the most prominent representatives of their faith, and they actively worked to dispel negative impressions of Islam and of Muslim women in particular.

After they started covering, one of the first issues that several of the participants encountered did not come from the dominant society, but rather from their own families. Many people in the United States believe that Muslim women are pressured, subtly or not so subtly, to wear the headscarf (Ali 2003). However, with the current generation of young Muslim Americans, that is typically not the case (Leonard 2003; Schmidt 1998). In fact, many of the women that I interviewed actually began covering despite their parents’ objection. As Leonard (2003: 97)

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7 The Council on American-Islamic Relations (2004a) commissioned a study to better understand what Americans think about Muslims, to identify variables associated with anti-Muslim prejudice, and to determine ways to combat such prejudice. An independent research group conducted telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 Americans. The survey results showed that negative images of Muslims are 16 times more prevalent than positive ones and that one in four Americans believes a number of anti-Muslim stereotypes. For example, more than one-fourth of survey respondents agreed with comments such as “Muslims teach their children to hate” and “Muslims value life less than other people.” When asked what comes to mind when they hear “Muslim,” 32 percent of respondents offered negative comments, while only two percent gave a positive response.
suggests, in the United States the wearing of the *hijab* can lead to a generational struggle because daughters often want to wear the headscarf against their parents’ wishes.

Some of the interviewees reported that their family members were pleased when they began wearing a headscarf. However, many of the young women said that their parents were shocked, and at times even angry, that they had chosen to wear the *hijab*. The familial resistance that these young women encountered is not surprising, given that an array of complex cultural, historical, political, socio-economic, and religious factors influence whether or not Muslim women in nations around the world accept this form of dress. For example, in some of the parents’ countries of origin, women who wear the headscarf represent the most poor, uneducated, and stigmatized members of society. Moreover, a number of the respondents’ parents had immigrated to the United States to escape repressive social conditions in countries that required all Muslim women to cover. Some of the mothers and fathers viewed wearing the *hijab* as strictly a cultural practice – not mandated by God and certainly not required for girls or young women. Given the diverse backgrounds and perspectives among the older generation, it is not surprising that some of the interviewees’ mothers and fathers could not understand why their daughters would adopt such a symbol, particularly in the United States. Kamila described how her father reacted after she began wearing the headscarf:

For my dad, after I put on the headscarf, it was, “Why are you wearing that?” Then when I started wearing the *jilbab,* it’s like, “Oh my God, those are Arabic clothes. Why are you wearing Arabic clothes?” The way we were raised, women don’t wear this. If you see the Muslim women who are on television, the majority don’t even cover. So for

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8 The *jilbab* is an ankle-length coat worn in public, which covers any style of clothing beneath it.
them it’s not even an issue. But the fact that our generation wants to cover, my relatives are so Westernized you can’t even tell they’re Arabic, let alone Muslim. They have blonde hair, contact lenses, tight clothes. They’re like, “Why are you wearing that?” I’m like, “Why not? Why aren’t you wearing it? I should be asking you that question.” They’re like, “You’re young, you shouldn’t do that to yourself.” They think that I shouldn’t wear my headscarf until after I get married. And even if I wear it now, I should wear more tight clothes and be more Westernized. I think they want that. If I tell them something, they’re like, “Oh my God, are you the priest or what?” So I just stop.

Ariana, whose family was from Pakistan, reported a similar reaction from her parents after her sister began wearing a headscarf:

My older sister started covering first and my parents hated it. They told her, “You’re so young. You don’t need to cover. You’re losing your youth.” She went to her university freshman orientation. They came back and my dad was talking to my mom. He said, “She’s the only one that covers. All the other people look so good. They don’t cover. She’s losing her youth. She’s just a child, what is she doing? She looks like a grandmother.”

The parents of these young women were concerned that their daughters would be harassed and treated as social outcasts by both the dominant society and their own ethnic communities. Related to these fears, they worried that their children would have a difficult time making friends, finding a spouse, or securing a job after graduation. Despite their parents’ fears and opposition, the young women continued to wear the headscarf, and, as mentioned previously, some of their mothers and other family members eventually began wearing the hijab themselves. The young women viewed this as a confirmation that they had made the right decision.

Beyond the problems the women faced in their own families, they also had to deal with various stereotypes among the dominant U.S. society. The interviewees realized that many Americans believe Muslim women are oppressed and consequently view them as “objects of pity.” To some extent, they understood why
non-Muslims would have such conceptions, given that most Americans are unfamiliar with the tenets of Islam. Additionally, this view has been reinforced over the past several years by the U.S. media, which has devoted increased attention to the circumstances of women in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Those stories have left many Americans with the impression that all Muslim women are disenfranchised, politically and socially powerless, isolated from public life, and forced to cover.

The interviewees used various strategies to try to dispel the notion that they were oppressed. For example, many of the young women emphasized their personal and scholarly achievements to others to demonstrate that they could be both a Muslim woman who wears the hijab and a productive and successful member of society. Halima, who came to the United States from Indonesia when she was a young child, talked about her accomplishments while also expressing frustration with the ways that Muslim women are stereotyped:

When a woman is uncovered, people look at her like, wow, she’s so brave. But when a Muslim woman covers, she’s oppressed. When an American woman stays home and takes care of her kids, she’s choosing the life she wants. When we stay home and take care of our kids, we’re oppressed. I have a 15-month old daughter and I’m six months pregnant and I’m taking 18 credits and I’m graduating. American women who aren’t Muslim look at me as being oppressed. They don’t feel what I’m doing with my life, they don’t understand it. All they see is, I’m wearing this headscarf, so I must be oppressed by their standards. But that’s not it. You can’t make a generalization about something you don’t know. People see me on the street and think, oh, you stay at home and you have kids and you can’t go out and your husband abuses you.

Other interviewees participated in various activities to try to demonstrate to non-Muslims that they were indeed liberated, self-determined, self-confident, and
happy. Leila, who was a particularly vibrant and outgoing young woman, described her experience riding on a jet ski while wearing a headscarf. She tried to take part in sports and other activities that Americans might think of as off limits to Muslim women. She said:

I always have to prove myself. With me, that’s the reason I go on a jet ski with a headscarf, just to do crazy things. My friend did bungee jumps with a headscarf on. Crazy girl. I want people to see me and know, okay, that’s a Muslim girl, but she’s not oppressed. We know how to enjoy our life. I can wear this, my headscarf, and I can move on with my life. I go on jet ski and do crazy things, although I’m horrible at it. I wear my headscarf because I want people to look at me and be like, wow, that’s a Muslim girl. She can have fun with her life.

In the United States, another prevalent stereotype of Muslim women is that they are uneducated, consequently do not participate in the workforce, and are forced to stay home. As college students, the women who participated in this study felt it was important that they display their Muslim identity to dispel this myth. They wanted to demonstrate that Muslim women could be active participants in the university community and eventually establish professional careers. Indeed, some of the women said that they felt pressure to raise their hands and speak in class so that their professors and peers would know that they were intelligent and not afraid to express their own opinions. Badia, who attended college in Colorado, said:

There are so many things that people believe, like we’re not allowed to be educated or live on our own. So by being visibly Muslim, people can see that at least in my situation this isn’t true. That was something about being on campus. I was really proud to wear the hijab because I wanted people to know that I was Muslim and I was educated. The biggest good consequence of covering is that I personally can break stereotypes in people’s minds just by doing my daily routine. I don’t even have to say much, just by seeing me and what I have done, people can get a new image.
Despite the increasing prominence of Muslims in American public life, Islam is still generally perceived as a foreign religion (Leonard 2003; Smith 1999), and because of their religious dress, many of the women reported that strangers often asked what country they were from. Of course, those people were subsequently surprised to learn that not only were the women from the United States, but also that they were fluent in English. Salma, whose parents were from India, discussed this issue:

Sometimes you feel like you have to prove things to people because they automatically think you’re a foreigner. Some people hear me talk English and look at me in amazement, like, she can speak English properly and not with an accent? Sometimes you want them to know that you’re just as competent as anyone else. I try to show that.

During a focus group interview, Leena discussed the perceptions that she felt others had of her language capabilities. She said:

They really think we can’t speak English. I was born and raised here, so it’s not surprising that I speak English like the way people speak it here. This lady said, “Oh, wow, you can speak English pretty well.” I was like, “Well, I was born and raised here.” And they don’t expect it. Sometimes when me and Farah, one of my other sisters here, when we see each other, we’re like, “Yo, wassup?” People are just so shocked, like they can’t believe we know what that is. [laughter]

As these comments illustrate, the participants were aware of stereotypes that others held because of their gender and religion. Rather than passively accepting these views, the women tried to change those beliefs through their appearance, words, and actions. Following September 11, the students that I interviewed for this study felt an even more urgent need to confront misconceptions and to engage with members of the broader American community.
In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Muslim women were seen as vulnerable by members of their own communities as well as by the dominant society. Although most Muslim women were concerned for their own safety after September 11 (see Badr 2004), for the reasons cited above, they also felt that they had to continue to declare their identities. This resolve resulted in some conflicts with relatives who asked the women to stay home, to drop out of school for the semester, or to take off their headscarves (see Chapter Five). Tamara, who was born in Afghanistan but had lived in the United States for most of her life, described how her family reacted after September 11. Despite their fears for her well-being, she refused to stop going to school and actually was quite defiant about continuing to attend college and educating non-Muslims about her faith:

On September 11, my brother called me. He e-mailed me, “Come home as soon as you can.” I called and said, “What’s going on?” He said, “Come home.” So I went home. The next day they didn’t let me come to school. They were like, “You’re not going. Drop out of school for a semester.” I had to show that, I had to explain and say, “No, I’m not going to sit at home and hide like a little mouse.” This is an opportunity to go and educate everybody. So I didn’t come the next day, Wednesday. I came back to school on Thursday. But everything was fine. They were really worried about me. They were e-mailing me every two minutes, “Are you okay?” I’m like, “Yes, I’m fine.”

Like Tamara, many of the other interviewees reported that they became more determined to speak out on behalf of the Muslim community following September 11. Henna, who was studying to become a lawyer, said:

I think after September 11, when people see a Muslim woman, there’s some kind of reaction. Not necessarily that they’re going to say something, but you can see people doing a double-take. I think that impacts me. The whole feeling the responsibility of being a good example as a Muslim is still there on a daily basis. But now, after everything that happened after the attacks, I’m definitely more vocal about Muslim issues.
Within the MSAs I observed, oftentimes it was the women who had taken on the role of educators and public speakers following September 11. This was a new leadership role for many of the young women, but they accepted it as part of their religious and social duty. Saba, who attended a college in New York City, said:

This year a lot of people have been coming to our MSA events, I think because of September 11. They come with a lot of questions. It’s been interesting. Before that, men were the ones who were doing it, who were organizing things and speaking out. This time, it’s us.

Imani, a college student in Colorado, reported a similar trend among the Muslim women there regarding their educational outreach efforts following September 11:

It’s interesting. Just looking at the Muslim women and the Muslim men. A lot of the women wanted to do immediate educational reaching out to people and the men felt more that it was too late.

Some of the young women said that September 11 caused them to re-examine their personal and social identities as Muslim women in America. This exploration resulted in a few of them changing their career goals. Essentially, they wanted to become more involved in their own religious communities but intended to stay active in the American community as well. Leila discussed how things changed for her personally after the terrorist attacks:

You know how before 9/11, how much work we did as Muslims to establish a good image? After 9/11, all of it went to waste. It is going to take a very long time to put up a good image and to make people over here feel comfortable around us again. That is one of the reasons I want to be a professor. You know when you’re in college, you’re learning. I can tell students, this is what we’re doing. I want to educate people about my religion and my culture, my identity. I know it sounds selfish, but when people look at me I don’t want them to feel I’m oppressed.
Rashida, who was a second-generation Pakistani American, put it this way:

I definitely want to do something more. In terms of wanting a career, I feel like it’s my duty as a Muslim woman in America to be out there mingling with people, just to show them that I’m a Muslim woman and I can be free and I’m doing something. So I feel like my life isn’t just for me any more. There’s more of a duty.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim women that I interviewed chose to wear the *hijab* as both a symbol of religious devotion and modesty and as a physical marker of their Islamic social identity. By wearing the headscarf and visibly declaring that identity, these young women established a stronger sense of their religious identity and connection to their peers and religious and cultural communities. Thus, they incurred benefits from covering, but they also encountered negative reactions from their families and others because of stereotypes. These women used their visibility to confront and address various misconceptions regarding both their gender roles and their religion. Especially following September 11, Muslim women were both visible and vocal representatives of Islam, which further strengthened their faith and heightened their Islamic identity. This study demonstrates that Muslim women are significantly contributing to the formulation of a distinctly American Islam as they increasingly participate in the public spheres of Muslim life in the United States.
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I described the diverse experiences of a sample of young, mostly second-generation, Muslim Americans both prior to and following the events of September 11, 2001. Specifically, I examined: 1) the ways that perceptions and experiences of post-September 11 social exclusion heightened the participant’s minority group consciousness and led to increased group solidarity; 2) why and how the students developed a highly salient religious identity and subsequently chose to assert and maintain that particular aspect of self; 3) their patterns of ethnic self-identification and processes of ethnic identity negotiation; and 4) why the Muslim women decided to publicly display their Islamic identity through their dress and behaviors, and the personal and collective outcomes of that choice. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the main theoretical contributions of this dissertation and offer policy options to help communities better prepare for and respond to the social consequences terrorist attacks and other human-caused disasters.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The themes and insights that have been elaborated throughout this dissertation contribute to sociological understanding of the ways that religious, ethnic, and gender identities are developed, negotiated, and asserted, particularly among second-generation immigrants. This study also demonstrates that personal and social identities can be significantly transformed in response to a crisis event. This work provides an important lens through which to consider the ongoing effects of social stigma and alienation on marginalized populations in the United States through the
exploration of the social psychological effects of blame and hostility following a
human-initiated disaster. This research is particularly timely because of the growing
number of Muslims living in the United States (Eck 2001; Leonard 2003; Smith
1999) and the increasing visibility of second-generation Muslim American men and
women in the political and social spheres of American life.

The Identity of Crisis

The September 11 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center towers
were the most destructive acts of international terrorism ever perpetrated. In addition
to the devastating loss of life, the economic costs, physical and mental health effects,
political ramifications, and social consequences have been wide-ranging and enduring
(see Chapter One).

All Americans have been affected by September 11 and its aftermath.
However, Muslim Americans, in particular, have suffered the ongoing effects of the
legislative and social responses that followed that tragic day. Immediately after the
September 11 attacks, government officials, including President George W. Bush,
made a concerted effort to reach out to the Muslim American community. Politicians
visited mosques, invited Muslim community leaders to interfaith prayer services, and
reminded Americans that, “Islam is not the enemy.” However, since that initial period
of support, a number of federal government policies have singled out Muslim
individuals and Islamic organizations. The Bush administration implemented
additional domestic policies related to the “war on terror” which continue to
significantly alienate and isolate Muslim communities in the United States. Never
before has a terrorist act had such a long-lasting impact on Muslim daily life in the
United States, whether at schools, workplaces, airports, or public areas (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2003).

In the days and months immediately following September 11, over 1,200 Muslim and Arab men were rounded up and imprisoned by the U.S. government (U.S. Department of Justice 2003).¹ The government refused to reveal the detainees’ identities, give them access to lawyers, disclose information on the charges against them, or allow them to have contact with their families (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2005; Human Rights Watch 2002). In the fall of 2001 and spring of 2002, representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other law enforcement officials began visiting mosques, schools, and homes to conduct “voluntary” interviews with nearly 8,000 Muslim and Arab men who were legally residing in the United States as students or visitors (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2003, 2005). Also, several Islamic charities, businesses, and homes were raided and assets and private property were seized pending investigation (Arab American Institute 2002; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2003). In December of 2002, over 700 Muslim men were arrested after they had waited in line for several hours at Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) offices to register under the mandatory National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS).² After this

¹ According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (2005: 8), there are approximately 314,000 absconders, or deportable illegal aliens, living in the United States. Of these 314,000, only about 6,000, or less than 2 percent, originate from Muslim or Arab nations. Despite the fact that over 90 percent of absconders are from Latin American countries, following September 11 the U.S. Department of Justice began selectively targeting immigrants from predominantly Muslim and Arab countries.

² NSEERS requires that all male nationals over the age of 14 from select countries report to the U.S. government to be registered and fingerprinted. The 25 special registration countries include Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2005: 11-12).
incident, the Associated Press reported that Muslim families from across the United States were seeking refuge in Canada.

In addition to the post-September 11 arrests, detentions, and deportations of thousands of young Muslim, Arab, and South Asian men, several high profile cases against Muslim American individuals further stigmatized the Muslim community. For example, the media covered the cases of U.S. Army Captain James Yee, Portland attorney Brandon Mayfield, and University of Idaho doctoral student Sami al-Hussayen extensively. These three Muslim men were arrested, held in solitary confinement for prolonged periods, and labeled as “terrorists.” All three were eventually exonerated of all charges brought against them (in the Mayfield case, the FBI even issued a rare public apology for their egregious investigative errors regarding a false fingerprint match that allegedly connected Mayfield to the March 11, 2004, Madrid, Spain train bombings). Despite the legal victories for the defendants, the damage to their personal reputations and to the image of the Muslim community was done. These cases and other activities by the federal government resulted in widespread apprehension among Muslim Americans who believed they were being scrutinized based on their religious association (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2003). Indeed, discriminatory policies and disproportionate focus on the Arab and Muslim American communities have encouraged hostility and bigotry by the general public (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003).

The most dramatic increase in violent hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims occurred in the days and weeks immediately following September 11 (American-
Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003: 18). However, reports of bias and discrimination continue to rise. In 2004, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (2005: 41) processed a grand total of 1,522 incident reports involving claims of harassment, ethnic and religious profiling, discriminatory treatment, property damage, physical violence, and civil rights violations. This marked the highest number of bias-related incidents ever reported to the organization. (See Figure 1 for a summary of the number of anti-Muslim bias incident reports over the past decade.)

Figure 1

Total Number of Anti-Muslim Bias Incident Reports by Year

Muslim Americans, like other minority groups, have long faced problems with discrimination, but following the September 11 attacks, this pattern became more intense, frequent, and widespread. Several factors likely contributed to the sharp and

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sustained increase in reported anti-Muslim bias incidents since 2001, including: a) a lingering atmosphere of fear and suspicion against Muslims and Arabs since the September 11 attacks; b) the ongoing armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the social environment created by pro-war rhetoric; c) the noticeable increase of anti-Muslim rhetoric from some politicians, media pundits, and Christian evangelists, which often portrays Muslims as followers of a false religion and as enemies of America; d) portions of the USA PATRIOT Act, NSEERS, and other post-September 11 federal legislation that selectively target Muslim and Arab immigrant populations; and e) increased incident reporting by Muslim community members (see Council on American-Islamic Relations 2004b, 2005).

Stronger individual religious identification may result in enhanced group solidarity, cohesion, and collective identification. At the same time, visible demonstration of a minority religious identity may provoke hostility and discrimination from the dominant population, as occurred following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Haddad (1994: 79) contends that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the resultant American support for the effort, shocked the Arab community in the United States and led to the creation of the Arab-American hyphenated identity. Similarly, I argue that the events and aftermath of September 11 solidified Muslim American identity and made it a stronger social and political force. Certainly Muslim Americans recognized their role in the public sphere prior to the tragic events of September 11; however, that catastrophe and the complex social and political response that followed

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4 While most aspects of the USA PATRIOT Act are unobjectionable, the law has caused considerable concern by stretching the definition of terrorism, damaging the principal of judicial review and system of checks and balances between different branches of the government, and providing new and expansive detention and deportation powers (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003: 38).
led to an identity formed in response to crisis – an identity of crisis – as Islam came under intense scrutiny by non-Muslim Americans.

Following September 11, for the students interviewed for this study, being Muslim American has new meaning, as religious identity has become even more central to their social and personal selves. Indeed, the young women and men I interviewed experienced September 11 as a “turning point” moment (Strauss 1959). Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 2001) introduced the concept of “reactive ethnicity” to describe the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter confrontations with an adverse native mainstream. Similarly, the interviewees’ religious, ethnic, and gender identities were shaped and further strengthened by the post-September 11 hostility as well as the perceived threat to both Islam and their individual identities.

According to Smith’s (1998) theory of subcultural identity formation, as long as the perception of a threat remains, personal identities and group solidarity will likely continue to be strong. Only time will tell if this is the case for the young Muslim men and women interviewed for this study.

Identity Development, Negotiation, and Assertion

Secularization theory predicted the diminishing significance of religion in modern society (Cox 1965; Hadden 1987; Parsons 1963). However, this study illustrates the continued importance of religion as a basis of personal and social identity. Moreover, this research demonstrates that the formation of a religious identity is a dynamic and ongoing process and that religious identity itself is not a static phenomenon. As the data clearly show, religious identities are actively constructed by individuals and groups in our social world, in addition to being
defined, challenged, accepted, or rejected by other people, communities, and institutions. The development of a strong religious identity involves heightened reflection and self-awareness, individual choices, and the acknowledgment of others. Religious boundaries and meaning are constructed both from within and without, in response to internal conflicts and choices and external pressures and rewards that drive identity formation. Religious identities are ultimately “achieved identities” (Hammond 1988; Warner 1993), which can be affirmed or denied.

Ammerman (2003) argues that taking up a core religious identity is a matter of choice, not determinism. The present study provides qualitative data that illustrates the processes, decisions, and social factors involved in developing a highly salient religious identity. In fact, for this particular group, being Muslim has become a master status-determining trait (Hughes 1984: 147), as religious identity has powered, in most situations, any other ascribed or achieved statuses that may run counter to that identity. Additionally, this research confirms that identity salience hierarchies (see Stryker 1968, 1980) may change over time, as individuals, when they age and mature, become more or less committed to particular identities.

Like religious identity, this research also demonstrates that ethnic identity is not simply an ascribed aspect of self, but also involves individual choice in deciding to assert or deny one’s ethnicity. Ethnic identity changes with the emotional development of the individual, and it evolves depending on historical and social events and circumstances. Three aspects of ethnic identity formation and negotiation were clear among the subjects in this study: ethnic identity awareness; ethnic identity distancing; and ethnic identity reaffirmation. As the participants moved through each
of these phases, they learned about, disregarded, and ultimately reaffirmed their ethnic identities. However, for this particular group of participants, ethnicity was not as important to their construction of self as their religious identity.

Indeed, in the case of the Muslim students I interviewed, ethnic identity became, in effect, more or less salient depending on family socialization processes, peer group influences, religious allegiance, and perceptions and experiences of individual or group discrimination in the dominant society. Thus, numerous personal choices, social factors, and external forces, including in particular the aftermath of September 11, influenced their ethnic awareness and changing patterns of ethnic self-identification.

**Social Exclusion and Minority Group Solidarity**

A recurring theme of sociological investigations of natural disasters has been that mass emergencies create a sense of solidarity out of which emerges a therapeutic community response (see Barton 1969; Fritz 1961). In a therapeutic community, it is rare for segments of the impacted population to be excluded from the post-disaster unity, such as occurred with the Muslim community following September 11. Therefore, when an intentional, human-conceived disaster is considered, traditional ways of understanding and responding to emergent social processes must be re-evaluated.

It is obvious that a richer and more sophisticated exploration of post-disaster therapeutic communities is necessary. Immediately following September 11, we witnessed communities develop through inclusion, and exclusion. The existence of these types of emergent communities warrant inquiry into how violent and intentional
acts, including terrorist attacks, are likely to encourage anger and blame, creating an “us” sentiment that can only take shape in relation to a “they” or “other” sentiment. Consideration of this issue is important because the resultant division may lead to illegal acts of discrimination and bias-motivated crimes, which may result in individual harm and social disruption (Cogan 2002).

The focus on the physical, psychological, and economic devastation caused by the September 11 attacks should be extended to explore their specific impacts on religious and ethnic minority groups that were victimized twice by disaster: first by the actual attacks themselves, and second by the backlash that followed. It has often gone unrecognized that the emotional devastation from a disaster can be at least as great as the physical devastation (Clizbe 2003: 12). Therefore, longitudinal research is necessary to understand the unique social and psychological impacts for dual-victimized minority communities.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

In addition to contributing to sociological theory, this research has implications for policy. Disaster research has a long tradition of producing practical applications to minimize losses and vulnerability to hazards (Mileti 1999; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001; White and Haas 1975). Indeed, given the unprecedented nature of the September 11 attacks, not only is it important at a theoretical level to understand the myriad consequences of the events, it is also essential to recognize the applicable lessons. Specifically, social scientists and policy makers need to consider the various effects on different segments of the population impacted by disasters and terrorist attacks.
Natural disasters, technological accidents, and human-initiated crises may cause similar physical destruction and thus require similar emergency response capabilities, but at the same time, they may have very different social and psychological consequences (Nigg and Mileti 2002; Peek and Sutton 2003). For example, in one review of traumatic stress literature, mass violence was found to be “by far the most disturbing type of disaster” with respect to mental health outcomes (Norris 2002: 2). Increased awareness of human consequences should lead to better planning and preparedness for long-term recovery that takes into account significant social and psychological impacts for all affected populations. In particular, we must develop a better understanding and greater awareness of vulnerable groups that may experience differential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity, and religion. We must ensure that members of these groups remain safe in the sometimes disorderly, conflictual, and blame-filled environments immediately following human-generated catastrophes and also make certain they have equal access to recovery resources. While pro-social, helping behavior is quite often directed toward victims directly impacted in disasters like September 11 (Lowe and Fothergill 2003; Webb 2002), other populations may become targets for retaliation, and it is important that public officials, service and aid providers, and all other concerned individuals become aware of this possibility.

Indeed, to avoid or minimize such problems, responsible communities should initiate proactive measures. They should reach out to vulnerable communities and provide them with opportunities for dialogue before disaster strikes. Moreover, local and federal disaster policy should promote tolerance, build community, and decrease
social isolation among individuals and groups, particularly in light of the severity of the backlash that followed the September 11 attacks. It is imperative that future social science research and public policy address issues of religious and ethnic discrimination and social exclusion following terrorist attacks and other human-caused disasters.

**Developing Proactive Community Response Strategies**

As discussed previously, Arabs and Muslims living in the United States have experienced discrimination, vilification, ostracism, and even direct violence for several decades – actions usually triggered by conflict in the Middle East and acts of terrorism associated with Arabs or Muslims (Human Rights Watch 2002; Said 1997). However, the magnitude of the backlash following September 11 was unique. The rise in anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate crimes after the World Trade Center attacks was the most dramatic to date, and many advocates for minority communities strongly fear that if another terrorist attack occurs, the backlash will be even worse (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003; Arab American Institute 2002; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002a, 2002b; Human Rights Watch 2002).

Given the likelihood of future terrorist attacks on U.S. soil and the historical legacy of backlash violence against ethnic and religious minority groups following such events, local communities must recognize this potential problem, act proactively, and prepare to respond effectively should potential conflict and violence toward minority populations arise. Initiating planning for this problem, and following through on those plans, is a challenge. The problem does not easily fit within the
traditional organizational structures or missions of many agencies, and dealing with it entails a significant allocation of time and human resources, that, to be effective, must be drawn from the grassroots, planning, law enforcement, victim advocates, and disaster response communities. In addition, the benefits of such organizational planning are not always readily apparent. However, such preparedness can be crucial to averting or minimizing ethnically and religiously motivated post-disaster backlash. For example, following September 11, in Dearborn, Michigan, where well-established good-faith relationships existed among various ethnic and religious groups, government representatives were able to quickly join Arab Americans and Muslims and act in a coordinated way that spanned emergency response, law enforcement deployment, and message dissemination (Human Rights Watch 2002). The sustained efforts of community stakeholders significantly deterred any backlash in Dearborn, which is the home of the largest Arab American community in the United States.

Just as prior emergency management planning can ensure effective, relatively smooth response to a disaster, building and fostering good-faith community relationships before a crisis can be crucial to creating an environment of post-disaster social harmony. Below I present a set of recommendations to help communities prepare for and mitigate post-catastrophe backlash. Taking these actions before potentially disruptive events occur can help diminish potential harm to individuals and property.

**Identify Vulnerable Populations.** Local leaders, law enforcement officials, and emergency managers should work together to identify segments of their
community that might be at risk to backlash violence. Arabs, South Asians, Muslims, and Sikhs were targeted in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks and hence should receive particular attention. Obviously, however, other types of events might endanger different populations.

Grassroots organizations and advocacy groups for minority communities are useful starting points to identify those most at-risk of stigmatization and hate crimes. Within the local community, minority groups often sponsor associations, businesses, student groups, places of worship, educational centers, and other organizations. The mission of these organizations typically includes outreach to the broader community through conferences and seminars, public education, and media relations efforts.

**Conduct Pre-Disaster Outreach to At-Risk Communities.** Local law enforcement officials and community leaders must forge strong ties and trusting relationships with members of at-risk minority communities before disaster strikes. Building a disaster-resistant community, at least with respect to social and human relations, requires an enduring, personal commitment and effort by community officials. They should become acquainted with leaders of vulnerable communities, collaborate on projects of mutual concern, and hold public meetings to proactively establish open channels of communication. In short, law enforcement officials and political leaders should institute programs to reach out to minority community members. Just as minority advocacy groups undertake efforts to inform the more general public about their cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, law enforcement officers must also attempt to educate the community about their programs and the efforts that they are undertaking to protect all individuals and
groups. Indeed, initiatives among grassroots organizations, advocacy groups, law enforcement agencies, and political leaders must be reciprocal and multidirectional to ensure the commitment of stakeholders from various groups within the community.

**Improve Cultural Sensitivity.** Emergency managers, police officers, public health officials, mental health practitioners, spiritual care providers, and others who may respond to disasters should be educated regarding the beliefs, traditions, cultural norms (including acceptable and unacceptable behaviors), religious concerns, and other perspectives of vulnerable populations. Such information will help disaster responders work more effectively in situations involving these groups. Moreover, increased knowledge and sensitivity will help increase trust and further build community.

**Develop a Backlash Mitigation Plan.** Communities with vulnerable populations should consider developing a Backlash Mitigation Plan. Such a plan, in conjunction with existing emergency management planning, provides a framework for meeting specific community needs and also documents efforts that have been taken to build relationships and engage various groups within the community. Simply integrating a Backlash Mitigation Plan with existing emergency response plans and mitigation efforts alerts responders to be aware of cultural issues. The plan itself should define situationally appropriate actions and messages and provide a roster of specially trained personnel and other useful contacts.

Local officials, first responders, and law enforcement authorities should work in cooperation with at-risk groups to develop a Backlash Mitigation Plan in advance of another act of terrorism or other human-caused disaster. Planning ahead to present
a coordinated message of tolerance that can be espoused by community members, government officials, public information officers, and religious community leaders alike is essential to diffusing tensions in the face of potential hatred and violence.

Local leaders and members from vulnerable communities should be prepared to address the general public and promote tolerance. Comprehensive educational materials – from printed brochures, to media feature articles, to web sites – should be developed by communities in collaboration with members of at-risk populations. These materials may be designed and adapted for different segments of the population, including, for example, children, teenagers, and adults. Materials should educate the general public and foster a climate of increased religious, ethnic, and cultural awareness. In addition to general educational materials, pre-recorded public service announcements calling for tolerance could also be developed in anticipation of an event that might provoke bias-motivated behavior and crimes.

Not surprisingly, given the considerable cultural and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population, language barriers can be a serious problem during emergency response. Volunteers should be identified well before disaster strikes and be available to offer translation services for various agencies that respond in times of crisis.

Following September 11, the rapid deployment of law enforcement officials to minority communities proved vital in protecting those populations and their property (homes, automobiles, businesses, mosques, community centers, and schools). Thus, police officers should be trained to handle situations and be ready to patrol vulnerable areas in case of a large-scale emergency. Police officers also must be educated in the identification, classification, and reporting of hate crimes.
Increased presence of police officers in at-risk communities may be necessary for days, weeks, or even months after a terrorist attack. Therefore, law enforcement officials must be willing and able to commit considerable time and resources – both human and financial – to stem backlash violence. Conversely, those communities must be aware that law enforcement is there to protect their welfare, not to intimidate. In short, again, a sense of trust must be built between law enforcement and at-risk groups prior to any disaster.

Local leaders and law enforcement officials should work with members of at-risk populations to inform them of agencies that combat hate crimes and other available resources. Members of the at-risk community should be informed of whom to contact in case they are the victim of a bias-motivated incident or crime.

As suggested above, following any event that might trigger backlash violence, police officials and community leaders (political, religious, educational, and business) should make explicit statements that any type of bias-motivated crime will not be tolerated. Pre-recorded public service announcements calling for tolerance may also be broadcast at this time. This is an important period for members of various community stakeholder groups to be seen together in public – standing in solidarity – discussing the issues that have arisen in the aftermath of the disaster. Physical proximity and open communication among these individuals will help demonstrate trust and promote tolerance among other community members.

**Implement the Backlash Mitigation Plan.** Community leaders must be prepared to implement the Backlash Mitigation Plan immediately following any future disaster event that might trigger bias-motivated behavior or violence. This
means that the plan must be clearly defined, and those responsible for carrying out the plan should be specifically identified and well trained. The plan should be included in all disaster response scenario training, and updated hard-copy versions should be sent to all relevant responders, including religious and community institutions. Representatives of vulnerable communities should be invited to participate in Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) and, as happens with the Red Cross and private voluntary organizations such as the Salvation Army or faith-based organizations, these representatives should function as liaisons between the EOC and their communities.

Secure Long-Term Support and Resources. Bias-motivated crimes, such as those that occurred following September 11, are socially disruptive to the larger community and may be emotionally devastating to minority communities (Cogan 2002; Peek 2003). Hence, long-term social support should be part of any Backlash Mitigation Plan and made available to both individual victims and the minority community generally. Mental health practitioners and spiritual care providers need to be accessible and aware of the impacts on a community that has suffered hate-related violence.

The backlash that followed the September 11 attacks was severe, but it could have been even worse had some local leaders not responded quickly and law enforcement officers not been deployed immediately to at-risk communities. However, most towns and cities remain un-prepared for another terrorist attack and consequent backlash. The prevention of bias-motivated incidents and hate crimes must begin well before disaster strikes and requires the ongoing and unwavering
commitment of various stakeholders in communities across the United States. The long-term benefits of pre-event planning and community alliance building will result in more effective political, law enforcement, and emergency management agency efforts immediately following a disaster, and better social outcomes for all involved.

Strong communities have agreed at many levels to accept and honor cultural and ethnic diversity. Such communities have already taken a significant step toward improving their disaster resiliency. We can build stronger buildings, create new warning systems, and develop better security systems, but disasters, and their many consequences, will still happen. Thus, local leaders must consider the importance of social integration and community collaboration as they are planning for the next disaster. The events of September 11 have had a profound impact on U.S. citizens and the world at large. During this time of reflection following that catastrophe and the subsequent consideration of new policies and programs, we must seize this opportunity to develop and adopt initiatives that work in the long term and protect, integrate, and improve our society as a whole.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and Jane I. Smith, eds. 2002. Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.


I, Lori Peek, a graduate student in the University of Colorado’s Department of Sociology, 327 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0327 (phone: 303-492-1028), am inviting you to participate in a research project. This project is being conducted under the direction of Professor Dennis S. Mileti, Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado (phone: 303-492-6315).

The purpose of this project is to learn about the experiences of Muslim students following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Specifically, this research project will be examining the responses of and reactions toward Muslim students on college and university campuses in the United States.

I have asked you to participate in a taped focus group session that will take approximately two hours to complete. The questions that I ask will be about how you have responded to the events of September 11, how others have reacted toward you, and how you have coped in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

The potential risk associated with this study is that I am asking you to reflect on a time of crisis, and I will try to avoid questions that may be uncomfortable for you to answer. I hope the focus group session benefits you by giving you the opportunity to express your thoughts, feelings, and experiences following the attacks.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason.

In addition, your privacy will be maintained in all papers and projects resulting from this study. Your name will never be used, and I will change your specific description, where appropriate, to ensure your anonymity. Interviews will be audio-taped, but these tapes will be erased immediately after transcription.

This study is being funded by a federal agency, the National Science Foundation, which requires that data be collected in a format that may be analyzed for differences between men and women and races or ethnic groups.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them – confidentially, if you wish – to the Executive Secretary, Human
Research Committee, Graduate School, 26 UCB, Regent 308, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, or by telephone to 303-492-7401. Copies of the University of Colorado Assurance of Compliance to the federal government regarding human subject research are available upon request from the Graduate School address listed above.

Please sign below to indicate that you understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research project entitled: “Religious and Ethnic Issues on University Campuses After an Act of Terrorism: Muslim Student Response.” You are being provided two copies of the informed consent form. Please keep one for your records and return the other to me before the interview begins. Thank you.

Signature of Subject: __________________________________________

Date: _________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Religious and Ethnic Issues on University Campuses After September 11:
Muslim Student Response

HRC Protocol # 0901.26

I, Lori Peek, a graduate student in the University of Colorado’s Department of Sociology, 327 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0327 (phone: 303-492-1028), am inviting you to participate in a research project. This project is being conducted under the direction of Professor Dennis S. Mileti, Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado (phone: 303-492-6315).

The purpose of this project is to learn about the experiences of Muslim students following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Specifically, this research project will be examining the responses of and reactions toward Muslim students on college and university campuses in the United States.

I have asked you to participate in a taped interview that will take approximately one hour to complete. The questions that I ask will be about how you have responded to the events of September 11, how others have reacted toward you, and how you have coped in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

The potential risk associated with this study is that I am asking you to reflect on a time of crisis, and I will try to avoid questions that may be uncomfortable for you to answer. I hope the interview benefits you by giving you the opportunity to express your thoughts, feelings, and experiences following the attacks.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason.

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Research Committee, Graduate School, 26 UCB, Regent 308, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, or by telephone to 303-492-7401. Copies of the University of Colorado Assurance of Compliance to the federal government regarding human subject research are available upon request from the Graduate School address listed above.

Please sign below to indicate that you understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research project entitled: “Religious and Ethnic Issues on University Campuses After September 11: Muslim Student Response.” You are being provided two copies of the informed consent form. Please keep one for your records and return the other to me before the interview begins. Thank you.

Signature of Subject: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer all of the items. On items that have more than one choice, please place a check mark next to your choice.

1. Today’s Date: ___________________

2. Gender:

   ______ Male
   ______ Female

3. Age: __________

4. College Major: ______________________

   ______ Undergraduate Student
   ______ Graduate Student

5. Citizenship:

   ______ United States of America
   ______ Other (please specify):

6. Place of Birth:

   ______ United States of America
   ______ Other (please specify):

7. Political Affiliation:

   ______ Democrat
   ______ Green Party
   ______ Independent
   ______ Republican
   ______ Other (please specify):

8. Marital Status:

   ______ Single
   ______ Married
   ______ Separated/Divorced
   ______ Widowed

9. How many persons (including yourself) are in your immediate family?

   ______ Persons

10. How are you employed?

    ______ Employed Full-Time
    ______ Employed Part-Time
    ______ Not Employed
    ______ Student
    ______ Other

11. Ethnic Identity:

    ______ African American/Black
    ______ Arab American
    ______ Asian American
    ______ Latino American
    ______ South Asian American
    ______ White
    ______ Other (please specify):

FOR DEMOGRAPHIC REPORTING PURPOSES ONLY. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS FORM.
APPENDIX D

CONTACT INFORMATION FORM

Name: ____________________________________________

University: ____________________________________________

Mailing Address: ____________________________________________

City: ____________________________________________

State: ________________ Zip Code: ________________

E-mail Address: ____________________________________________

Phone Number: ____________________________________________

Preferred Method of Communication: __________________________

Additional Comments: