

Gender, Martyrdom, and the Management of Stigmatized Identities among Devout Muslims in
the U.S.

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Sociology and the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Date approved: April 6, 2016

Abstract

This dissertation explores the role of gender in contemporary Islam and the daily lives of Muslim minorities in the West. Specifically, I examine how social constructions of masculinity and femininity are manifest in militant jihad, and how young Muslims in America manage the stigma placed on them as a result of jihadists' beliefs and actions. I asked how jihadists frame acts of martyrdom and mass violence, and how young Muslims in America handle the associated and ensuing stigma in daily life? To address these questions, I analyzed statements from militant jihadists and conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-six young and devout Muslims living in the Midwestern United States. Using grounded methods, I found that martyrdom acts, which include suicide attacks, were framed as self-defense, restorative rituals, and honor displays. These frames indicate that such violence—directed at others and the self—enables aggrieved men to resist foreign domination, elicit deference from others, and claim gender-based rewards. Integrating Symbolic Interactionist and pure sociological perspectives, I argue that martyrdom is a form of masculine self-help: a gender-signifying act that expresses a grievance through self-sacrificial and embodied aggression. In addition, I found that young Muslim men and women cope with collective stigmatization by defining and doing gender in culturally normative ways, especially when interacting with non-Muslim publics. Drawing on dramaturgical and identity theories, I conceptualize these stigma management strategies as allaying embodiment, benign accommodation, claiming normality, embracing stigma, communicating commitment, and claiming exceptionality. These strategies suggest that gender displays are integral to the stigma process and may be strategically deployed to protect the self in mixed-contact situations. This research also indicates that the stigma process can lead to greater commitment to religious role-identities and increased self-esteem based on the subjective interpretation and social context of traumatic events.

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks and gratitude to members of my dissertation committee, Joane Nagel, Eric Hanley, Mehrangiz Najafizadeh, Mary K. Zimmerman, and Christian S. Crandall, my beloved parents, Marzie and Kazem, my loyal brother, Parsa, my wise mentor, Bob Antonio, my entire academic family at the University of Kansas Department of Sociology, and my solicitous and willing interview participants.

In addition, I must acknowledge the following people and programs for being significant, at one point or another, in my development as a teacher, researcher, and compassionate human being: Reza Aslan, Karim Sadjadpour, Robert Jensen, Eva Vlach, Matthew Carlson, Ebenezer Obadare, Razi Ahmed, Dean Braa, Peter Callero, Peter Collier, Lewis Mennerick, Margaret Wood, Kuoray Mao, Stephanie K. Decker, John Paul, Cheryl Childers, Janelle Williams, Kyle Chapman, David Health Cooper, Robert Bombard, Mark Keaney, Lacy Haynes, LeaMarie Herron, Jessica Irving, the University of Kansas Center for Global and International Studies, the Hall Center for the Humanities, the United States Department of Education, and the Rime Center. Your guidance and continued support have been vital to my success.

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INTRODUCTION

“The fully and visibly stigmatized...must suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament” (Goffman 1963: 127)

“Stigma is as much about the resistance of identities as the reduction of identities” (Howarth 2006: 450)

To be Muslim in America is to be a problem. The cultural and political landscape in the United States following the September 11th attacks carried by al-Qa’ida, has led to anti-Muslim stereotypes, sentiments, and violence, defined collectively as “Islamophobia” (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008; Love 2009; Perry 2003). More than a decade after 9/11, this “backlash” against Muslims continues (Peek 2011). At the same time, Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S. The number of adherents will soon surpass Judaism and all other faith communities in the country, save Christianity (Mohamed 2016). The steady growth of Islam in America is contoured by many different ethnicities, nationalities, and ideological schools. In terms of age, an increasing percentage are younger people that are more devout and conservative than previous generations of Muslim-Americans (Peek 2005; Hermansen 2003). This trend is akin to the rise of identity politics among other minorities in the U.S. in earlier eras (Anderson and Cromwell 1977; Nagel 1995; Min and Kim 2000). It also makes young Muslim-Americans an increasingly significant block of the sociopolitical order in the country. Their experiences and actions will inevitably shape the trajectory and impact of Islam in arguably the most religiously diverse society in the Western world.

9/11 was a tragic moment in American history and for Muslim people around the globe. The U.S. actions following 9/11, particularly the War on Terror and U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have targeted Muslims in extraordinary and unprecedented ways, and strained relations with the Muslim world. The start of this contentious situation, at least in the eyes of

most Americans, remains the actions of nineteen men: the self-proclaimed “men of jihad” (Aaron 2008). According to Aslan (2009), these men believed they were heroic martyrs waging a “cosmic war” on behalf of Islam. Their actions have raised questions about the meaning of martyrdom in Islam (Ahmed 2003; Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005; Hafez 2007). While the religious views and identities of the 9/11 hijackers have become notorious, what often goes unsaid and unexamined is the fact that they were all men, convinced of their actions by other men. This raises the issue of gender and the role that gender plays in militant jihad. Another issue is that of motivation: how can we make sense of jihadist grievances and use of violence? More specifically, what do their grievances suggest about the relationship between martyrdom and manhood? Despite a few recent studies that have explored such issues (e.g., Aslam 2012; Von Knop 2007; Hafez 2007), these questions remain empirically under-explored and under-theorized in the sociological literature. This presupposes further study of the subjective meaning and aims of martyrdom.

The specter of terrorism looms over Muslim communities in the West, even more so after the 2015 mass-casualty attacks in Paris carried out by members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In the U.S., such violence has revived anti-Islamic sentiment, with conservative politicians, media personalities, and members of the public calling for significant restrictions on Muslim immigrants and communities. The severity of Islamophobia in America now mirrors, if not exceeds, that which immediately followed the 9/11 attacks (Obeidallah 2014; Gallup, Inc. 2011). In this “post-9/11” context, Muslim identities continue to be scrutinized and surveilled, and so the lives and standpoints of Muslims living in America are shaped by this context. An important aspect of this process is how the younger generation—those who were just kids when 9/11 happened—deal with collective stigmatization. How do they reconcile their religious role-

identities with the views and expectations of various audiences? What types of coping strategies do they use when confronted with negative feedback from others? To what extent does gender influence these strategies? And what do these strategies suggest about the social construction of masculinity and femininity? To address such questions theoretically, I turn to interactionist traditions in sociology, especially the dramaturgical perspective advanced by Erving Goffman.

Dramaturgy remains a cogent theoretical framework for making sense of what and why people do what they do in interaction with others. This framework is particularly useful for delineating the various effects of stigma on individual and collective behavior (Goffman 1963; Ryan 2011; O'Brien 2011). To avoid negative sanctions, individuals manage their impressions and define situations in ways that convince themselves and others that they belong. As a result, and as dramaturgical theorists assume, “actors present self in strategic ways” (Turner and Stets 2006: 26). Such strategic action not only reflects the agency of individuals—i.e., that we are not so “tightly programmed by culture” (p. 26)—but also that problematic identities and situations may be manageable with appropriate actions. This means that Muslim minorities can exert some control over the stigma process, for example, by engaging in rituals and behaviors that prevent their identities from “looming large” in encounters with non-Muslims, and enable them to “pass” off as “normal” members of society (Ryan 2011; Khosravi 2012). Despite the significance of stigma management to the lived-experiences and life chances of Muslims living in the West, few studies have theorized the specific ways this process unfolds in everyday life. This dissertation proposes to fill this gap in the literature by conceptualizing these coping and management processes in the context of “mixed-contacts” (Goffman 1963: 12) or, in this case, everyday encounters with non-Muslim publics.

Gender is a key dimension of identity and stigma management. How gender is displayed, both in appearance and through rituals and gestures, reveals an actor's alignment with audiences and influences the collectively shared definition of the situation (Goffman 1979). To further our understanding of gender as a social construct (e.g., as an avenue of power and source of stigma), Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) have called for a renewed emphasis on dramaturgical approaches to studies of men and masculinity. They note the current limitations of the multiple masculinities perspective (Connell 1983, 1995), and argue that interactionist analyses of gender are needed to develop new knowledge about this key aspect of social relations (p. 278).¹ In particular, they encourage researchers to focus analytic attention on “manhood acts” or what males actually *do* to claim membership as “men” and reap the associated privileges (p. 279). For males to claim the privileges and rewards of membership in the dominant gender group, they must convince others of their manhood. While having a male body certainly helps in this regard, it is what males do with them—their actions—that best explains their positions in society. For instance, violence remains a common way for males to demand recognition and elicit deference from others, and a conventional tactic of social movements, like Global Jihad (e.g., see Aslam 2012). Together, these perspectives on gender suggest that displays of masculinity and femininity are integral to the experience and effects of anti-Islamic stigma, and that martyrdom acts can be defined as manhood acts carried out, in this case, by militant jihadists. In these ways, gender displays and ideologies may help to explain both the meanings of martyrdom and the management of stigma. This dissertation thus focuses on the role of gender, especially masculinity, in contemporary Islam and the daily lives of Muslims in America. In particular, this research explores how

¹ This argument is detailed in Chapter 1.

gender influences the violent acts of militant jihadists and how young Muslim men and women manage the stigma placed on them as a result of jihadists' beliefs and actions.

Background and Methods

The first phase of this dissertation research started in September 2011, on the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. At that time, I was awarded a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship from the United States Department of Education to study the link between gender and assimilation in diaspora communities. This fellowship was renewed the following year and over the course of this time period, I identified the population under study, conceptualized the research project, and collected and analyzed my data. These data consisted of twenty-six in-depth interviews with young Muslims living in the Midwestern U.S. This decision was based on recent calls to examine the formation of ethno-religious identities in new diasporic contexts (e.g., Moghissi and Ghorashi 2010; Braziel and Mannur 2003). Aside from being a new gateway of immigration (Waters and Jimenez 2005), the Midwestern U.S. has been an active arena of anti-Islamic sentiment, including legislative efforts to ban Sharia law and restrict immigration from Muslim countries (Hancock 2011; Fantz and Brumfield 2015). My goal was to understand the experience and management of stigma among young Muslims in this particular milieu.

Participants were drawn from the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) of two large Midwestern Universities, and an Islamic center and mosque. These social spaces have been the focus of media and policy discourses on terrorism, especially the radicalization of young men (e.g., Spencer 2014; House Committee on Homeland Security 2011; Post and Sheffer 2006; Emerson 2006; Pipes 2003). Like Peek (2005: 221), I initially relied on a few key informants at the MSAs to recruit participants, coordinate interviews, and begin sampling. The majority of both men and women were identified through the MSA network and procured through this type

of “snowballing” strategy. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-eight years and were primarily 1.5 and second-generation Muslim Americans (the complete demographics are detailed on pages 61-64 and listed in Appendix B). I also attended MSA meetings and events, attended Friday Prayers and other gatherings at the Islamic Center, and occasionally met with small groups of participants for more informal discussions of issues related to the study—e.g., breaking news over government spying on MSAs, the hearings on Islamic Radicalization that occurred in March 2011, and unrest in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslim countries affected by the U.S. War on Terror. Given the focus on social meanings in this research, I used grounded methods to locate, collect, analyze, and interpret the data. This methodological approach is well-established and well-suited for qualitative analysis of interviews and extant texts (Charmaz 2006; Warren 2002; Johnson 2002; Strauss 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Decisions about when to stop interviewing and what constituted the presumptive findings and conceptual categories were all predicated on grounded theory (the entire analytic technique is described in Chapter 2).

Based on these data and methods, and rooted in critical and dramaturgical perspectives in sociology, this dissertation explores three key questions: (1) how are martyrdom acts framed in militant jihad? (2) How do young Muslims minorities cope with anti-Islamic stigma related to these acts? And (3) what role does gender play in both of these processes? I address these questions in separate chapters—or studies—of this dissertation. Although each chapter contains an abstract, the main focus and findings are as follows. The first chapter details the framing activities of jihadists in order to explicate the subjective interpretation and aims of martyrdom acts. The crux of this chapter is the conceptualization of *masculine self-help* and the argument that martyrdom and mass violence are gender-signifying acts. The second chapter elaborates dramaturgical theories and the concept of *gender displays* (Goffman 1979) by illustrating how

young Muslim men in America manage encounters with non-Muslim publics in gender-specific ways. This chapter shows how masculinity is integral to stigma management, especially during mixed-contacts. The third chapter draws on Identity theory and Goffman's (1963) concept of "moral careers" to make sense of the coping strategies of young Muslim women. More broadly, this chapter establishes the impact of commitment and identity salience on the coping strategies and self-esteem of stigmatized persons. In addition, I conducted a textual analysis of *In Their Words: Voices of Jihad* (Aaron 2008), a compendium of statements from jihadists compiled by the RAND Corporation. This text contains more than 300 direct quotations and statements from contemporary leaders, prominent historical figures, and rank-and-file members of the movement, some of whom have successfully carried out suicide attacks and other so-called "martyrdom operations" (p. 89). The quotes were derived from a variety of sources, including books, articles, interviews, communiques, and online posts, and translated from Arabic to English (p. xii). This text and the analytic approach toward it are detailed in Chapter 1. Combined with the in-depth interviews, these constituted appropriate data for exploring the social construction of gender in contemporary Islam, in particular, and the social meaning of martyrdom and management of stigma, in general.

This dissertation research stands to make several contributions to sociological research on gender, violence, stigma, and the self. First, each chapter builds on and extends dramaturgical theories of gender: Chapter 1 conceptualizes martyrdom acts as a form of gender-signification. Chapter 2 theorizes the role and influence of gender displays in stigma management, and Chapter 3 demonstrates the self-protective properties of the stigma process. The dissertation's second major contribution involves new evidence in two areas: how violence is framed by jihadists and how stigma is managed by young Muslims in America. Considering the limited research about

the construction and negotiation of Muslim identities in Western contexts, this project will expand what we know—and what we can reasonably say—about these processes. The third contribution of this work is to understanding the link between gender and militant jihad by shedding light on the impetus for martyrdom in social movements, as well as the role of gender in facing and managing stigma. Gender is an important factor that remains underappreciated in explanations of collective violence and the strategies used to cope with collective stigmatization. By illustrating how gender, global jihad, and the everyday experiences of young Muslims are intertwined, this research may be used to develop more appropriate and effective interventions for preventing radicalization, on the one hand, and challenging stigma labels, on the other.

CHAPTER 1

Masculine Self-Help: Martyrdom and Mass Violence as Gender Signifying Acts in Militant Jihad

Abstract

Martyrdom has a central and increasingly popular role in Islamic social movements, but remains undertheorized and empirically underexplored in sociological studies. In this chapter, I examine the social meanings and aims of martyrdom acts by analyzing the statements of jihadists. I find that these violent acts to be framed as *self-defense*, *restorative rituals*, and *honor displays*. Such frames indicate that, in the context of Global Jihad, martyrdom constitutes a violent repertoire of contention that enables aggrieved men to resist domination, elicit deference, and claim gender-based rewards. Through integrating critical constructionist perspectives on gender and Donald Black's theory of self-help, along with recent critiques of Black's pure sociology framework, I argue that martyrdom is a form of *masculine self-help*—a gender signifying act that constitutes an expression of a grievance through self-sacrificial and embodied aggression. This conceptual approach suggests that gender ideologies are critical to understanding why acts of martyrdom and mass violence are advocated over other methods of handling grievances, and that masculine self-help is a major impetus for men's violence in social movements.

The Contested Meanings and Aims of Martyrdom Acts

Martyrdom has played a significant role in social movements, but only recently become associated with mass violence on a global scale. In Islam, martyrdom (*shahadat*) refers to self-sacrifice on behalf of the *ummah*, or Muslim community, and is deemed an expression of *jihad*, or struggle “for the cause of God” (Allah) (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005: 11-13; Aslam 2012: 107-08). Unlike martyrdom in Judeo-Christian and Eastern religious traditions that equate this practice with “bearing witness” to injustice, martyrdom in Islam is a tactic directed at perceived enemies (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005). To illustrate by contrast: whereas Christian martyrs have historically died for refusing to obey restrictions on Christianity (e.g., in ancient Rome), Muslim martyrs have often been the initiators of violence. The purpose of self-sacrifice in the latter case is “to annihilate the enemy” (p.6), be they infidels, oppressive rulers, or apostates. This form of “offensive martyrdom” (p.6) thus represents a break from other religious and philosophical bases for self-sacrificial violence. The consensus among Islamic scholars is that martyrdom is only appropriate in the context of *jihad* (Ahmed 2003; Aslan 2009), but the rise of political Islam and militant jihadist movements have raised new questions about the impetus and legitimate exercise of this violence, especially in terms of the line between *haraam* (forbidden acts in Islam) and *Istishhad* (honorable death in defense of Islam). In this sense, martyrdom acts reveal serious divisions within Islamic theology and among Muslims.

Along these lines, acts of martyrdom in global *jihad* are controversial because they target Muslims *and* non-Muslims alike. One highly controversial and increasingly popular type of martyrdom is the suicide attack, “an operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator” (Ganor 2006: 6). Among jihadists, these violent acts are referred to as “martyrdom operations” (Aaron 2008: 89-92; Aslan 2009; Kepel 2004;

Ahmed 2003; Chriss 2007: Chapter 9). This term is used in part to situate such violence in the context of “holy war” and distinguish it from suicide and murder, both of which are haraam and strictly prohibited by Islamic laws (Aslan 2009: 102; Hafez 2007). For example, Hafez (2007) shows how jihadists use warrior narratives to create images of the *heroic martyr* so as to justify and glorify suicide missions, and to mobilize Muslims to carry them out. The distinct character of martyrdom as a violent “repertoire of contention” (Tilly 2003) in militant jihadist movements has prompted scholars to further examine the impetus for these acts, especially the motivations of martyrs (Aslan 2009: Chapter 4; Lankford 2013: Chapter 8; David 2013; Khosrohavar and Macey 2005: Chapter 3; Kimmel 2005; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003; Freamon 2003). While questions of motive are certainly important and warrant consideration, less attention has been paid to what martyrdom acts signify about the identities of the men who advocate and commit them. Before proceeding to the latter issue, which is the focus of this research, I briefly review some assertions that researchers have already made in relation to both questions.

In the literature on suicide terrorism, researchers have claimed that martyrdom operations are a rational and calculated form of resistance (Pape and Feldman 2010; Sageman 2008; Ganor 2006; Crenshaw 2006; Pape 2005). In other words, martyrdom is a form of political protest. For example, through extensive quantitative analyses of suicide attacks around the world, Pape and Feldman (2010) conclude that such violence is a direct response to foreign military occupation. Their conclusion is supported in part by a pair of striking statistics: (1) all major suicide terrorist campaigns between 1980 and 2009, “which together comprise 96% of the 2,188 attacks during that period,” are linked to the presence of foreign troops in “territory that the terrorists prize” (p. 10), and (2) the ratio of suicide bombers per million is ten times higher in Sunni-majority countries that are host to American military forces than those without such attacks (p. 186). For

jihadist movements like al-Qa'ida and the more recent Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), these operations have targeted civilians, militaries, and symbolic social institutions with the expressed purpose of coercing foreign nation-states to withdraw from Muslim lands and for destabilizing local Islamic regimes that are seen as proxies for foreign powers (McCants 2015; Hafez 2007; Chriss 2007: Chapter 7; Pape 2005). Geopolitical factors thus appear to shape the choice and trajectory of this violence. In particular, suicide attacks appear to be linked to the political autonomy of Muslim communities and perceived efficacy in deterring outside threats and/or punishing accomplices. This work suggests that martyrdom is a manifestation of political struggles for self-determination and self-preservation.

While Pape and fellow researchers make a compelling statistical case about the drivers of martyrdom and mass violence, other scholars contend that these acts are not just an expression of political grievances, but also of extreme religiosity and sectarianism (Aslan 2009; Atran 2006; Moghadam 2006; Crenshaw 2006; Khosrokhavar and Macy 2005; Jurgensmeyer 2003; Stern 2003). Through interviews with would-be suicide bombers and their supporters, Atran (2006: 132-34) found these acts to be inspired by the desire to advance a “Salafist vision of Islam.” Salafism is the ideological mainstay of most jihadist groups, emphasizing a utopian vision of a unified Islamic nation or “neo-umma” (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005: 151). Unlike Islamist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, these Salafi and Wahhabi-inspired jihadists are not content with the removal of foreign occupiers from Muslim territories—they seek the “purification” of Islam and the resurrection of a Sunni caliphate (McCants 2015; Roy and Boubekeur 2012; Khosrokhavar 2009; Gerges 2006; Roy 2004). In their view, modern nation-states, including those with Muslim-majorities, have “strayed from the true path of Islam” (Atran 2006: 128) and that “the only way back is through violent jihad” (p. 133). By relegating the role of religion in

explaining the incidence of suicide attacks, Atran accuses Pape and other politically-focused scholars of discounting the religious dimensions of these acts and thereby misrepresenting what motivates them. In other words, determining the impetus for martyrdom in jihadist movements presupposes an understanding of the aspirations of adherents: how do jihadists define these acts and come to see themselves as responsible for carrying them out? Such questions suggest that the meanings attributed to martyrdom are central to explaining why these acts arise in social movements like Global Jihad.

Other recent accounts have linked martyrdom not to political or religious grievances, but to mental illness. From this perspective, attempts to understand what martyrs seek and why they seek it distracts from the underlying psychological issues that are manifest in their deadly actions (Lankford 2012; Kix 2010). For example, in *The Myth of Martyrdom*, Lankford (2012) calls into question the experts on suicide terrorism, including Pape and Atran, by arguing that martyrs are basically *suicidal*. Using a combination of suicide notes and biographical information, Lankford claims that individuals who kill themselves in the course of killing others are, above all, driven by the desire to end their own troubled lives. That is, martyrdom is not a political or puritanical practice, but rather a pathological one—rooted in the psychological problems of the perpetrators. This perspective appeals to Western audiences that may more readily accept assertions that suicide bombers are simply sick people (after all, there *must* be something mentally wrong with individuals that hijack planes and crash them into buildings). However, such arguments are often reductionist and ethnocentric. For instance, Lankford argues that framing of martyrdom in Islam as honorable and altruistic is nothing more than propaganda for attracting new recruits and encouraging them to carry out suicide attacks. While this may be true, he then equates legitimate self-sacrifice with the actions of American soldiers and other “true martyrs.” This distinction not

only reveals how cultural narratives and political interests influence the meaning of martyrdom, but also reinforces normative boundaries around the use of violence (i.e., what forms of violence are deemed socially acceptable, in what context, and by whom). For this reason, explanations of martyrdom as psychopathology remain controversial and in the minority. Still, the competing claims of Lankford and other scholars indicate the need to further examine the intended and actual aims of martyrdom. In particular, none of the aforementioned works directly address the role of gender in defining, driving, and justifying these acts.

The Gender of Martyrdom in Global Jihad: Martyrdom Acts as Manhood Acts?

Whether driven by politics, religion, or illness, what often goes unsaid is that martyrdom in global jihad is almost exclusively practiced by men—young men. The impetus for these acts may also be rooted in gender-based grievances and reflect masculine cultural scripts. Since 9/11, a growing number of scholars have started to examine the relationship between martyrdom and masculinity in Islam (e.g., Aslam 2012; Rohde 2008; Kimmel 2005; Gerami 2005; 2002). Their research directs our attention to the ways in which martyrdom acts invoke notions of manhood, including what Muslim men feel entitled to and obligated to do, and how they collaborate in the construction of Islamic masculinity. For example, Gerami (2002: 267) describes the ideal type of Muslim martyr as “a young, unmarried (virgin, innocent) man fearless and strong...with eyes cast forward to jihad and the blessed state of martyrdom...He protects the women, children, and country’s honor.” Notions of honor, bravery, glory, purity, and pride not only distinguish the identities of these mostly-male martyrs, but also the grievances that prompt their violent acts. According to Kimmel (2005), martyrdom operations, like the 9/11 attacks, are a consequence of the adverse and gendered effects of globalization on Muslims around the world. Among these effects have been the proletarianization and marginalization of formerly privileged men that, in

turn, has motivated oppositional movements that “take the veneer of restoring manhood” (p. 416). In examining the biography of Mohammad Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, Kimmel argues that suicide missions are embedded in politics of masculinity, including men’s frustration with dwindling economic opportunities, resentment over the breakdown of traditional patriarchies, and other shifts in the gender order that have accompanied the rise of global capitalism. The resulting inability of men like Atta to claim membership in the dominant gender group thus contributes to their radicalization and leads them to see martyrdom as a means to overcome feelings of personal defeat and humiliation. In this sense, martyrdom is a masculine mode of recourse for disaffected and downwardly mobile men.

Recognizing martyrdom acts as a consequence of gender politics is compelling, at least for Western feminists and scholars, and yet empirical linkages between the two remains thin. For instance, Kimmel’s suggestion that the 9/11 attacks were driven in part by gender-based grievances tied to globalization was based on a single case profile of a single individual, Atta, and similar claims have been made using limited evidence—e.g., piecemeal biographies and general observations (Brison 2009; Gerami 2003; Sarikakis 2002; Lorber 2002). More empirical evidence is therefore necessary in order to assess, let alone advance, claims that martyrdom and mass violence in global jihad are also somehow rooted in a *crisis of masculinity*. Recently, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) outlined an agenda for future research on men and masculinity that may clarify the gender dimensions of martyrdom in the context of global jihad. They have pointed out some limitations of the prevailing “multiple masculinities” perspective and called on researchers to refocus their analyses on men’s gendered practices, such as what men actually *do* to achieve dominance. In their view, too much of the sociology of gender literature has focused on cataloging various forms of masculinity or what they refer to as “men-and-(fill in the blank)”

patterns (2009:278). Over time, this has led to “categorical essentialism” (p. 281) in studies of different groups of men and yielded diminishing theoretical returns that explain how males construct identities as “men” and what men’s practices specifically share that “makes them masculinity.”² In order to avoid the pitfalls of the multiple masculinities approach, they suggest revisiting symbolic interactionist perspectives on gender³ by exploring how men, individually and collectively, signify masculinity and what consequences these signifying practices present for women and other groups of men. In other words, rather than cataloguing the various features of “jihadi masculinity,” scholars should direct analytic attention toward the specific types of acts that enable jihadists to signify a masculine self. Insofar as martyrdom acts are gender-signifying acts, they serve as an important and further illustration of doing masculinity.

Toward this end, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009: 289) encourage researchers to document and analyze “manhood acts” or the identity work that males do to claim identities and privileges as men. Manhood acts are, of course, socially learned, historically and cross-culturally variable, and are contoured by social class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, and other social forces. Nevertheless, they are bound by a common theme: “the desire to claim an identity as a member of a privileged gender group,” which entails “signifying a capacity to exert control over one’s self, the environment, and others” (p. 286). This theme suggests that manhood acts share certain aims: “claiming privilege, eliciting deference, and resisting exploitation” (p. 281). Identifying these aims in terms of specific actions can help overcome the aforementioned categorical essentialism and reification of masculinities, and also show *how* males achieve dominance.

² In other words, “The implicit claim is that all members of a category (e.g., Black masculinity, gay masculinity, working class masculinity) practice an identifiable unique form of masculinity,” which “can cause us to lose sight of what these allegedly diverse gender-signifying practices have in common that makes them masculinity” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 281).

³ For example, Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985); West and Zimmerman (1987).

Men's violence, for example, has long served as an exercise of gender power and been motivated by a desire to establish or resist domination (Kaufman 2001). In this way, violent acts constitute manhood acts. Examining the aims of martyrdom may offer insights into the role of gender in prompting these acts, including the extent of embodiment (i.e., how male bodies serve as assets for committing martyrdom and signifying manhood) and degree of institutionalization (e.g. why martyrs are deemed heroes in Islamic movements and thus come to epitomize Muslim manhood). The framework put forth by Schrock and Schwalbe suggests that martyrdom in global jihad is rooted in the gender subjectivities of jihadists, and that delineating the expressed aims of these acts can clarify the apparent role of masculinity, and offer another way to conceptualize them.

Martyrdom as Violent Self-Help

Although scholars disagree about what motivates martyrdom, the above explanations all share the premise that these acts constitute a response to a grievance. It is here that the work of sociologist Donald Black provides a conceptual bridge for further distinguishing such violence. Black (2004; 2000; 1998: 74; 1983) proposes that most violent acts⁴ are forms of *self-help*, which he defines as “the handling of a grievance by unilateral aggression.” With respect to martyrdom, whether grievances are political, religious, or gender-based, they are handled with violence all the same. According to Black (1998: 31), aggrieved individuals and groups use different types of self-help in “an effort to achieve compensation, or restitution, for a harm that has been done.” The concept of self-help represents one way that conflicts are managed; other responses include avoidance (temporary or permanent curtailment of interaction), negotiation

⁴ According to Black (1998: 74-75), violent forms of self-help include “massive assaults resulting in numerous deaths... fighting, beating, and killing between family members, friends, acquaintances, ethnic groups, and nations.” Non-violent forms of self-help include “quick and simple gestures of disapproval, such as glares and frowns,” as well as gossip, taunting, and ridicule.

(working toward a mutual agreement), settlement by a third party (deferred decision), and toleration (inaction) (Chapter 5). Violence is an extreme form of self-help and is more likely to arise in conflicts where the parties are unequal in terms of social status and/or are “uninclined or unable” to resolve their issues using laws (p. 3) [see Black (1998) for complete discussion of the social structure of self-help]. By contrast, avoidance and negotiation are more common among parties of equal status and similar access to legal recourse.⁵ This interesting take on self-help is applicable to martyrdom, delimiting these acts strictly in terms of grievances.

This conceptual approach to self-help has been used to explain both collective and self-inflicted violence (e.g., see Manning 2012; Cooney and Phillips 2002; Senechal de la Roche 1996). However, current applications of the concept do not focus on or appropriately address acts of martyrdom in Islam and cannot be readily extended. For example, Black (2004: 15) defines the ideal type of terrorism, *pure terrorism*, as “self-help by organized civilians who covertly inflict mass violence on other civilians.” Although the definition of pure terrorism seems applicable to martyrdom in global jihad, conflating the two is problematic on both definitional and political grounds. Martyrdom acts may involve the use of mass violence, but unlike pure terrorism they are often overt (e.g., pronounced publicly) and target both civilians and militaries (Aslan 2009; Hafez 2007; Riedel 2007; Hoffman and McCormick 2004). Insofar as terrorism lies in “the eye of the beholder” (Turk 2004), defining martyrdom as a form of pure terrorism also reflects and serves the interests of targeted groups. Similarly, Blackian scholars have classified suicide, the “self-application of lethal violence,” as an expression of grievances (Manning 2012: 208). Using historical cases of suicide, Manning shows how some suicidal acts

⁵ This is thought to explain why violent self-help occurs more often in conflicts where avoidance and other types of conflict management are “difficult or impossible” (Black 1998: 82).

serve as a mode of social protest or moral punishment directed at another party.⁶ Acts of martyrdom in global jihad are also punitive and like suicide in other cases and contexts (e.g., Canetto and Cleary 2012; Fincham et al. 2011; Counts 1987), these acts are highly gendered. Such specifications of suicidal behavior suggest that martyrdom acts may be defined as a distinct form of self-help.

While Black's definition of self-help has the potential to inform our understanding of martyrdom, questions have also been raised about the theoretical framework, *pure sociology*,⁷ within which this and other concepts have been formulated. The crux of pure sociology since its inception nearly four decades ago has been the scientific distinction of sociology, particularly through efforts to "purify" the field of psychology (Black 2004; 1998; 1983; 1976). According to Black and fellow scholars (e.g., Manning 2012; Campbell 2009, 2010; Cooney and Phillips 2002), a purely sociological approach to the study of social behavior must focus on the behavior of social structures and not individuals or collectivities. That is, sociologists should consciously ignore psychological factors, including people's attitudes, intentions, and goals, because these data make sociological theories prone to subjectivity and undermine the discipline's ability to explain and predict social phenomenon. For instance, Black (2004: 15) contends that violence is "unpredictable and unexplainable only if we seek its origins in the characteristics of individuals (such as their beliefs or frustrations) or in the characteristics of societies, communities, or other collectivities (such as cultural values and level of inequality)." Rather than the expressed aims of perpetrators, sociologists should concentrate on defining the behavior of violence itself (i.e., the location and direction of violence in social space). By dismissing human thoughts, feelings, and

⁶ For example, in highly patriarchal societies, women have used suicide or the threat of suicide as a way of handling grievances against their husbands and for coercing them to change their behavior (Counts 1987).

⁷ As a theoretical strategy, pure sociology attempts to explain and predict human behavior by examining its "social geometry," or the location and direction of human relations in social space (Black (2004: 15; 1998; 1983).

intentions—the stuff of subjectivity—as extraneous to explanations of violence, Black’s pure sociology perspective suggests that neither the meanings jihadists’ attribute to martyrdom nor their subjective aims can be used to properly theorize these acts.

Marshall (2008) and Turner (2008) have put forth critiques of pure sociology, including its lack of purported objectivity, empirical support, explanatory power, testability, and falsifiability as a scientific method. While addressing these extensive criticisms is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is possible to parse and clarify two issues that pertain to the central focus of this study: (1) the role of subjectivity and (2) suitable empirical support. First, the explicit disregard and implicit use of subjectivities in Black’s work renders his core concepts confusing and empirically problematic. The term “self-help,” for instance, implies that the interpretations and intentions of actors influence how, when, where, and why they engage in violence in order to handle grievances. In scrutinizing the aforementioned concept of pure terrorism, Marshall (2008: 220) asks: “Does the inclusion of self-help in the definition require one to ascertain the (subjective) motivations of terrorists in order to decide whether to include them?” For Blackian scholars, the answer is no. And yet research on jihadist groups has shown that subjectivities *do matter* for making sense of their choice and use of violence (Aslam 2012; Aslan 2009; Khosrokhavar 2009; Hafez 2007; Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005). For example, through interviews with inmates accused of plotting terrorist acts, scholars found that feelings of shame, humiliation, and marginalization, along with perceptions of Western arrogance, were articulated motives for their activities (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005). The video testimonies of suicide bombers, including that of Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the four men who coordinated and carried out the 7/7 attacks in London, reveals how anger and indignation over the persecution of

Muslims also motivated them to carry out their missions (Aslan 2009: 51-52). These cases indicate that the subjectivities of actors are indeed important for understanding martyrdom.

Second, Black's framework continues to lack adequate and appropriate empirical support. The problem lies with verifying concepts, like self-help, based on the data and methodological approach of pure sociology. According to Marshall (2008: 219), the sampling frames for these studies are too large, consisting of the "totality of human history," which leads to opportunistic and arbitrary selection of evidence. The specific evidence used to support Black's concepts and claims are therefore questionable. For example, Black (2004: 16) never specifies the historical range or contexts involving pure terrorism and considers certain attacks (e.g., 9/11) to be a case of pure terrorism but not others (e.g., the Oklahoma City bombings) by simply distinguishing some as an attack on the state and not civilians. In many cases, however, both civilians and state institutions are deliberately targeted (Hoffman and McCormick 2004). Because of such dubious definitional criteria and problematic sampling frames, Blackian concepts remain "unvalidated and awkward" (Marshall 2008: 222), which cast doubts over their empirical status. Based on their stance on subjectivity, Black and other pure sociologists also dismiss evidence that seems relevant to explaining the type and occurrence of violent acts, such as self-report data, while at the same time inferring from them to construct pure sociology concepts. Self-help, for instance, suggests that actors consciously direct actions in order to bring about "some more satisfactory state" (p. 226). Support for this concept presupposes evidence of the interpretive processes through which actors identify and attempt to achieve desired goals—precisely the evidence that pure sociologists reject. So, while the concept of self-help may develop our understanding of martyrdom, it lacks the right kind of evidence. Analyzing the social meanings that jihadists attribute to martyrdom acts, along with the taken-for-granted role of gender, may address these

shortcomings and criticisms. In order to capture and assess these meanings, I turn to the framing perspective in social movements.

Framing Acts of Martyrdom

How jihadists make sense of, or *frame*, martyrdom is one indication of their subjective aims. Frames refer to “schemata of interpretation” that people use to define social situations and occurrences (Goffman (1974: 21). This concept has been elaborated by social movements scholars to mean discourses that define issues, events, activities and other phenomena in the social world by locating them in a larger system of meaning (Snow and Byrd 2010; Snow 2004; Benford and Snow 2000; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Snow 1986). In practical terms, frames enable people to “interpret their experiences, identify the source of their problems, and develop a response to those problems” (Fitzgerald 2009: 185). For instance, following 9/11 attacks, U.S. leaders used an “injustice” frame in order to mobilize the American public in support of preemptive military actions abroad and acceptance of new surveillance and security measures at home (Entman 2003). In practice, *framing* is used by people to “construct, negotiate, and redefine meanings about a problem” (Coe 2011: 296; Snow and Benford 1988: 198). The framing of 9/11 involved media and policy discourses that defined the event as a watershed moment that ushered in a new era with new enemies, hence the U.S. “War on Terror.” So, framing is “meaning work”⁸ that groups draw on to “legitimize and motivate collective action” (Benford and Snow 2000: 613). The concepts of frame and framing can help us to better understand acts of martyrdom in the context of global jihad by directing

⁸Benford and Snow (2000: 613) define “meaning work” as “the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings.”

analytic attention toward the discursive processes through which such violence is interpreted, endorsed, and perpetuated.

Examining the ways in which martyrdom is framed by jihadists sheds light on what these acts signify, and yet relatively few studies have specifically examined the framing activities of jihadists themselves (Snow and Byrd 2010; Aslan 2009; Hafez 2007; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003). Among these, Snow and Byrd (2010: 131) analyzed the framing activities of al-Qa'ida and other Islamic extremist groups and found differences in the ideological basis for martyrdom. Their analysis indicated that these acts are “nurtured and developed” through social movement activities in which framing processes are central.⁹ Because suicide is considered *haraam* (forbidden in Islam), these movements conjure images of the *shahid* (martyr), characterized by his commitment and self-sacrifice, in order to frame suicide attacks as martyrdom acts. Similarly, in examining the framing of martyrdom operations during the Iraqi insurgency, Hafez (2007: 95) found that jihadists used emotional narratives to “mythologize martyrdom” by casting suicide bombers as “heroic martyrs.” Still, many of these studies have failed to theorize this violence and determine, at least directly, how masculinity is involved in the framing process.¹⁰ I build on these gaps in the literature by examining how martyrdom acts are framed by jihadists and what role gender plays in this process.

This research thus stands to make a few modest empirical and conceptual contributions to the sociological literature on gender and violence. First, by making masculinity visible as a key aspect of martyrdom in global jihad, this study further illustrates the link between gender identity

⁹ Snow and Byrd (2010) analyzed and differentiated the core framing tasks (e.g., diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing) as well as the processes of frame articulation and elaboration to make the claim that “Islamic terrorist movements” are not ideologically “monolithic.”

¹⁰ While Hafez (2007) notes that “appeals to manhood” inform a range of issues and motivations jihadists use to frame martyrdom, he does not explain how or in what ways.

and violent behavior, especially how men's subjectivities are conditioned by the framing of this behavior. Second, using a gender lens to delineate the frames used to define martyrdom can help illustrate the degree to which these acts constitute "manhood acts" and signify possession of a masculine self (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Examining martyrdom via the expressed motives and aims of jihadists may also address criticisms of Blackian concepts, like self-help, particularly the exclusion of human subjectivities and lack of empirical support. With these contributions in mind, I now present the data and methodological approach taken to do so.

DATA & METHODS

Jihadists (*mujahedin*¹¹) are the self-proclaimed true believers and self-identifying holy warriors of Islam. They are members of a multifaceted militant Islamic movements that espouse visions of global transformation and encourages violence as a means of advancing their interests (Gerges 2009; Aslan 2009; McCants 2015). In particular, jihadists exhibit a "zealous devotion to the glories of martyrdom" (Aslan 2009: 7) as evidenced by the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., the 7/7 suicide bombings in London, the near daily suicide attacks during the Iraq War and in its wake, and, most recently, the November 10th attacks on Paris by ISIS members. Given their grandiose goals and signature use of martyrdom operations, jihadists have been described as "heavy metal Muslims" (Roy and Boubekour 2012) waging a "cosmic war" against infidels and other non-believers (Aslan 2009). Despite the apparent successes of the U.S.-led War on Terror, their movement activities continue, as does their membership, numbering in the millions (McCants 2015; Gerges 2006). In contrast to Islamist groups whose suicide missions have been confined to local and regional conflicts, jihadists have expanded the scope of violence to over twenty-two

¹¹ "Mujahedin" literally refers to "those who wage jihad" (Aslan 2006: 271).

countries around the world (Roy and Boubekeur 2012; Aslan 2009; Gerges 2009; Sageman 2008). Because of jihadists, martyrdom acts have gone global.

In order to delineate the subjective meanings and aims of martyrdom in militant jihad, I coded and analyzed data from the compendium, *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad* (Aaron 2008). According to the editor, this compendium is intended to provide students and researchers with “unfiltered access to a broad range of the stories, rationales, ideas, and arguments” of global jihad—as expressed by jihadists themselves (Aaron 2008: iii). This text contains more than 300 direct quotations and statements from contemporary leaders (e.g., Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Musab al-Zarqawi), prominent historical figures (e.g., Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Faraj) and rank-and-file members of the movement, some of whom successfully carried out suicide attacks (e.g., Mohammad Sidique Khan, Ali Hussein al-Samari). The quotes were derived from a number of different sources, including books, articles, interviews, and web postings, and were translated from Arabic to English. The decision to analyze martyrdom frames using these data was straightforward given the central and increasing role of such violence in jihadist movements (Aslam 2012; Aslan 2009; Hafez 2007; Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005: Chapter 3). Compared with other texts that have documented the biographies and goals of jihadists (e.g., Hafez 2007; Sageman 2008), the RAND compendium offered a significantly broader set of accounts about the ideological basis for and use of violence, and, in doing so, minimized cherry-picking and other potential biases (a more detailed discussion of bias is included in the Conclusion chapter). Considering the challenges and dangers¹² associated with obtaining information on jihadist

¹² Aaron (2008: xi) notes that locating and accessing jihadist internet web sites is difficult in large part because these sites “come and go, closed down by various authorities or abandoned by their creators, who may switch to password protected sites” (pp. xi-xii). The authors also “regularly move sites to avoid attracting the attention of hackers and internet service providers” (p. xii).

networks, for researchers and lay inquirers alike, this text also served as a unique and secure source of data on movement activities.

Analytic Technique

My analysis of the data was guided by three interrelated questions. How do jihadists frame martyrdom acts? What do these frames reveal about the meaning of martyrdom and mass violence in global jihad? What do these meanings indicate about the impetus for these acts in social movements more generally? Given the focus on framing and meaning construction in this research, I used Grounded Theory (GT) methods to analyze the data.¹³ This methodological approach is particularly useful in examining subjectivities using extant texts (Charmaz 2006: 35-36). So, the meanings of martyrdom were “grounded” in the data. I situated the data, source, and my research approach within the sociopolitical and cultural context of the study. I also took a constructivist stance governed by the notion that social reality is “pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized” (Creswell and Miller 2000: 125). For instance, even as these data were packaged and presented as jihadi views on “virtually every subject relevant to their cause,” and in their “actual words” (Aaron 2008: iii), I maintained a critical approach toward the content and structure of the text, including which actors and what types of statements were included (or excluded), and the extent to which the text reflected or perpetuated prevailing discourses on terrorism and Islamic extremism in Western societies. In adopting this method, I regarded both the data and my analysis as products of subjective reality—i.e., recognizing that the data and my reading of it were shaped by both the editor’s assumptions and interests, as well as my standpoint

¹³ By GT methods, I refer to research that “focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data” (Charmaz 2006: 187). Scholars have long used GT methods to develop theories of social processes, beginning with empirical observations (Charmaz 2009; DeVault and McCoy 2003; Strauss 1995; Guba and Lincoln 1994; Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

as a researcher. Therefore, my goal was not to conjure an objective “Truth” about martyrdom in global jihad but rather to identify and offer a way of conceptualizing these acts.

I analyzed the data by coding, organizing, and comparing statements on martyrdom acts, developing categories to represent these statements, and sorting the main categories into frames. I coded the raw data in stages: initial, focused, and theoretical coding. During initial coding, I studied and named each quotation in the text by coding the data line-by-line (Charmaz 2006: 50-53) and created open codes in order to capture and condense the substance of each quote. While only a few sections of the compendium were dedicated exclusively to martyrdom operations and suicide attacks, I found that references to martyrs and martyrdom acts permeated the data—there were over one hundred fifty direct mentions and many that indirectly eluded to them. Using the qualitative analysis software N-vivo (9.0), I defined, sorted, cataloged, grouped the open codes together into categories (called “nodes” in N-vivo) in order to identify and clarify patterns in the data (Dahlgren, Emmelin, and Winkvist 2004). I then used comparative methods to evaluate the initial codes, spot similarities and differences among them, and to delineate categories and subcategories. Among the most salient categories I defined during this stage were: moralistic, obligatory, defensive, honorable, restorative, agentic, altruistic, and heroic.

In focused coding, I refined and specified the above categories to develop an analytic frame for the data. Drawing on Benford and Snow’s (2000) typology of core framing tasks,¹⁴ I distinguished the framing processes through which jihadists’ viewed martyrdom. In comparing these framing tasks, I discovered that acts of martyrdom and mass violence were most often

¹⁴ Benford and Snow’s (2000: 616) typology of core framing tasks consist of: *diagnostic framing*, which creates a shared understanding of a problematic condition and identifies the source of the condition, often by attributing blame or responsibility to a specific actor or set of actors; *prognostic framing*, which outlines a “plan of attack” for resolving the issue; and the likely consequences; and *motivational framing* or “a call to arms” (p. 617), which is used to inspire movement members to act and to legitimate the proposed action.

framed in motivational terms, “to inspire movement members to act and to legitimate the proposed action” (p. 617). I also determined that jihadists engaged in both “internal framing” (Coe 2011: 501), or framing martyrdom through communications with one another, and framing geared toward outsiders—e.g., potential followers and perceived enemies of their movement. During this stage, I revisited and reassessed the initial codes, removing those that were irrelevant or tangentially related to this motivational framing process, and searched back through the data for disconfirming evidence, such as inconsistencies among the prospective frames (Charmaz 2006; Dahlgren et al. 2004; Cresswell and Miller 2000: 127). Through this focused coding, I delineated the main motivational frames for martyrdom as *self-defense*, *restorative rituals*, and *honor displays*—frames which I detail in the findings below.

In the final stage, I examined the interconnections among the main frames so as to move the analysis toward a theoretical explanation (Glaser 1978: 72). In relating these frames to one another on an abstract level, I discovered that, on the one hand, martyrdom acts were defined as a legitimate response to jihadist grievances, consistent with Black’s (1998: 74) definition of self-help, and, on the other hand, the expressed aims of these acts reflected Schrock and Schwalbe’s (2009: 281) conceptualization of manhood acts. By elaborating the focused codes in theoretical terms, I determined that the concepts of self-help and manhood acts were apparent in the frames. Thus, I was able distinguish, build, and posit an emergent theory of martyrdom and masculinity. In the next section, I present the main martyrdom frames as findings and illustrate the ways in which these frames are indicative of masculine self-help.

CONSTRUCTING MARTYRDOM FRAMES

In analyzing the statements of jihadists, I found that martyrdom acts were framed as self-defense, restorative rituals, and honor displays. These frames were “motivational” insofar as

they served as a “call to arms” and a “rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action” (Benford and Snow 2000: 617). First, jihadists framed martyrdom as a form of *self-defense*—defending Islam and the ummah from outsiders, including foreign militaries, autocratic regimes, and rival sects. Second, they framed martyrdom as *restorative rituals*—necessary for purging perceived enemies, restoring Islamic hegemony, and paving the way for the caliphate. Lastly, these acts were articulated as *honor displays*—as ways of preserving one’s dignity, redressing humiliations experienced by Muslim people, and delivering justice on behalf of Allah. In their view, various outsiders have instigated a global war on Islam that has destroyed and devastated Muslim communities, and subverted Islamic ways of life. This conflict cannot be resolved using non-violence (e.g., through physical separation or diplomatic agreements that entrust foreign and local governments). In this context, jihadists framed so-called “martyrdom operations” as divine retribution. Such violence enabled them to resist domination and exploitation, “re”establish certain privileges, and elicit deference from others by claiming exclusive identities as martyrs of Islam. In the words of Omar Bakr Mohammad, a jihadi cleric who endorsed the July 7th 2005 suicide bombings in London: “the self-sacrifice operation is the only way of life for those who resist” (Aaron 2008: 82). Although their statements often reflected some combination of these frames, I discuss them separately in order to show how each constructs martyrdom as a gender-signifying form of self-help.

Self-Defense

One way jihadists framed martyrdom acts were as self-defense against threats to Islam and the ummah posed by outsiders, including infidels and Zionists (*kuffar*), apostates (*murtad*), heretics (*fasiqun*). These “sources(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents” (Benford and Snow 2000: 616) were deemed responsible for the deaths and suffering of countless Muslims

around the world, the theft of oil and other wealth generating resources from Muslim territories, and the purposeful violation of Islamic social life. For jihadists, the power and pervasiveness of outside forces, and the defenselessness of many Muslim communities precluded non-violent remedies. The only way to resolve this ongoing conflict is through collective action that resists and repels those forces from the Muslim world. And so, they defined martyrdom acts in part as a valid response to an immediate threat or “self-defense.” These acts enabled Muslims to defend their communities, their religion, and themselves from annihilation. This self-defense frame is evident in the following quote by Abu Hajer, an al-Qa’ida operative and former editor of the jihadist training publication *Sword of Prophets*:

We have not conducted a single offensive operation; all operations that have taken place have been defensive operations. On the contrary, you will find that the brothers try as much as possible to avoid confronting the army and security forces. However, the government is escalating its war, and is trying to remove me and you and all Islamists...I have taken upon myself an oath to purify the Arabian Peninsula from polytheists. We were born in and saw the light in this country, so we will fight the Crusaders and the Jews in it until we have repelled them or we are martyred (Aaron 2008: 182).

Martyrdom operations are framed here as “defensive,” a mode of resistance against the ongoing victimization of Muslims by foreign nations-states and their militaries. In other words, these operations are necessary for survival. According to Hajer, al-Qa’ida has actually tried to avoid violent confrontations with outside forces (identified here as “Crusaders” and “Jews”) that are “trying to remove” (i.e., kill) him and other true believers. The apparent inability to defend the ummah and Muslim lands using non-violent methods has compelled them to fight back and be “martyred.” Even though the vast majority of Islamic scholars forbid violence (Aslam 2012: 108), it remains permissible for Muslim men “if he is attacked, [and] he has no alternative but to

fully defend himself.”¹⁵ Moreover, the prohibition of all but defensive wars is considered one of the “most important innovations of the doctrine of jihad” (Aslan 2005: 84) and a major rationale for violent action. In this way, the cover of self-defense in Islam was used to justify martyrdom operations and to exonerate those that carried them out. The framing of this violence as self-defense was also consistent with one of the main and distinct aims of manhood acts: “resistance to domination and exploitation” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 281). Through martyrdom, these aggrieved men could assert their will and abilities to resist threats posed by outsiders, and, in so doing, defend and signify their manhood.

In an interview aired on Al-Jazeera following the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden drew a similar connection between martyrdom acts and self-defense:

They did this [the 9/11 hijackers]...as a matter of self-defense, in defense of our brothers and sons in Palestine, and to liberate our sacred religious sites/things. If inciting people to do that is terrorism, and if killing those who kill our sons is terrorism, then let history be witness that we are terrorists...the truth [is] that we are not terrorists as they understand it but (acting in self-defense) because we are being attacked in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, Kashmir, the Philippines and everywhere else (Aaron 2008: 86).

Bin Laden points to a number of Muslim-majority countries beset by conflict and foreign occupation to make the case that Muslim people “everywhere” are “being attacked” by outsiders. The attacks on New York and Washington were thus framed as moralistic violence “in defense” of Muslims in conflict zones and “to liberate” sacred Muslim spaces. Such statements vindicated the 9/11 hijackers, defining these nineteen men as martyrs who sacrificed themselves to defend the ummah. This framing strategy served as a way of countering the “terrorism” frame invoked by Western governments to define the events of 9/11 (Entman 2003). Such quotes also revealed

¹⁵ *Qur'an* 5:2.

the jihadi belief that avoiding, tolerating, or negotiating with offending groups was futile. Only through militant jihad could they effectively resist. Irrespective of being “central to the notion of male honor” in Muslim cultures (Aslam 2012: 211), violence as revenge is sanctioned in Islam for “victims of violence” and “on the principle of justice” (p. 104). For jihadists, these acts were a form of divine retribution doled out by holy warriors. Their justifications further revealed that martyrdom acts were seen as a way to resist domination by demonstrating the abilities of Muslim men to reciprocate violence—i.e., to fight fire with fire.

The framing of martyrdom acts as self-defense also involved expanding the category of combatants to include civilians. Jihadists often argued that those who are presumably innocent in the conflict (e.g., civilians) were in fact complicit in the war on Islam and therefore subject to violent sanctions. In order to remove the Islamic injunction on killing innocent people, they problematized the definitions of “innocent” and “civilian” in jihad. For instance, Ahmed Ismail Yassin claimed that, “Islamic history has no term for ‘civilian’ in the Western sense. In our Islamic rules of war...a person can be a combatant even if he does not carry a weapon” (Aaron 2008: 105-06). Considering that this distinction goes against the early doctrine of jihad put forth by the Prophet Muhammad (Aslan 2006: 84), these men focused on *ayas* (verses in the Qur’an) that dismissed it in their cases. By rejecting the notion of innocents (i.e., you are either a defender or an enemy of Islam) such views were used to frame sensational acts of mass violence as martyrdom. For example, on November 9th 2005, suicide bombers hit three hotels in Amman, Jordan, one of which was host to a wedding reception that killed over sixty women and children, and wounded hundreds of others. The orchestrator of the suicide attacks, al-Qa’ida operative Musab al-Zarqawi, explains the killing of civilians in an official statement:

After the blessed attack conducted by the heroes of the nation, the lions of the al-Barra' bin-Malik Brigade, against some of the dens of evil in Amman, we committed to explain to Muslims some of the reasons the jihad fighters targeted these dens, so that all may know that we did not target [the dens] until after we had determined that they were centers for waging war against Islam and for supporting the Crusader's presence in Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula, and supporting the presence of the Jews in Palestine (Aaron 2008: 228-29).

The claim here was that the hotels were targeted by the al-Barra' bin-Malik Brigade¹⁶ *after* they were “determined” to be “centers for waging war against Islam.”¹⁷ In other words, these suicide attacks were deemed a defensive measure. In particular, al-Zarqawi accused the hotels or “dens of evil” of “supporting the presence” of “Crusader's” (i.e., Western forces) in Muslim territories. Since they cannot unilaterally withdraw from, mutually settle, or further tolerate conflicts with these foreign occupiers, and considering the complicit role of local actors, jihadists were forced to defend Islam and the ummah by any means necessary. In framing acts of such violence in terms of self-defense, jihadists attempted to dispel any and all reservations over the killing of civilians,¹⁸ especially among followers and potential recruits. What is more, the suicide bombers were deemed “heroes of the nation,” worthy of praise and adulation. In keeping with the legacy and fraternity of Muslim martyrs before them, those who successfully carried out the mission were cast as symbols of resistance, defiance, heroism, and deserving of “high social prestige” (Rohde 2008). While depictions of martyrs as saint-like figures in Islam has been well documented by scholars (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2007; Hafez 2007; Bloom 2006; Gerami 2005; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003), accounts like that of al-Zarqawi further indicated that

¹⁶ Hafez (2007: 98) describes the al-Barra bin Malik Brigade as “al-Qaeda's suicide bombing squad.”

¹⁷ According to Aaron (2008: 228), the hotels were host to groups that militant jihadists have accused of conspiring in the invasion of Iraq, including “foreign military contractors, oil executives, government diplomats, and Western journalists.”

¹⁸ While not all jihadists agreed with the killing of civilians, especially other Muslims, their framing of martyrdom operations as self-defense consistently cast the martyrs as heroes and their actions as justified (see Aaron 2008: 92, 107-109, 243).

their actions “elicit deference from others,” another objective of manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 281). That is, by sacrificing their lives in this way, militant jihadists could claim exclusive identities as “heroic martyrs” (Hafez 2007: 95) and, in the process, convince others of their manhood—points which I discuss below.

Restorative Rituals

Martyrdom acts were also framed as necessary rituals for restoring Islamic hegemony. According to jihadists, the plight of Muslims stems in large part from the decline of Islam as a dominant, or hegemonic, system of social relations. Though this decline was attributed to a long and, at times, random list of outside forces, their statements consistently identified infidels, apostates, and heretics as the main obstacles to a unified Islamic nation. In their view, the only way to restore Islam and “regain its lost glory” is by purging these enemies from Muslim lands, and reinstalling the “fallen caliphate” (Aaron 2008: 112). According to jihadi leaders, Muslims could not avoid or negotiate with infidels given the latter’s economic interests (read: oil) and military actions in the Muslim world (read: Iraq and Afghanistan), nor could they continue to tolerate the deviant conduct of apostates and heretics given the degree to which true Islam has been undermined. Here again, martyrdom operations were framed in terms of the perceived inefficacy of non-violent methods for handling grievances. More specifically, such violence was framed as rituals that purified the ummah and paved the way for the caliphate.¹⁹ For instance, in a letter to followers, Musab al-Zarqawi claimed that:

...the tree of triumph and empowerment cannot grow tall and lofty without blood and defiance of death, that the [Islamic] nation cannot live without the aroma of martyrdom and the perfume of fragrant blood spilled on behalf of God, and that people cannot awaken from their stupor unless talk of martyrdom and martyrs fills their days and nights

¹⁹ The Islamic Caliphate refers to “the political office of the head of Islam, established with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 c.e. and abolished by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1924” (Aslan 2009: 7).

(Aaron 2008: 235).

Such evocative language was often used to frame martyrdom as “ritual or ceremonial acts” (Aslan 2009: 102) for resurrecting the caliphate. Similarly, in a 2002 web post, Abu Sa’d al-Amili links suicide attacks to the larger goal of Islamic nationhood:

The raid [9/11] was purely religious in nature. The mujahadin’s [jihadist’s] stated aims were to strike the enemy in order to expel him from the Arab Peninsula in keeping with the prophet’s order: Expel the polytheists from the Arab Peninsula.’ This slogan had been forgotten, but it calls for the unification of all the scattered Muslims and mujahadin to restore the caliphate and reunite the community (Aaron 2008: 219).

The 9/11 attacks were motivated not only by the need to “expel” Western forces from Muslim territories but also for the purpose of restoring the caliphate and reuniting the ummah. These acts thus served as restorative rituals that fulfilled “the Prophet’s order” to rid Muslim territories of perceived enemies and establish an Islamic state. Although the basis for the “raid” is defined above as “purely religious,” the statement as a whole indicates that such violence was a response to grievances over foreign occupation and, as argued by Pape and Feldman (2010: 175-76), “unjust interferences in and control over the affairs of Muslim countries.” In linking the impetus for the 9/11 attacks to the glory and revival of the caliphate, jihadists also reminded Muslim men of their lost power, place, and positions in society. Much like the motive for men’s violence in other cultural contexts (Kaufman 2001: 40), these acts also displayed the desire to reclaim a “rich set of privileges” and were an assertion of patriarchal power. As well as resisting domination, then, these acts were also cast in terms of claiming privileges, yet another aim of manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 281).

In framing martyrdom acts as restorative rituals, jihadists often distinguished between “near” and “far” enemies, and invoked the Islamic practice of *takfir* to interpret their violence.

First, consistent with previous research on militant jihadism (Gerges 2009; Aslan 2009), their statements defined the far enemies as forces *outside* the Muslim world that represent a threat to Islamic ways of life (e.g., Zionism, global capitalism, military imperialism, modernization, and secularization linked to “the West”). In contrast, the near enemies were identified as hypocritical Muslims and apostates—i.e., the enemies *within* (Riedel 2007). These near enemies included autocratic and allegedly corrupt Muslim governments, as well as heretical sects (e.g., Shi’ism). They blamed these enemies for undermining Islamic hegemony in part by facilitating the foreign invasion and resource divestment of Muslim lands. In their words, apostate regimes “obey the United States” (Aaron 2008: 174) by expediting the expropriation of oil from Muslim territories, which they described as “the greatest theft in the history of humanity” (p. 204). Control of oil and other forms of wealth was a recurring theme, and key motive for violent jihad. The only way to “rule ourselves,” and regain “control [over] our own wealth” (p. 110), they argued, was through eliminating the near and far enemies of Islam, and reestablishing the caliphate. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa’ida, maintained:

Without achieving this goal, our actions will mean nothing more than mere and repeated disturbances that will not lead to the aspired goal, which is the restoration of the caliphate and the dismissal of the invaders from the land of Islam. This goal must remain the basic objective of [global jihad], regardless of the sacrifices (Aaron 2008: 111).

Such statements indicated that militant jihad was also a response to grievances over economic exploitation and lost lands. In order to right this wrong, the men of jihad must be willing to sacrifice themselves as martyrs.

Second, their statements linked martyrdom to takfir, an Islamic edict that “places the authority [for violent sanctions] in the hands of individual believers, allowing them simply to declare Muslim enemies as ‘unbeliever,’ thereby avoiding any religious prohibitions against

shedding Muslim blood” (Aslan 2009: 104). Takfir is to martyrdom what conviction is to state execution: it authorizes the aggrieved parties (jihadists) to use law (their interpretation of the Sharia) to justify the punishment (death). While there was some debate among jihadi leaders and rank-and-file members as to which enemies should be targeted, most agreed that both stood in their way and were subject to takfir. For example, in a 2004 communique, al-Qa’ida member Faris al-Zahrani argued:

The rulers of the countries of Islam in this age are all apostate, unbelieving tyrants who have departed in every way from Islam. Muslims who proclaim God’s unity have no other choice than iron and fire, jihad in the way of God, to restore the caliphate according to the Prophet’s teachings (Aaron 2008: 173).

Here, martyrdom and jihad are defined as necessary measures for overcoming the deviant rule of local leaders and resurrecting the caliphate. In other words, these acts were viewed as a form of de facto excommunication whereby the punishment of alleged apostates is placed in the hands of individual believers. The claim that they had “no other choice than iron and fire” (i.e., holy war) to resolve grievances was, in effect, a rejection of others forms of conflict resolution and indicative of self-help (Black 1998). In order to restore the caliphate and their former status and privileges, they argued, Muslim men must accept roles as heroic martyrs and wage violent jihad against these near enemies.

In addition to infidels and apostates, martyrdom acts were framed as ways of handling grievances against heretics.²⁰ Again, jihadists are Sunni Muslims that espouse a radical militant interpretation of Islam that guides their choice and use of violence. Specifically, their statements denounced Shi’a Islam for being a heretical sect and pointed to historical conflicts with Shi’a Muslims as a major hindrance to restoring the caliphate and reunifying the ummah. As evidence

²⁰ Unlike apostates who have rejected Islam, heretics were considered to be imposters whose actions violate Islamic codes and values (Aaron 2008: 6).

of Shi'a "treachery" and "betrayal," jihadists accused Shi'a Muslims of colluding with outsiders in oppressing Sunnis (Aaron 2008: 239-244) and encouraged the targeting of Shi'a communities with suicide attacks.²¹ For example, Musab al-Zarqawi argued that "The danger from the Shi'a, however, is greater and their damage is worse and more destructive to the [Islamic] nation than the Americans..." and therefore jihadists must "strike the religious, military, and other cadres among the Shi'a with blow after blow until they bend to the Sunnis" (Aaron 2008: 239-242). The labeling of these near enemies as traitors and cowards also illustrated the problematizing of neighboring masculinities, an impetus for violence in such "movements of restoration" (Kimmel 2005). Although some expressed reservation over the targeting of other Muslims,²² most were in agreement that Shi'ism, along with Sufism and other traditions in Islam, represented a threat to their rule and that violent confrontation with followers of these traditions was inevitable.

Honor Displays

Yet another way that jihadists framed martyrdom acts were as symbolic and embodied displays of honor. In their view, outside actors have not only subverted Islam and endangered the ummah, but in the course of perpetrating these "crimes" (Aaron 2008: 127) they have also humiliated Muslim people. The need to secure Muslim honor (*ard*) was articulated by jihadists as another motive for martyrdom. They drew on passages from the Qur'an, Hadith,²³ as well as the writings of Salafi scholars to frame these acts as a revered way of redressing humiliations,

²¹ Such views were especially visible during the Iraq insurgency, wherein "the most gruesome suicide attacks" were directed at Shi'a civilians (Hafez 2007: 97).

²² Jihadist Isam al-Barqawi, argues that "the number of Iraqis killed in suicide operations has become a tragedy for Iraq's people...the mujahideen (holy fighters) must revise their tactics and I must stress that I have reservations about these actions" (Aaron 2008: 243).

²³ The Hadith are stories, statements, and anecdotes of the Prophet Muhammad that are often used for understanding Islamic laws (Aslan 2006).

salvaging reputations, delivering divine justice, and reaping eternal rewards.²⁴ Not surprisingly, this framing process involved more explicit appeals to Muslim men and manhood. For example, in an official statement after 9/11, al-Qa'ida called on the “sons of Islam” and the “men of belief” to “recall those who followed the path of jihad and martyrdom: the path of glory, and not humiliation; of pride, and not subjection; or paradise, and not of hell” and conduct similar operations (Aaron 2008: 237). In call-response fashion, these grievances were also voiced by jihadists who went on to successfully carry out suicide attacks. This is evident in the following communique by 7/7 suicide bomber Mohammad Sidique Khan:

...the path of jihad and the desire for martyrdom is imbedded in the holy prophet and his beloved companions. By preparing ourselves for this kind of work, we are guaranteeing ourselves for paradise and gaining the pleasure of Allah. And by turning our back on this work, we are guaranteeing ourselves humiliation and the anger of Allah. Jihad is an obligation on every single one of us (Aaron 2008: 83).

The message is unequivocal: Muslims who embrace their role as martyrs are rewarded with the “pleasure of Allah” and guaranteed entry into “paradise,” while those who turn away from this duty are guaranteed “humiliation” and Allah’s wrath. That is, martyrs were devout Muslims that received divine rewards by preventing certain indignities at the hands of outsiders. Redressing humiliation has been recognized as a basis for joining jihadist groups (Khosrokhvar and Macey 2005: Chapter 3) and a theme “at the heart of mobilizing narratives” for suicide attacks (Hafez 2007: 99). In this sense, martyrdom was framed as both a means and an end for preserving *ard*. Claims that “the desire for martyrdom is imbedded in the holy prophet and his beloved companions” also illustrated how these acts were defined as manhood acts in Islam. As

²⁴ The rewards were articulated as posthumous fame, glory, and esteem in the eyes of the Ummah, sexual prospects in the afterlife (e.g., the proverbial seventy-two black-eyed virgins), and other kinds of androcentric catharsis.

martyrs, men like Sidique Khan joined the ranks of exemplary Muslims, above all the Prophet Mohammad. In this sense, martyrdom was a form of identity work through which jihadists signified masculinity and claimed membership as “true men of Islam” (Aslam 2012: 119).

Jihadists also framed martyrdom acts as honor displays by directly questioning the faith and fortitude of Muslim men. For instance, in a 2005 video directed at potential recruits, an al-Qa’ida spokesperson asked, “Where are those desiring martyrdom, seeking to become near the Prophet and to please the Merciful? Where are the lovers of martyrdom?” (Aaron 2008: 237).

As well, in a response to Muslims that expressed opposition to suicide attacks in Iraq, Musab al-Zarqawi asks:

Has the dignity of your women become so slight?...Many of your pure and spotless sisters in the Sunni Community of Tel’Afur were violated, their chastity slaughtered and their wombs filled with the sperm of the Crusaders and their brothers the hateful Rafidites?!²⁵ Where is your religion? And where [is] your chivalry, your ardor, your manliness? (Aaron 2008: 246).

Each line of questioning provides a window into the subjective meanings and aims of martyrdom in militant jihad and how they reflect the centrality of men’s honor. Not only were these acts framed as a way for these men to defend their honor (especially that of *their* women), but also to affirm their virility and display their “chivalry” and “manliness.” The suggestion of rape as a “weapon of war” (Aslam 2012: 132) and the undeniable shame it brings on them and the ummah also illustrated how honor was used to motivate martyrdom acts, after all, “rape is a collective dishonor” (p. 134). The line of questioning also coincides with claims that movements like al-Qa’ida use masculinity as symbolic capital by eliciting men’s honor and threats of emasculation as “rhetorical devices” to motivate “similarly situated” men to join the movement

²⁵ According to Aaron (2008: 246), “Rafidites” refer to “Shi’ites.”

and conduct martyrdom operations (Kimmel's (2005: 416). In other words, martyrdom signifies masculinity in Islam and failure to take such action when necessary "raises questions about one's nobility and sense of manhood" (Hafez (2007: 101). Such questions presented the threat of dishonor as *Casus belli*, a basis for violence, and cast martyrdom as "quintessentially masculine" (Aslam 2012: 96), the moral duty of Muslim men.²⁶ The significance of Muslim honor as a motivational frame is further evidenced by a 2003 web post by Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, entitled "Iraq Must Establish a Suicide Army."

In order to defend the homeland from the terrorist Crusader attack, there is a need for people who yearn for Paradise, and the shortest way to Paradise is death for [the sake of] Allah. Some of us should see the joyful and satisfied faces of the mothers in Iraq when they part from the fruit of their loins, who go off to the realms of honor, the realms of martyrdom. This is so that the enemy of the nation knows that safeguarding honor and the homeland is dearer than life, and that our mothers in Iraq, like our mothers in Palestine, [are willing] to sacrifice the fruit of their loins—but not their honor (Aaron 2008: 89).

Given the extent to which Muslim societies have been besieged by "the terrorist Crusader attack," defending Islamic spaces and honor rests on the shoulders of martyrs—i.e., those "who yearn for Paradise." Here, martyrdom was framed as a way of exhibiting and protecting honor, especially of those in conflict zones, like Iraq and Palestine, as well as a direct path to and place in the afterlife. Such statements illustrated how, in the eyes of militant jihadists, Muslim men have something to prove and something to gain by committing acts of martyrdom. Along with self-defense and revenge, "affairs of honor" are considered a basis for self-help (Black 1998: 74). The expressed eagerness for such violence further indicated that, among jihadists, "men *become* men if they 'face' death with a smile" (Aslam 2012: 119), and the apparent willingness of their mothers to "sacrifice the fruit of their loins—but not their honor" suggested that men's bodies

²⁶ Aslam (2012: 93) connects this duty to protect Muslim women to *qawwam*, or the custodial responsibilities of Muslim men to protect their wives and women as directed by Islamic scriptures.

served as symbolic resources for honor displays, on behalf of the ummah. Indeed, “denying one’s own needs while providing for others is a signifier of being a man” in Muslim cultures and, in this case, as a key mobilizing narrative for suicide attacks (Aslam 2012: 119; Hafez 2007: 99). For jihadist, then, martyrdom acts convinced adversaries, onlookers, the ummah, and Allah, of their honor. According to this frame, such violence elicited deference from valued others and secured certain privileges—i.e., prestige in this life and paradise in the next.

The quotes above help to illustrate how jihadists defined acts of martyrdom as moralistic violence for defending Islam and the ummah from perceived threats, restoring certain privileges and entitlements—vis-à-vis the caliphate—and redeeming Muslim honor. In other words, these acts were framed in motivational terms, as ways to resist domination (self-defense), claim “lost” privileges (restorative rituals), and elicit deference from others (honor displays). Considering the cosmic stakes and intractable conditions of the conflict, jihadists rejected non-violent resolutions and advocated martyrdom as a necessary means of handling grievances and achieving movement goals. In line with previous observations, these frames also elevated martyrs “to the status of extraordinary moral beings who make the ultimate sacrifice for God” (Hafez 2007: 96), “fully in control of their choices and destinies” (p. 107). In this sense, martyrdom acts were defined in terms of heroism, nationalism, and other markers of masculinity (Nagel 2005; Kimmel 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Together, these frames indicated that martyrdom in the context of militant jihadism both constituted self-help and signified manhood. I now turn to a discussion of these findings.

Martyrdom, Subjectivities, and Self-Help

In the context of militant jihad, martyrdom acts constitute a form of masculine self-help or a gender-signifying form of conflict resolution. In line with Black’s (1998: 75) definition of

self-help, the statements of jihadists defined martyrdom as moralistic violence—directed at both others and the self—for handling grievances. Their framing activities indicated that these acts signified manhood, enabling Muslim men to defend Islam and the ummah from outsiders, restore a system of religious patriarchy (a caliphate), and claim exclusive identities as heroes and holy warriors of Islam. In these respects, martyrdom acts constitute “manhood acts” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 281). This understanding of martyrdom reinforces the importance of gender subjectivities in facilitating violent practices and the knowledge that can be gained by integrating Blackian theories of conflict management with critical constructionist approaches to masculinity. In this section, I further discuss what these findings reveal about the meaning of martyrdom in social movements, and how, in spite of recent criticisms of Black’s pure sociology perspective, they provide qualified support for conceptualizing these acts in part as violent self-help. I then elaborate and specify this concept in terms of gender, proposing that martyrdom acts may be understood as a form of masculine self-help. I conclude by discussing why future studies of martyrdom should consider the role of gender subjectivities and how the concept of masculine self-help can be used to examine and explain the identity work that men do, consciously and collaboratively, to achieve dominance.

One of the main goals of this study was to understand the subjective meanings and aims of martyrdom in militant jihad. I identified these meanings in how jihadists framed these acts—as self-defense, restorative rituals, and honor displays. Consistent with the previous claims of gender scholars, these framing activities involved direct and indirect appeals to masculinity. In particular, jihadists viewed such violence as a legitimate means for resisting domination and restoring privileges. The delineation of these martyrdom frames contributes to the literature on framing and ideology in social movements, as well as ongoing debates regarding the basis and

impetus for martyrdom by showing how gender ideologies are integral to interpretations and the impetus for violence. In this case, the framing of martyrdom involved advancing the interests of aggrieved men and claiming exclusive gender identities and gender-based rewards. In line with research on gender and war, martyrdom and manhood in militant jihad appear to be “mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing, with masculinity acting as an enabling condition” for these acts (Hutchings 2008: 391). In other words, doing martyrdom is a way of doing masculinity.

Following the agenda charted by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), this research focused on a specific practice through which males claim identities as men and illustrated how this practice signifies possession of a masculine self. Again, a masculine self is constructed in interaction, including those mediated through discourse and framing, and possessing this virtual self means signifying the capacity “to ‘make things happen’ and to resist being dominated by others” (p. 280). Violence remains an all-too prevalent way for men to handle grievances, and this is further illustrated by the frames above that cast martyrdom as “legitimate and justified when it occurs in a struggle between good and evil” (Jordan and Cowan 1995: 728). These martyrdom frames not only reflected the “bifurcated worldview” of jihadists (Aslan 2009: 5) but also revealed the role of gender-as-motive. Martyrs are portrayed as exemplary Muslim men whose actions display qualities of heroism, altruism, courage, fearlessness, and honor—traits befitting of ideal Islamic masculinity and indicative of Muslim manhood. Consistent with Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), then, the framing of martyrdom acts reflected the aims of manhood acts, enabling jihadists to resist domination and exploitation at the hands of outsiders (e.g., near and far enemies), elicit deference from others (most notably from the ummah and fellow jihadists), and claiming certain privileges (ranging from material to symbolic rewards). These scholars (p. 280) are careful in qualifying the subjective aims of manhood acts as “elements of masculinity in Western cultures,”

but the findings above suggest they are relevant to movements and male peer cultures outside of Western contexts as well.

This research also shows how jihadists collaborated in defining martyrdom in terms of manhood. Their framing activities focused on collective aims: the defense of Islam and the ummah, especially Muslim women, the resurrection of the caliphate, and so on. Aggrieved men could draw on these frames as “vocabularies of motive” (Mills 1940) and “craft a manhood act” (p. 287) that resisted domination and elicited deference from others. For instance, by framing martyrdom as a rite of passage and incumbent upon the “men of belief” (Aaron 2008: 90), jihadists tied these acts to essential “maleness/manhood” in Islam (Gerami 2005: 452). Even as they offered praise to *any* Muslim, man or woman, who conducted a martyrdom operation, the grievances and aims that were apparent in framing these operations appealed almost exclusively to Muslim men and manhood. For instance, they defined suicide attacks in terms of their honor, duty, and reputation as men, and discouraged their Muslim sisters from carrying them out.²⁷ Similar to the discursive role of masculinity in framing acts of war, the “crucial characteristic” of martyrdom in global jihad is that they are “not feminine” and not for women (Hutchings 2008: 401). Such gender-based distinctions are not surprising given that war and soldiering remain exclusive avenues for constructing, reproducing, and deploying masculinity, and correspond with evidence that women continue to have limited and ancillary roles in jihadist movements, especially as suicide bombers (Pape 2005; Davis 2013; Morgan 1994: 165; Hutchings 2008). To borrow from Morgan (1994: 166), the gendered expectations associated with martyrdom acts “define not only who *does* what but who *is* what,” and reach “deep into a man’s sense of identity

²⁷ In a message to “sisters wanting to participate” in martyrdom operations, one jihadist stated “the situation in the Ummah is not that desperate yet, that sisters are called to fight” and instead encouraged female adherents to work as “nurses” providing health care to jihadi fighters and “to mold the thought process of their young sons—the future mujahideen of the Umma” (Aaron 2008: 96-97).

and self.” These acts reveal the extent to which militant jihad also emphasizes “masculine group solidarities organized around violence (p. 167). This suggests that martyrdom acts are not only integral to signifying manhood in militant jihad and but also in other social movements that similarly seek to restore “lost” power and privileges.

Many of the jihadist statements discussed above support and illustrate Black’s (1998) conceptualization of violent behavior by showing how martyrdom and mass violence serve as a means of handling grievances. In other words, these acts may be understood as a form of self-help. This was not surprising given Black’s unique and broad definition of self-help, and the reasons it is used to handle grievances, including “self-defense,” “revenge,” “affronts to honor,” the “defense of ‘manliness,’” “the pursuit of justice,” “vengeance,” and “matters relating to sex, love, and loyalty” (1998: 31-76). Although the statements of jihadists revealed multiple motivational frames for martyrdom, all proposed to handle grievances with violence and invoked the reasons just listed. Following Marshall’s (2008: 228) claim that researchers must make the “missing motivational engines” of human behavior explicit in order to determine whether or not, for instance, a violent act actually constitutes self-help,²⁸ this study explicates these engines in and through the motivational framing of martyrdom acts. And yet, the findings provide some support for Black’s definition of self-help: martyrdom is in part the handling of a grievance by unilateral aggression. This analysis suggests that efforts to “eliminate the individual” (Black 1995: 849) in theorizing violence and other social phenomenon may be counterproductive in supporting Black’s work and suggests a modest middle-path solution for substantiating pure sociology concepts: acknowledge and analyze the role of subjectivities.

²⁸ Again, Marshall (2008) has detailed how Black’s own work infers from the psychological underpinnings of other research, as well as the partial assumptions of readers and those he himself holds in making theoretical claims. For example, he argues that Blackian constructs, such as “grievance,” are “patently psychological” (p. 228).

In addition to meeting the definitional criteria for self-help, these findings reflect some of the distinctions in Black's self-help framework. Again, self-help is among a number of ways in which grievances are resolved in conflicts; others include avoidance, negotiation, settlement by a third-party, and toleration. The statements of jihadists indicate that martyrdom acts arise because the conditions of the conflict are *perceived* as precluding non-violent resolutions. In their view, Muslim societies cannot avoid foreign aggression, given the "cosmic war" (Aslan 2009) in which they are embroiled; they cannot negotiate a resolution given outside interests in exploiting the resources of Muslim territories; they cannot rely on nor do they trust a third-party to settle the conflict, save Allah; and they can no longer tolerate the harmful conduct of outsiders (infidels, apostates, and heretics), given the degree to which these actors have undermined "true" Islam and devastated Muslim communities. In lieu of alternative modes of recourse, suicide attacks and other martyrdom operations are framed as moralistic violence for handling grievances. So, although Blackian scholars believe that the study of subjective factors is antithetical to the scientific (read: positivist) approach of a "pure" sociology, these same subjectivities may nevertheless help distinguish the characteristics and use of martyrdom in social movements.

These findings also offer more appropriate evidence for supporting and employing the concept of self-help in future studies of collective violence. As noted above, Black (2004; 1998) and fellow scholars (Senechal de la Roche 1996) have dismissed data pertaining to subjectivities (e.g., people's perceptions, attitudes, intentions) as beyond the scope of sociological theories of violence. In their view, historical cases of conflict and big data are sufficient for verifying pure sociology concepts and generating "highly general and testable propositions about the likelihood and severity of collective violence" (p. 102). As detailed earlier, despite such claims, Black's work has been accused of weak empiricism, stemming in part, from underspecified and unclear

concepts (Marshall 2008; Turner 2008). For example, Marshall (2008: 222) insists that “Black’s theories require a clear articulation between constructs and their empirical indicators, such that their terms are identified with some fixed and fully specified measures.” Without more precise and consistent operationalization, Blackian concepts are difficult to substantiate. Unlike the “objective” focus and methodological approach of pure sociology, this research explored the social meanings and aims of violence. It provided a clear unit of analysis (the subjective views of jihadists) and evidence (interpretive frames) for analyzing whether or not an act (martyrdom) may be defined as self-help. What is novel about these findings, then, is *how* they support the self-help concept and *what* they suggest about the empirical value of subjectivities. While this research is far from a treatise on the empirical claims and criticisms of pure sociology, it does indicate that subjective factors can serve as empirical indicators for concepts, like self-help.

CONCLUSION: *Martyrdom as Masculine Self-Help*

Explicating the subjective and empirical dimensions of self-help is integral to the main findings of this research: that martyrdom may be understood as a form of masculine self-help—a gender-signifying act that expresses a grievance through unilateral, self-sacrificial, and embodied aggression. Again, this conceptualization combines the analytic approach to gender proffered by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) with the Black’s (1998) definition of self-help, offering a more precise and evidence-based understanding of martyrdom in movements like militant jihad. In line with other motives for men’s violence, jihadists framed their actions as a way to “achieve manhood status through actual and symbolic acts of intimidation” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 283). Insofar as martyrdom is seen as a way to “put on a convincing manhood act” (p. 281), it signifies a gender-based response to grievances. This process, evident in the martyrdom frames above, further suggests that such acts arise from the desire to “signify possession of a masculine

self” (p. 281). That is, martyrdom represents a mode and a consequence of clinging devotion to a masculine self.

The concept of masculine self-help offers a way of distinguishing violent acts based on their symbolic and structural features and makes masculinity visible in the framing and use of certain types of violence in social movements. The concept also sensitizes us to the collaborative process through which men define and support each other’s behavior—e.g., how individual men come to believe that they have something to prove and something to gain by engaging in violent behavior. Based on these empirical and definitional criteria, a few applications of the masculine self-help concept may be conjectured for future research. For instance, how and to what extent might the violence perpetrated by hooligans, prison gangs, school shooters and so forth, also be understood as masculine self-help? How and to what degree do the actions and activities of these groups of men reflect the aims of manhood acts? And what about women—in what ways do the crime and violence they perpetrate also reflect gendered repertoires of contention? Or, as Schrock and Schwalbe (2008: 289) suggest, are these cases of “compensatory manhood acts,” or attempts to appropriate or out-do male exercises of power? Addressing such questions would provide evidence for further assessing the scope and explanatory power of the masculine self-help concept, and perhaps new insights into how gender-signifying practices lead to and explain social conflicts.

CHAPTER 2

Haraam-less Masculinity: Normative Gender Displays as Strategies for Managing the Stigmatized Identities of Young Muslim Men

Abstract

In Western contexts, the social identities of Muslim men pose a persistent predicament. Still, few sociological studies have theorized the ways in which these identities are constructed and negotiated in mixed-contacts or everyday encounters with non-Muslim publics. In this chapter, I examine the experience and effects of anti-Islamic stigma by analyzing in-depth interviews with twenty-six young Muslim men and women living in the Midwestern United States. I find that participants use specific gender-signifying strategies in order to manage their impressions and interactions with non-Muslim audiences. I define these strategies as *allaying embodiment*, *benign accommodation*, and *claiming normality*. Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical framework and concept of gender displays, I argue that young Muslims cope with stigmatization by both challenging and adhering to normative ways of doing gender in Western cultures. This research further develops two ideas about the stigma process: (1) gender displays are integral to stigma management and (2) such displays may be strategically deployed to protect the self in mixed-contact situations.

Stigma and the Social Identities of Muslims

Stigma inevitably affects our lives and shapes our identities. For Muslims living in the U.S., this process has been profoundly shaped by the events of 9/11. Much like the Japanese following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, their social identities have been defined as foreign and threatening, casting over them a shadow of collective stigmatization. Understanding the lived-experiences of Muslims in this context presupposes an understanding of how their identities are depicted, defined, and managed in daily life. In particular, it is important to ascertain the impact of the stigma process. In the now classic essay *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963: 2) defined social stigma as a relationship between an attribute and a stereotype that is “deeply discrediting” to individuals and groups that bear them. These stigmas may be embodied, concealed,²⁹ and/or affixed to social categories (e.g., races, ethnicities, and religions) that are deemed alien, extreme, insolent, or otherwise menacing by dominant social groups. The lattermost stigmas are “tribal” in that the identities of all members of the group are devalued and relegated in status. The negative effects of tribal stigma are evident materially, in terms of limited life chances, and symbolically, in terms of mortified selves (Link and Phelan 2001; Goffman 1963). Since 9/11, Muslims living in Western countries have been subjected to tribal stigmatization, as evidenced by negative media portrayals of Islam, ongoing legislative efforts to restrict or ban Islamic practices, and extraordinary surveillance and social control of “bad” Muslims (Mamdani 2014; U.S. Cong., House Committee on Homeland Security 2011; Ibrahim 2010; Naber 2008; Banks 2005; ICE 2003; Lyon 2002). A number of studies have now documented the extent of this “Islamophobia”³⁰ and the ways in which Muslim identities have

²⁹ Examples of embodied stigmas are scars, disabilities, and perceived “deformities” examples of concealed stigmas are mental illnesses, addictions, or radical political and religious beliefs (Goffman 1963: 4).

³⁰ In line with Kunst et al. (2013), I define Islamophobia as general fears of Islamization often leading to perceived and actual experiences of prejudice and discrimination on the part of Muslims.

been targeted and tarnished (Khosravi 2012; Kunst et al. 2012; Ryan 2011; Peek 2011: Chapter 4). The persistence of anti-Islamic sentiment in the West affects new generations and newly formed communities of Muslims—subjecting them to unease, fear, and abuse (e.g., Ewing and Grady 2013). What it means to be Muslim in America continues to be shaped by the events of 9/11. What remains unclear, however, are the specific spaces and ways in which these Muslims have since confronted collective stigmatization.

How stigma manifests and is managed in daily life is most apparent in mixed-contacts, or “moments when a stigmatized and normal are in the same social situation” (Goffman 1963: 12). As such, the effects of stigma on Muslims may be gleaned from encounters with non-Muslim majorities. As Goffman theorized, whenever there exists a discrepancy between other’s expectations of an individual, their “virtual social identity,” and attributes that an individual possesses or could be revealed about them, their “actual social identity,” then he or she is vulnerable to being stigmatized. This broad basis for scrutiny suggests that most people experience stigma at some point in life. The impact of such experiences on the self, however, depends on the extensiveness of the stigma labels and the particular situations wherein these labels become harmful. Mixed-contacts thus serve as both a key space and social context for understanding how Muslims deal with or “manage” stigma. For example, O’Brien (2011) has shown how Muslim youth anticipate mixed-contacts by practicing different types of rehearsals among themselves. These rehearsals included preparing remarks for educating non-Muslims about Islamic beliefs and practices, and tailoring their rehearsals to local challenges. Following Goffman, then, how successful Muslims are in mitigating the effects of stigma labels hinges in part on their ability to present information and control expectations about themselves in these

situations. In other words, they must influence the definition of the situation in order to effectively manage their impressions.

The successful management of stigma is also dependent upon the particular form and perceptibility of the stigmatized attribute and the extent to which it deviates from a social norm. The form of stigma may be distinguished as *discredited* (i.e., readily evident to others as signs of abnormality or deviance) or *discreditable* (i.e., not obvious but potentially damaging information related to an abnormal or deviant trait) (Goffman 1963: 19). Both forms may discredit or “spoil” one’s identity, but this spoiling process often depends on the type of “mark” one bears. For example, studies have detailed the stigmas associated with Muslim names and veils³¹ (e.g., Khosravi 2012; Sandikci and Ger 2010), as well as Islamic beliefs and rituals (e.g., Mahon 2013; Mobasher 2006). For many Muslims in the West, the negotiation of self and identity necessarily involves controlling information that draws attention to their “debasing identity discrepancy” (p. 43). This information is symbolic and includes physical signs and appearances, gestures, and manners of interactions associated with Islam—all of which come to the fore in mixed-contacts.

The experience of stigma in encounters with non-Muslims—i.e., how the stigma process unfolds in mixed contacts—is shaped by cultural ideologies, standards, and boundaries. That is, the impact of stigma on the self is related to the extent and ways in which one’s appearance and behavior depart from prevailing social norms. For instance, Western mainstream media have characterized Muslim women as “victims” and Muslim men as “dangerous,” and as “agents of terrorism” (Mishra 2007; Naber 2008: 282). Such portrayals have spoiled Muslim identities, in general, and raised concerns about the activities and intentions of ordinary Muslim men, in

³¹ Simply being *perceived* as a Muslim has also been shown to have stigmatizing effects and, in some cases, lethal consequences (see Santora 2012).

particular (Aslam 2012; Bayoumi 2009). This was evidenced by the 2011 hearings on “Islamic radicalization” conducted by the U.S. Congress.³² Concerns with deviance are, of course, a cornerstone of Goffman’s work on stigma: it is the inability to sustain identity norms that inevitably leads to stigma management (1963: 130-35). Several studies have referred to this concern to explain the plight of Muslim minorities in Western contexts. For example, Ryan (2011) detailed how Muslim women in Britain interpreted and resisted anti-Islamic stigma, especially associated with their clothing and veiling. Like other minorities, their sensitivity to being seen as subversive outsiders led them on a “quest for normalcy” (p. 3) and a mission to show themselves as “good members of society” (p. 8). Such studies suggest that normative expectations, particularly relating to gender, are a significant feature of anti-Islamic stigma and that the social identities of Muslims present certain risks—risks that requires management.

Stigmatized persons respond to their situations in a myriad of ways and adopt a multitude of strategies (Goffman 1963; Herman 1993; Siegel, Lune, and Meyer 1998; O’Brien 2011).³³ Among Muslim minorities, these stigma management strategies have included avoidance of social spaces deemed unfriendly or potentially hostile and, when avoiding such spaces is neither feasible nor desirable, attempting to cover up, play down, or abandon their religious identities altogether (Khosravi 2012; Kunst et al. 2012; Mir 2006; Mobasher 2006). For example, in Sweden, some Muslim immigrants have engaged in name-changing as a “strategy to cope with and manage stigmatization and discrimination” (Khosravi 2012: 66).³⁴ They expressed hope that

³² U.S. Congress, Committee on Homeland Security (2011).

³³ Among these strategies are attempts to fix the “objective basis” of the stigma, (e.g., through surgery, therapy, or religious conversion); develop skills that offset the stigma label (e.g., through cultural assimilation); separate themselves from others that bear and share the stigma; or by embracing the stigma as something that has actually enhanced their sense of self; a “blessing in disguise” (Goffman 1963: 9-11).

³⁴ Name changing in this case specifically refers to changing Muslim surnames to “Swedish-sounding” or “neutral” European names (Khosravi 2012: 66)

extricating themselves from these markers of Muslim identity would facilitate social and employment opportunities, and shield them from prejudicial treatment (p. 72). Name-changes are one way for Muslims to blend in or “pass” as normal in Swedish society. Muslim minorities have also resisted stigma and stereotypes through active engagements with non-Muslim publics and by strengthening their associations with Islam and involvements with fellow Muslims (Ryan 2011; Peek 2005, 2011: Chapter 6; Amiraux 2011; Schanzer, Kurzman, and Moosa 2010). For example, many of the Muslim women interviewed by Ryan (2011) challenged images that cast Muslims as backward by asserting their own moral standing. These strategies not only coincide with Goffman’s conceptualization of stigma management,³⁵ but also indicate that Muslims embedded in different cultural contexts draw on various repertoires (e.g., passing, covering, and confrontation) in order to manage spoiled identities.

The growing volume of research on Islamophobia and the experiences of Muslims in Western societies is compelling, and yet much of it remains under-theorized, Eurocentric, and primarily focused on the experiences of women. For instance, most studies of these studies have focused on describing the civic consequences of Islamophobia rather than explaining the coping process (e.g., Kunst et al. 2012; Kunst et al. 2013; Ghaffari 2009; Elaasar 2004; Perry 2003). Many also employ and extend theories of race, assimilation, and multiculturalism (e.g., Mamdani 2014; Hopkins and Gale 2009; Maruoka 2008; Halim 2006). In addition to descriptive and race-based accounts, it is necessary to examine the subjective experience of anti-Islamic stigma, especially how Muslims negotiate self and identity in everyday encounters with non-Muslim publics. This latter focus is important not only for documenting the material and emotional

³⁵ In particular, this corresponds with Goffman’s (1963: 51) conceptualization of stigma management as “an offshoot” of “stereotyping or profiling of “normative expectations regarding conduct character” in mixed-contacts.

impact of stigma on minorities, but also for clarifying and understanding what strategies are deemed effective in coping with the adverse effects. Given the history and pervasiveness of anti-Islamic sentiment in Western Europe, more research on Muslim identities and stigmatization has also taken place in European societal contexts (e.g., Ryan 2011; Kunst et al. 2012; Amiraux 2005; Hopkins 2004). Less attention has been paid to how Islamophobia is experienced and handled by Muslims living in the U.S. Research suggests that American society has historically been less hostile to Muslims than in Europe, even though anti-Islamic sentiments has remained prevalent since 9/11 (Gallup, Inc. 2010; Obeidallah 2016).

Many qualitative studies of Islamophobia have focused on the accounts and experience of Muslim women, particularly regarding controversies over the hijab (e.g., Ryan 2011; Mishra and Shirazi 2010; Meer, Dwyer, and Modood 2010; Williams and Vashi 2007; Haddad 2007; Zine 2006; MacDonald 2006; Cole and Ahmadi 2003). Less is known about how Muslim men deal with stigma labels in daily life. This is not surprising considering the mistreatment and marginal status of Muslim women in some hardline Islamic regimes, as well as prevailing discourses on women's rights in the West (Lorber 2002). After all, "under Western eyes" (Mohanty 1988), it is such women that are seen as imperiled and in need of rescue (Razak 2004; MacDonald 2006; Mishra 2007; Ho 2007). It is also important consider, however, how Muslim men have dealt with stigmatization. On the one hand, the beliefs and displays of some men—nineteen jihadists in particular—have arguably contributed most to the rapid rise and development of Islamophobia in American society, and set into motion a series of discursive and institutional processes that have effectively spoiled the identities of *all* Muslims. On the other hand, ordinary Muslim men are obliged to confront and/or correct stereotypes through their own actions, for instance, by exercising restraint, tolerance, liberalism, and other values amenable to social life in the West.

Doing Gender in Islam

Gender is a key aspect of social identity as well as a potential source of stigma, especially for men of color. This is evident in media and policy discourses that continue to define minority men as deviant and in need of social control (hooks 2004: Chapter 5; Hopkins 2004; Anderson 1998). For instance, depictions of Islam in Western media have often cast Muslim men as hostile and oppressive, and Muslim women as passive and programmed—at best, “oppressed creatures” with few rights and second-class status; at worst, complicit in their own oppression and the subversive activities of the men (Mishra 2007). These depictions suggest that doing gender in Islam is intrinsically deviant and that Muslim men are, by nature, nefarious. Recently, Aslam (2012) presented a keen analysis of gender and jihad that attempted to address, theoretically and empirically, controversial questions surrounding the identities of Muslim men, such as “*why are Muslim men so violent?*” (p. 140). Aslam (2009: 224-26) argues that the dire economic and political conditions that beset many Muslim communities are channeled through masculine notions of honor and bravery in Islam, leading some Muslim men and boys to engage in ritualistic acts or *performances* that are harmful to others and themselves. For instance, she found that Muslim men who idealized stereotypical masculine traits were more likely to “offer themselves for jihad.” Masculinity was thus linked to the radicalization of these men and boys through its relationship to gender socialization in Islam, the economic power and prospects of Muslim men (or lack thereof), and shifting gender regimes inside and outside Muslim societies. Ultimately, Aslam considers movements like militant jihad to be another form of “gender trouble” (Butler 2006) or a disruption of “ideal” Islamic masculinity via the violent performances of Muslim men.

While the argument put forth by Aslam is intriguing and presupposes further analyses of gender-signifying acts and gender-based grievances in Islam, the framework on which it rests is problematic for theorizing the role of masculinity in managing stigma during mixed-contacts. It reflects an ontological position that relegates human agency and patently denies the existence of the self. Aslam focuses on gender performativity, a concept taken from Butler (2006) and rooted in post-structuralist perspectives that question the ability of individuals or “subjects” to decipher and direct their gender performances. Instead, gender is conceptualized as a product of repetitive acts, wherein embodied males, females, and intersexed subjects (are compelled to) exhibit (what appear to be) natural expressions of masculinity and femininity. These expressions are therefore viewed as contrived images or “illusions” that reflect hegemonic discourses, such as compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). That is, who and how we are as men and women is more a matter of coercion than volition, dictated by social discourses, sanctions, and taboos. This take on gender suggests that Muslim men and women must recognize the power of gender ideologies to mount an emancipatory response to them. Studies of anti-Islamic stigma indicate that Muslim men and women are aware of gender-based stigmas and adjust their appearances and behavior accordingly (Khosravi 2012; Mir 2006). In other words, they exhibit “stigma consciousness” (Pinel 1999) and present the self in ways that will facilitate acceptance from others.

Dramaturgical theories define gender as a psychic process that arises and is achieved in interaction. As something people “do,” gender is “carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126). Insofar as gender is an emergent feature of social situations, individuals can orient their behavior in order to claim a masculine or feminine self. In this sense, Muslim manhood and womanhood reflects selfhood. Although gender ideologies and norms are understood as social constraints on

the self, individuals have agency in doing gender (Goffman 1979). Compared to Aslam and many Butlerian scholars,³⁶ Goffman and fellow dramaturgical theorists do not see individual behavior—gender or otherwise—as “tightly programmed by culture” but as consciously directed and driven by the self, with “a considerable amount of expressive manipulation along several fronts” (Turner and Stets 2006: 26). In this sense, Muslim men and women are creative actors with appreciable agency, not just passive subjects with docile bodies. This approach is apparent in Goffman’s (1979: 1) conceptualization of gender displays or the “readable expressions” and “conventionalized portrayals” of normative sex roles. Such displays convey an actor’s alignment with others in social situations and, consequently, are “important insofar as alignments are” (p. 1). In the case of Muslim minorities, establishing allegiance with non-Muslim publics is an important, if not crucial, aspect of daily life. Individuals can manipulate such displays in order to gain acceptance—e.g., present a masculine or feminine self that will be confirmed by others (p. 3). These displays are not simply seen as part of a gender game, but as a means of self-construction and social survival. To borrow from Howarth (2006: 443), the theoretical scheme of dramaturgy points to “the possibilities and conditions for stigmatized communities as agents and not (only) as objects or victims of stigma” by emphasizing the self-efficacy of Muslim men and women. So, in spite of the revelatory use of gender performativity in previous studies of violent jihad, I argue that the concept of gender displays is just as useful, if not more so, for explaining how such violence is dealt with.

Aside from acknowledging self and agency as critical aspects of gender, dramaturgical approaches offer insights into the specific structure of gender performances. In particular, the conceptualization of gender displays involves distinguishing patterns that are relevant to stigma

³⁶ For example, Barad (2014), Tyler and Cohen (2008), Hancock and Tyler (2007), and Jackson (2004).

management. Goffman (1979: 2) identifies two basic patterns of displays that are apparent in mixed contacts: (1) “bracket rituals,” which are “concentrated at the beginnings and endings of interaction” and (2) “overlays,” those “designed to be continued through interaction.” Examples of these include names, dress, and demeanor (p. 2). Together, these constitute a “schedule of displays” through which individuals define and present themselves in social situations (p. 2). Encoded in these displays is vital information about one’s self and identities, of which gender is central³⁷ (p. 7). For example, the Sunna beard (*lihyah*) is an overlay of Muslim identity that signifies both gender and situational alignment. According to many Islamic scholars, this beard is a display of essential differences between men and women and is mandatory (*wajib*) for all males capable of growing them (Khalilullah 2011). Shaving the Sunna beard is thus forbidden (*haraam*) on religious grounds as well as on charges that it violates gender mores of the *ummah* or Muslim community. And yet, in the post-9/11 context of American culture, this gender display has taken on a very different meaning: as a sign of religious extremism. In this sense, the Sunna beard is a marker of Muslim identity that “renders men and boys at once foreign and alien to the nation, but at the same time connected to ‘the terrorist’” (Khosravi 2012: 69). How such overlays are handled by devout Muslim men in Western contexts is therefore a matter of great significance—a decision that means confirming or countering stigma labels and dealing with the social consequences from both within and outside one’s group.

Insofar as gender roles, identities, and relations in Islam are scrutinized in the West, they serve as important dimensions of the stigma process. How Muslims manage such stigmatization is likely to involve displays of masculinity and femininity in mixed-contacts. As indicated by the

³⁷ Goffman (1979: 7) acknowledges the central role of gender in this process by stating that “the most deeply seated traits of man, it is felt, is gender: masculinity and femininity are in a sense the prototypes of essential expression—something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of an individual.”

Sunna beard, these gender displays bring to the fore the simultaneous demands of non-Muslim audiences and internal pressures to adhere to the beliefs and rules that govern gender interaction in Islam. The resulting tension and how it is resolved has important implications for the self-conceptions and social involvements of Muslims living in Western societies, especially younger generations and recent immigrants. Hence, in this research, I ask: how do Muslims in the U.S. manage stigmatized identities? In particular, what stigma management strategies do they employ in mixed-contacts? In particular, I explore how young Muslim men and women define-and-do gender in daily life. By addressing such issues empirically, I hope to uncover, assess, and clarify the process of anti-Islamic in America.

DATA & METHODS

This research is part of a larger project on the effects of anti-Islamic stigma on the self, for which I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with twenty-six young Muslims living in the Midwestern United States. My goals were to understand the experience of stigma among young Muslims in a particular milieu and to identify the specific strategies they used to cope with stigma in mixed-contacts, or everyday encounters with non-Muslim publics. The focus of this aspect of the research was on the manifestation and management of stigma in the daily lives of the young Muslim men (I explore similar processes with respect to the young Muslim women in the next chapter). Interview participants ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-eight years and varied in terms of ethnic³⁸ and nationality³⁹ backgrounds. Close to an even number of participants followed either Sunni (15) or Shi'a (11) traditions in Islam and identified as either men (14) or women (12). Most (21) were second-generation U.S. citizens or 1.5 generation

³⁸ Participant ethnicities included Arab, Azeri, Bengali, Pashtun, Persian, and Punjabi.

³⁹ Participant nationalities encompassed countries in the Middle East and South Asia, including Pakistani, Indian, Iranian, Saudi Arabian, and Palestinian.

naturalized citizens. Three participants were in the process of applying for U.S. citizenship and two were students with F1-visas,⁴⁰ all of whom expressed interest in finding work in the U.S. following the completion of their studies.

The interview research took place in the greater metropolitan area of a large Midwestern city between September 2011 and September 2012. The selection of this site was predicated on recent calls to examine the construction of ethno-religious identities in new Diasporic contexts (Moghissi and Ghorashi 2010; Braziel and Mannur 2003). Although the Midwestern U.S. has a few sizeable Muslim communities, like that in Dearborn, Michigan,⁴¹ the region is considered a new gateway for Muslims and other immigrants from developing countries (Waters and Jimenez 2005). Knowledge of the daily lived-experiences of Muslims in these settings remains limited. In contrast to more established ethnic enclaves, which have been shown to mitigate the adverse effects of prejudice and discrimination for Muslim minorities (Hassoun 2005; Ewing and Grady 2013), the urban sprawl and influx of immigrants to parts of the Midwest also provides a distinct social context for exploring the negotiation of Muslim identities. These areas may function less as a “buffer” against Islamophobia and therefore produce distinct experiences and responses to collective stigmatization. As one my participants put, “the ones who grow up in a Muslim majority area, like they are from Michigan and places like that, they don’t have as much of an issue with all this” (Khalid, 23). Indeed, this context has served as an impetus for studies of ethnic and religious identities, as well as gender attitudes and relations among young Arab Muslims (Haddad 2004). It is also worth noting that with the exception of Arizona, Alaska, and Maine, all twenty-three states that had proposed anti-Sharia legislation at the outset of this study

⁴⁰ F1 visas are a specific type of non-immigrant F visas that allow foreign students to pursue their education in the U.S., so long as they maintain full time status. For more details, see “The ABC’s of Immigration – F3 and M3 Non-immigrant Visas – August 18, 2003. Visalaw.com. Retrieved January 14, 2014.

⁴¹ See Hassoun (2005).

were located either in the Midwestern or Southern U.S. (Wajahat et al. 2011: 38). Such proposals not only suggest greater fears of and hostility toward Muslims in these regions, but, again, that Muslims residing in them may view and respond to anti-Islamic stigma and sentiment in particular ways.

Study participants were sampled from the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) of two large Midwestern universities and an Islamic center and mosque. These Muslim spaces have been scrutinized by American media personalities, counter-terrorism experts, policymakers, and pundits, for facilitating the radicalization of young men and even abetting “jihadi terror” (e.g., Geller 2015; Spencer 2014; Seibold 2011; U.S. Congress, Committee on Homeland Security 2011; Coalition to Honor Ground Zero 2010; Grantham 2010; Center on Security Policy 2009; Silber and Bhatt 2007; Post and Sheffer 2006; Emerson 2006, 2002; Pipes 2010, 2003). Such fears became apparent in the controversy over police spying on MSAs at several universities in the U.S. (e.g., Powell 2012; Devereaux 2012), leading some Muslims leaders to believe there are informants in virtually all mosques in America (e.g., Ewing and Grady 2013). In one case, the New York State Police Department acknowledged that it had sent an undercover informant on an MSA-sponsored whitewater rafting trip where he recorded student names, conversations, and activities for police intelligence. Incidentally, this well-publicized story occurred in the midst of my data collection and was raised during a few interviews as a cause for concern and caution in dealing with outsiders. The extent to which these spaces have been characterized as “incubators” of terrorism suggests that they are important entry points for this research. In addition, most of the young men were students studying applied technical fields, like engineering and medicine, and thus “fit the profile” of the 9/11 hijackers and other jihadists in terms of age, education, and

social class background⁴² (Aslan 2009; Kimmel 2002). Together, these Muslim identities and arenas remain the prime targets of surveillance and scrutiny—i.e., they serve as the social context of anti-Islamic stigma.

It is important to note that stigmatized individuals are also more likely to participate in research that examines their personal views and lives if they are approached by an in-group member or a person with a similar background and standpoint (Johnson 2002)—what Goffman (1963) refers to as members of the “own” and the “wise.”⁴³ As a second generation Iranian-American, I was accepted by participants as someone wise to their situations and given access to settings and events generally closed to outsiders (e.g., Friday Prayers and MSA meetings). I was granted approval from the Human Subjects Committee of Lawrence (HSCL) to proceed with this research on June 6, 2011 (#19463). I collected the interview data using snowball sampling, an established methodological approach for the study of sensitive topics and accessing populations that fear exposure, and are difficult to reach (Sadler et al. 2010; Oliver 2006; Platzer and James 1997; Bailey 1994: 438; Lee and Renzetti 1993: 5; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981: 141). I began by recruiting and interviewing a small number of key informants⁴⁴ from the MSAs. Following the interviews, I asked informants to recommend others who would be appropriate and willing participants for this research. Meet-ups were scheduled over email or phone and the majority were conducted in a reserved private room at the university campuses or the mosque. The remaining interviews took place at private residences. All of the participants were either fluent

⁴² For biographical accounts of specific members of al-Qa’ida and other jihadist groups see Aslan (2009) and Kimmel (2005).

⁴³ Goffman (1963: 27) defines the “own” as persons who share the stigma and by virtue of this are defined and define themselves as his own kind. The “wise” are defined as “persons who are normal but who special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan”(Goffman 1963: 28).

⁴⁴ The definition of informant here is based on grounded theory research methods (Charmaz 2006) and is not to be confused with the law enforcement criteria discussed earlier.

or proficient in English. At the time of the interview, each person was handed an information sheet stating the purpose of the study and an informed consent form to be signed and returned to me. They were also asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire, the responses of which are detailed in Appendix B. With the exception of one convert to Islam, all participants in the sample were from Muslim families. In addition, I attended a few small gatherings at participants' homes and at some coffee shops and restaurants they frequented. Meeting in these casual environments was helpful for clarifying questions in the interview schedule and, later on, served as a safe space for "member-checking" or taking my initial codes back to participants to determine if, how, and to what extent they "fit" participants' actual views and experiences (Charmaz 2006: 111).

In interviewing these young men and women, I was concerned with (1) detailed accounts of how Western discourses surrounding Islam, jihad, and terrorism were viewed, felt, and dealt with in daily life, and (2) thick descriptions of how the self and identities of young Muslims in America have been defined and negotiated in the decade since 9/11. To acquire such knowledge, I asked participants to share their thoughts and feelings about 9/11, their experiences of anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination, if any, and the ways in which they coped with anti-Islamic stigma. In order to remove terms that may be unfamiliar or have "normative connotations" (Ryan 2011: 5) that could be misinterpreted, such as "stigma," "discourse," and "radicalization," I also pre-tested a number of interview questions with key informants. Based on this pre-testing process, I refined and finalized the interview schedule (see Appendix A), and then proceeded to make contacts and conduct a formal round of interviews. The interviews varied in length from

50 to 110 minutes and most⁴⁵ were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded using the qualitative analysis program N-Vivo version (9.0).

The interview guide was comprised of three sections focusing on participants' views and experiences as Muslims in America, their presentations of self in everyday life, and definitions of masculinity and femininity in Islam. The latter category emerged during the initial round of pilot interviews, wherein participants often emphasized how portrayals of gender roles and relations in Islam and perceived violations of Western gender norms were integral to their stigma experience, and, in turn, their coping strategies. The final interview guide consisted of fifteen questions, carefully worded and delivered so as to facilitate and maintain trust between myself and participants. I also used probes and a few vignettes to delve further into their reactions to stigma. For example, I followed responses about the negative portrayal of Muslims in Western media by asking participants to share their thoughts on the impact of such portrayals, especially how they coped with them in daily life. I concluded all interviews by asking participants how, if at all, their views on being Muslim have changed since 9/11 and what strengths they had discovered about themselves in the process. These questions were placed intentionally at the end of the interview guide not only to end on a more "positive note" (Charmaz 2002: 679), but also to allow participants to revisit, clarify, or elaborate on any earlier responses. For many participants, these closing questions had a cathartic effect, providing them with an opportunity to vent frustrations, acknowledge personal triumphs, and discuss new-found perspectives.

⁴⁵ Twenty-one of the twenty-six interviews were audio recorded and transcribed; the remaining five interviews were conducted face-to-face but were not audio recorded due to the participant's concerns over anonymity and personal safety. In these cases, a pen and notepad were used to take notes and followed up by member-checking in order to confirm statements and views.

Considering the sensitivity of the issues discussed, I took extra precautions in managing the data. All audio files were kept in a password protected Zip file folder which no one else had access to but me. The demographic information of participants was acquired via a questionnaire (Appendix B) and hard copies of these, along with back up audio files, were stored at a bank safe deposit box. The names of all participants are pseudonyms or fake names.⁴⁶ Considering the snowball sampling technique used in this study, another important aspect of data collection was maintaining confidentiality among participants who knew others through the referral process. In these cases, I made sure to avoid references to specific comments and redirected the focus of the interview back to the immediate participant, when such matters arose.

Data Management & Analysis

I used grounded methods to collect, organize, and analyze the interview data, and to theorize the emergent findings. This methodological process involved a series of steps that began with empirical observations and developed into a conceptual framework for the study, without making a priori assumptions about what should or ought to be discovered (Charmaz 2006; DeVault and McCoy 2003; Johnson 2002; Warren 2002; Strauss 1995; 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded methods are particularly appropriate for qualitative interviewing and analysis in that they direct researchers in data collection and in identifying emergent processes *within the data* (Charmaz 2002: 676). Given my focus on learning about the experience of social stigma in a particular milieu, I also adopted a constructivist approach to the data. In other words, I viewed the “implicit meanings” and “experiential views” of participants as constructed within the cultural, historical, and political context of the individual’s life (2002: 677-78). Unlike

⁴⁶ In order to facilitate member-checking, I allowed each participant to choose their name. Less than a third choose to do so, leaving the remaining pseudonym selections up to me.

positivist research designs that approach data as inherently meaningful and treat findings as representations of a fixed, objective reality, I took the position that multiple realities exist and that the interview data and analysis of it are co-creations, defined by me and these young Muslims. As such, this study offers a “portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 678) and reflects the mutual influence of the researcher and participant on each other’s self-presentations and social worlds.

In coding these data, I followed the two-stage analytic technique detailed by Charmaz (2002). In the first stage of coding—open coding—I crafted codes that captured participants’ views and experiences of stigma by analyzing the interview data line-by-line. I compared the tonality, use of language, points of emphasis, and so forth in order to ascertain what these young Muslim men and women found important and/or problematic about their social identities. I then converted these into “action codes,” or codes that captured their methods of coping (p. 684). Based on comparison of these action codes, I developed categories and subcategories that specified the different dimensions of the stigma process. For example, in this stage, I discovered that gender was a key feature of interaction between participants and non-Muslim publics and, using a dramaturgical framework, I defined the specific relationships between gender constructs (i.e., masculinity and femininity) and stigma management (e.g., passing and covering). In the second stage—selective coding—I sorted and synthesized the initial codes and elaborated the most salient categories into concepts. In doing so, I drew on a small set of sensitizing concepts,⁴⁷ including “mixed-contacts,” “impression management,” and “gender displays,” as defined by Goffman (1959; 1963; 1967; 1979), and “negotiation” and “accommodation” as described by

⁴⁷ According to Blumer (1954: 7), “sensitizing concepts give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances.”

grounded theorists so as to apply “an analytic frame to the data” (Charmaz 2006: 62). For example, I asked what, if anything, the concept of gender display reveal about participants’ experiences and management of stigma? This step not only served as a starting point for conceptual analysis, but also clarified the fit and relevance⁴⁸ of a dramaturgical framework for theorizing the presumptive findings.

Throughout the analysis, I used comparative methods for determining and refining the conceptual categories, deciding when to stop data collection, and detailing the initial findings. Doing so entailed: (a) continuously moving back and forth between the statements and stories of participants and analysis of them; (b) maintaining an open-mind about what could be discovered about anti-Islamic stigma while coding; (c) questioning the degree to which the open codes and categories supported theoretical claims about stigma and the self; and (d) challenging my own preconceptions about the meaning and management of Muslim identities in Western societies, like the U.S. That is, I insured the reliability and trustworthiness of these data by remaining reflexive and flexible from the outset of data collection through to the analysis and presumptive findings (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). My decision to stop at twenty-six interviews was based on saturation of the conceptual categories—i.e., when no new information or insights were being gained about the stigma process beyond those which emerged during selective coding (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978). While no universal standard for saturation exists is accepted by qualitative researchers,⁴⁹ I based my decision on the opinion of Glaser (1978), as well as the modest scale and claims of the case studies. For example, rather than focusing on the repetitive patterns of

⁴⁸ Along these lines, Charmaz (2006: 54) notes that a study “fits the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participant’s experiences. It has relevance when you offer an analytic framework that interprets what is happening and makes relationships between implicit processes and structures visible”

⁴⁹ For detailed descriptions and disagreements over the issue of saturation, see Morse (1995), Dey (1999), Glaser (2001), and Charmaz (2006).

responses as an indication of saturation, I paid close analytic attention to the strategies or “properties” of this pattern in order to form an abstract accounting (read: conceptualization) of them. Next, I present empirically the role of gender in stigmatizing Muslim identities, according to participants, and the strategies used to manage these identities in mixed-contact situations.

“THE PROBLEM”: Discursive Representations of Global Jihadism and the Spoiling of Muslim Identities

While the events of 9/11 were acutely experienced by Muslim minorities in the West, including the young women and men in this study, knowledge of how they understand and have coped with the stigmatizing effects remains limited. Some recent studies suggest that gender plays a part in this process (Naber 2008; Meer et al. 2010; Hopkins and Gale 2009; Ryan 2011). For one, the framing of 9/11 and other acts of “Islamic terrorism” in Western media has also involved and invoked negative representations of Muslim gender roles and relations (Mishra 2007; Ryan 2011). My interviews supported these prior observations, that “discourse about Muslims” in the wake of 9/11 “has been heavily gendered” (Ryan 2011: 2), especially in terms of media portrayals of Muslim men and masculinity in Islam. For example, when asked about how Muslim men are portrayed in Western media, my participants used the words “violent,” “crazy,” “scary,” “oppressive,” “intolerant,” “hostile,” “abusive,” “extremist,” “un-American,” or as one of the young woman succinctly put it, “their identities all ended up being labeled as terrorist” (Maryam, 21). While they often discussed these characterizations in terms post-9/11 perceptions of Islam, their statements emphasized the particular ways in which militant jihadists and media and policy discourses have, together, discredited the identities of young Muslim men. For instance, Karim, a first generation Muslim-American from Bangladesh, claimed that “Before 9/11, I really didn’t see any kind of exposure of me as being very hostile to American culture, American ideologies, or American national interests. But after 9/11, the whole coverage of my

identity has been colored in terms of being backward, hostile, [and] intolerant.” Because of 9/11, Karim’s intersecting identities have become simultaneously visible and problematic.

In more detail, Naseem, 20, a second generation Muslim-American of Iranian descent, described the portrayal of his identity and negative associations made about him:

I feel we are portrayed as superior to women just because usually it’s the men who are blowing themselves up and whatever. And then aside from that, I think with the whole hijab situation with the women and then hearing from governments like Saudi Arabia doesn’t let women drive or they are not allowed to vote. I think that might have changed. I’m not sure, but all these little ticky-tacky laws and rules about how women can’t do this, but all men can do everything...I think that portrays Muslim men as aggressive and overpowering over women and there is no women’s rights, and we just treat women badly and all that.

Similarly, Yasmine, 26, a 1.5 generation Muslim immigrant from Pakistan stated:

I think Muslim men have become the most irrational actor, when it comes to how the media portrays them. They’re always put in some kind of threatening role, whether it’s a dictator we need to get rid of, or as the young revolutionary who is going to go to any violent means to overthrow that dictator, or down to the person who is sitting next to you on the airplane with intentions of harming you. And I think that no matter which way you look at him, he is irrational, he is threatening, he is scary, and he is always opposed to anything that the West represents. There’s no way he believes in freedom or that he believes in those ideals that the West holds dear and sincere to them.

Such quotes indicated that discourses surrounding Islam have stigmatized the identities of Muslim men by defining them in terms of deviant manhood acts. These men have been cast as potential terrorists and gender deviants whose male gendered practices are geared toward the resistance and disruption of Western social institutions, including the gender arrangements in these institutions. To illustrate by comparison: whereas the ideal or “hegemonic” form of masculinity in Western cultures is characterized by stoicism, rationality, rugged individualism, libertarian sexual proclivities, and whiteness (Connell and Wood 2005; Connell 2005; Goffman 1963: 128), Islamic masculinity is, as described above, regarded as “irrational,” “threatening,” and otherwise unpredictable and unruly. This corresponds closely with Leary and

Schreindorfer's (1998: 20) argument that stigmatized persons "are assumed to pose a threat to others, contribute inadequately to the common good, violate social standards," and "induce aversive emotions in other people." Insofar as Muslim men continue to be portrayed in these terms, they arouse feelings of "suspicion, disbelief, and mistrust" among non-Muslims, and are subject to extraordinary surveillance and social control (Khosravi 2012: 68; Lyon 2002). In this case, deviance and masculinity are fused to form a discursive frame that, in Goffmanian (1963: 3) terms, "reduce" the identities of Muslim men in the minds of Western audiences, from the "whole and usual" to the "tainted and discounted." In line with the research reviewed earlier, then, these participants linked anti-Islamic stigma to negative representations of gender in Islam.

My participants were not only aware of but also sensitive to stigma labels, especially the negative ways in which militant jihad and media portrayals reflected on Islam, the ummah, and themselves as individual Muslims. For instance, they viewed media coverage of 9/11 and other mass-casualty attacks carried out by Muslim extremists as discrediting their social identities, and rendering them unacceptable to non-Muslim majorities. It is precisely this lack of acceptance that Goffman (1963: 8) emphasizes as "the central feature of the stigmatized individual's social situation in life." The daily barrage of discrediting information seemed focused on the deviant displays of Muslim men. Although one participant did mention that media coverage of the Arab Spring had portrayed them in a positive light—as people "fighting for [values of] freedom and democracy" (Omar, 20)—nearly all expressed the view that Muslim men are more-often-than-not depicted as inherently volatile, resolutely anti-American, and easily moved to extremism. As Naseem put it, "You never see news media come in and say, 'Oh, Muslim man saves ten people. It's always, like, Muslim man kills ten people'." The notion that Muslim men are more inclined

to take lives than save them is a powerful narrative against which Naseem and the other young men defined themselves and their situations in daily life.

Not surprisingly, then, stigma continued to affect these young Muslims in profound ways, summoning them to develop strategies for managing the effects. Gender was highlighted as an integral part of this process—i.e., certain displays of masculinity were necessary for managing interactions with non-Muslims. The nexus of gender and stigma in this case raises questions about the construction and negotiation of Muslim identities in Western contexts. For instance, what specific role does gender play in coping with anti-Islamic stigma? How is gender manifest in stigma management strategies used by young Muslim men in everyday life? What other factors inform and influence this process? I address these questions by presenting a thick description of how some young Muslims in the Midwestern U.S. define-and-do gender, and how young Muslim men, in particular, manage their spoiled identities in mixed-contact situations.

DISPLAYING MUSLIM MANHOOD IN THE WEST

In analyzing the statements and stories of participants, I found that perceptions of anti-Islamic stigma and stereotypes compelled them, however reluctantly, to adopt certain strategies for managing mixed-contacts. These stigma management strategies were markedly gendered or, more precisely, involved gender displays. For instance, the young men spoke of situational pressures to show awareness and deference toward Western ways of doing gender. Among the most salient strategies discussed were *allaying embodiment*—altering the physical manifestations of stigma so as to dispel the fears and suspicions of normals, in this case non-Muslim audiences; *benign accommodation*—modifying or foregoing religious practices that violated prevailing gender norms; and *claiming normality*—resisting stereotypes by embracing normative displays, both averse to the deviant manhood acts of Islamic extremists and amenable to traditional gender

roles and relations in American society. With respect to the latter, many of the young women also attempted to extricate Muslim men and manhood from charges of inherent sexism and inclinations toward violence. For instance, they described “real” Muslim men as peaceful, tolerant, family-oriented, and respectful toward women. Although participants often discussed some combination of strategies, for the sake of scholarship, I present them as distinct forms of stigma management. Also, in order to show the richness of the interview data, I focus here on participant accounts that most clearly and cogently exemplify these strategies.

Allaying Embodiment and Benign Accommodation: From Shaving to Shaking Hands

One strategy that some young men used to cope with stigma involved altering their self-presentations, particularly with respect to two Islamic practices: maintaining the Sunna beard, a show of piety and closeness to the Prophet Mohammed, and shaking hands with women, an act that is considered *haraam* by a number of Islamic scholars representing the different schools of jurisprudence.⁵⁰ Much like Muslim names and veils (Khosravi 2012: 66), these practices were seen as conveying negative information about their social identities, potentially disrupting social interactions, and even leading to social rejection and abuse. The associated fears contributed to a deep sense of pressure to control such discrediting information in everyday encounters with non-Muslim publics. In Goffmanian (1959: 23) terms, this process involved changing aspects of their “personal front” (e.g., appearance and manner) that signified spoiled identities. The goal was to present the self in an inconspicuous manner and, thereby, influence the beliefs and reactions of others. In altering their personal fronts, these young men were clearly anticipating and expecting that: if I don’t appear or act like a “Muslim terrorist,” I won’t be treated like one. For example,

⁵⁰ For example, Imam Hanifah, Imam Malik, Imam Ash-Shafi’i, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Khalilullah 2011).

when asked about how they have responded to portrayals of Muslims in Western media, Salem, a 1.5 generation Muslim-American from Qatar, discussed an infamous point of interaction for him and fellow Muslims since 9/11:

So, when I'm going to the airport, I just try to make sure that my beard is shaved. I'm groomed. I'm looking nice and stuff. You know, try to be cool...so that people have this perception that I'm cool...I am not going to blame the people for thinking that way, they have been trained to think that way, that you know, a guy with a beard who is a Muslim, he is a terrorist and stuff.

He continued:

I mean, it [9/11] had a really big impact on lots of people, and see, if I grow this beard, I don't want my friends or my coworkers or my colleagues or whatever to think that I am one of them. And so I end up debating whether to go with—to please everybody else or just to go with how I am supposed to live, which is the way of my life...That's the challenging thing, [pause] that's a big issue, actually, to be dealing with in my daily life (Salem, 21).

To shave or not to shave. “To display or not to display” (Goffman 1963: 42). This issue vexed a number of the young men. For Salem, the events of 9/11 have transformed the meaning of the Sunna beard from a symbol of piety to one of extremism. The dawning of this beard drew negative attention that could prompt special scrutiny from Travel Security Administration (TSA) agents and/or other passengers. Since it is “evident on the spot” the Sunna beard is discredited stigma (Goffman 1963: 4) that could induce negative sanctions and thus needed to be managed. This process is acknowledged in the quote above via the seamless link between “...a guy with a beard who is a Muslim” and the idea that “...he is a terrorist.” Fearing that his facial hair would bring to mind such stereotypes, especially in securitized settings like the airport, Salem decided to shave in order to (appear) “to be cool.” Here, the word “cool” meant usual, acceptable, and, essentially, non-threatening. It also projected poise, a type of “facework” used to avert incidents by concealing attributes that threatened to leave a person “shamefaced during encounters with others” (Goffman 1967: 9-13). In this sense, the Sunna beard served as embodied information

that could be construed by certain audiences as signaling an imminent threat. In order to manage this embodied stigma, then, one strategy was to remove the source—i.e., literally excise stigma from the body.

Managing Muslim identities at the airport is arguably different than in mundane settings, particularly post-911, but for most participants encountering non-Muslim publics were viewed with apprehension no matter where they were. Each mixed-contact situation presented risks and presupposed a schedule of displays for conveying their true feelings and alignment vis-à-vis non-Muslim audiences. As Salem later put it, “Wherever I go, you know, I have to take these kinds of extra steps and extra precautions so they don’t perceive me as one of them...so they don’t perceive me as this angry terrorizer with red eyes.” Whether they were traveling, interviewing for jobs, running routine errands, or socializing in public, the young men expressed anxiety over how others might react to the sight of the Sunna beard. It seemed to matter less *where* they were when encountering non-Muslim publics (read: normals), but rather *how* flexible they could be in managing their impressions. In a multitude of settings, shaving was seen as a way to influence the definition of the situation and proceed undisturbed. Insofar as shaving enabled these young men to avoid detection and “definitional disruptions” in mixed-contact situations (Goffman 1959: 13), it constituted an attempt at passing or, more specifically, “adapting certain aspects of identity so as to be ‘unmarked’ as Muslim” (Khosravi (2012: 78). These disruptions were described as ranging from subtle forms of shaming (e.g., mean and suspicious glances) to more blatant acts of exclusion (e.g., bullying and violence). Removing the beard was thus considered a method for more predictably (read: safely) passing through different social arenas in the West.

Although shaving was considered by many of the young men as an effective way to cope with stigma, it was not unanimously accepted. Ahmed, a Palestinian-American Muslim and active MSA member, stated:

To me, I see that in airports and, in my opinion, I just don't respect that because, first of all, the people [responsible for] 9/11, none of them had a beard. Second of all, it's a red dot on your name, regardless, even if you come naked... The fact that you are changing yourself, to the other side, let's say to the U.S. government. It shows two things, you are either hiding something, that's why you are trying to fool us or you are not strong. You don't have strength. That you are not proud of what you believe in. And either way, it's a negative thing. It's a bad thing (Ahmed, 21).

For Ahmed, shaving the Sunna beard so as to avoid negative interactions with non-Muslims was both cowardly and counterproductive. In his view, the men who shaved either lacked intelligence (e.g., not knowing the actual basis for additional airport security that Muslim passengers face) or lacked strength (i.e., misrepresenting themselves and their beliefs). In describing these men as “hiding” and “trying to fool” others, Ahmed associated this particular coping strategy with weakness, cowardice, and appeasement—characteristics that run counter to ideal Islamic masculinity (Gerami 2005, 2003; Aslam 2012). Such views correspond with previous claims that dis-identifying acts present a virtual catch twenty-two for Muslim men: “To conservative Muslims,” like Ahmed, “they lack authenticity and have sold out their true faith for the price of admission to the West. To the dominant group of their Western homes, they are suspects deserving to be watched” (p. 455). The rejection of shaving, in this instance, further shows how issues of social misrepresentation can cause conflicts among the “own,” in this case, fellow Muslim men living in Western societies. As noted by Goffman (1963), trying to manage discrediting information about the self comes with risks. For young men, like Ahmed, the risk of feeling “disloyalty and self-contempt” (p. 84) by removing the Sunna beard outweighed the benefits of ameliorating personal fears and anxieties. He would rather manage the social tension

than the social information conveyed by this gender display. Disagreements over shaving, though limited, nevertheless revealed the importance of embodiment to the stigma experiences of these young men, and, in turn, how gender displays informed their stigma management strategies.

Interestingly, while the young men pointed to the *hijab* (the Muslim practice of veiling) as a more detrimental marker of Muslim identity than the Sunna beard, a number of the young women expressed the opposite. Even as they acknowledged the obvious stigma of veiling in Western settings, these women highlighted the problematic situations of the men. For example, Sana, a second generation Muslim-American, claimed:

A lot of times, girls will say, “Well, it’s harder for me. I’m the one who walks around with a hijab on my head.” That’s not completely fair. The guys have their hijab too [the Sunna beard] and we have to understand what struggles go with it. At least when a guy is going to look at me, he’s going to know I’m a Muslim woman and I’m off limits. With the guys, the moment people see they’re Muslim, they know they could get into trouble.

She continued:

I mean, it’s hard to wake up every morning and walk out with a hijab on your head but after a while it becomes part of you and it makes things a lot easier for you, although you might face the challenge of being taken aback by some person’s who’s never seen a girl in a hijab. But I still have that sense of comfort that, you know what, everyone’s going to know I’m Muslim, but I’m probably not dangerous. I don’t have to constantly explain myself, whereas the poor brothers with ‘lihyah,’ they’ve got to.

Sana’s sensitivity toward the plight of her “poor brothers” was nuanced and poignant—it revealed how embodied stigma presented unique challenges for Muslim men. By virtue of being privy to the challenges Muslim men face in the West, “wise” young women like Sana attempted to share the burden—what Goffman (1963: 31) refers to as bearing a “courtesy stigma.” As Sana put it: “the guys have their [own version of] hijab too” in the Sunna beard. This stigma symbol was understood as a similarly consequential to the veil, with different trade-offs. The veil does indeed presented challenges for these young women but, as indicated above, it was not clearly

associated with danger and hence did not draw the same sort of scrutiny. Such testimonies served as empathetic support and compensation for the negative encounters and occurrences experienced by Muslim men, once again, based on a gender display.⁵¹ In this way, young women like Sana exhibited “dramaturgical loyalty,” sharing in the “division of definitional labor” (Goffman 1959: 212, 9) with the young men.

Although a few of participants that did not appear stereotypically Muslim (read: Arab Muslim) took advantage of their racially ambiguous appearance in mixed-contacts (for instance, by not volunteering their Muslim backgrounds or beliefs unless asked about them directly), more often they considered unmarking their bodies. In other words, these men attempted to “directly correct” the discredited stigma (Goffman 1963: 9). I call this strategy allaying embodiment or presenting the body in a manner that mitigates the effects of stigma by lessening the perceived anxieties and suspicions of normals, in this case, non-Muslim audiences. These participants were aware that certain gender displays were stigmatized and so feared being judged and/or mistreated based on them—a process scholars refer to as “stereotype threat” (Steele and Aronson 1995; Link and Phelan 2001: 374). Much like the stigma of race, this stereotype threat was “embodied in ways of being seen, being treated, and being feared as different” (Howarth 2006: 445). In describing their motives and misgivings with regard to shaving, these young men were clearly grappling with the reality that their bodies were viewed as “quite thoroughly bad or dangerous” (Goffman 1963: 3) and therefore subject to being “policed, controlled, and excluded in particular ways in order to minimize the threat” (Howarth 2006: 445). As a strategy, allaying embodiment constituted a form of passing intended to avoid the social inequalities that stigmas

⁵¹ In line with Goffman (1959: 13), whereas the stigma management strategies of the young men were primarily “defensive,” an effort to safeguard the own impressions, those of the young women were more “protective,” an attempt “to save the definition of the situation” projected by the men.

induce (p. 447). While passing can be both intentional and unintentional, the statements of these young men suggested that shaving was a conscious overlay, intended and expected to project a favorable impression during mixed-contacts. Such overlays reflected participants' awareness of the embodied nature of anti-Islamic stigma and the role of gender displays in managing them—points which I discuss further below.

In addition to shaving, the young men discussed specific religious practices they felt the need to modify or abandon altogether in mixed-contacts. A common concern was with Islamic rules on gender interaction, especially those forbidding Muslim men from shaking hands and making direct eye contact with women (*ghad al-basar*). The former is considered forbidden (*haraam*) by a number of Islamic scholars, along with touching of any kind between Muslim men and women not related by blood or marriage; the latter mandates that Muslim men “lower their gaze” in the presence of women (Mir 2006; El Guindi 2005). While these gender mores are viewed as signs of respect among devout Muslims, they have been portrayed as quite the opposite in the West (Razak 2004; Mishra 2007). My participants expressed awareness of this contradiction and felt pressure to jettison such rules in mixed-contacts. In Goffman's (1963: 14) words, they felt “on” in these situations and therefore “self-conscious and calculating about the impression” they made. For Hani, a first-generation Muslim-American, coed handshakes were a dilemma on par with shaving the Sunna beard:

I mean shaking hands is not allowed in Islam—a Muslim man cannot shake hands with a woman, okay, that's there...But when somebody, like an American lady or another Muslim lady comes in and wants to greet you and say hello, just to introduce herself, if I tell her that, ‘hey, I cannot shake hands with you, that's insulting [to] her. So you must go ahead and do it. For me, personally, this is what I do, actually, when I meet somebody [sits back slightly]. I do not approach. I do my best not to get physically involved with them, be it a handshake or whatever. If they approach me with a handshake, yes I go ahead and do that, but I do not do it myself...I mean, I have to, kind of, make sure they know I am a nice guy. That I'm not being sexist and stuff (Hani, 20).

The choice in mixed-contacts was clear: commit haraam by shaking hands with women, be they Muslim or not, *or* risk being thought of “as one of them” (i.e., Islamic extremists). For young men, like Hani, this risk was not worth taking and so they devised strategies for handling such situations: “I do not approach” [to shake hands with a woman], Hani states, [but] “if they approach me with a handshake, yes, I go ahead and do it.” Without attempting to conceal his identity or beliefs, Hani tried to present himself as a willing participant when it comes to identity norms, a process Goffman (1963: 30-31) distinguishes as “normification.”⁵² Agreeing to engage in such rituals demonstrated to others that they were not hostile and sexist but rather open-minded and respectful toward gender codes of conduct outside Islam, thereby leaving positive impressions. In this sense, coed handshakes were a form of “code-switching” (St. Claire and Guadalupe 1980) that signaled their alignment with non-Muslim audiences.

When asked how, if at all, media portrayals of Muslims have affected his behavior, Karim, a second-generation Muslim-American, and Khaled, a first-generation immigrant from Pakistan also mentioned this bracket ritual:

So, for example, in terms of shaking hands with a female. It’s something very small. So in situations like this I try to avoid the [Islamic] idea that I should not shake hands with a female colleague or someone of the opposite gender. I try to avoid that idea. I try to not abide by that idea for the fear that, okay, she is going to think of me like as someone that is being portrayed in the media (Karim, 28).

I do feel like I have to go out of my way to dispel the negative stereotypes. I mean, my stance on shaking hands has changed over time. Before, I would never do it...I try to make it known to my non-Muslim female friends that I don’t hug and stuff like that, and I tell them, I’m not doing this out of disrespect or anything...But when somebody, like an American lady or another Muslim lady is being so nice to you and wants to greet you, and, you know, just get introduced. If I tell her that I cannot shake hands with you, that’s insulting to her, which certain scholars have said is worse than not shaking the hand itself (Khaled, 23).

⁵² Goffman (1963: 30-31) defines “normification” as “the effort on the part of the stigmatized individual to present himself as an ordinary person, although not necessarily making a secret of his failing.”

The risk and fear of coming across as disrespectful toward women compelled these young men to reconsider their stances on coed handshakes. While Karim “avoided the idea” (the proscription on coed handshakes) altogether, Khaled made earnest attempts to explain to non-Muslim women his decision to refrain from such gestures. Ultimately, however, the situational pressure to do gender appropriately forced their hands, quite literally. As Khalid later admitted, “I do feel compelled to do these things now that I normally wouldn’t do just to not perpetuate stereotypes.” Fortunately, as mentioned above, some Islamic scholars have qualified the practice of *ghad al-basar*, allowing participants to excuse certain gestures on moral grounds. Such statements revealed how discrepancies between the virtual and actual identities of Muslim men led to strategic performances in mixed-contacts. These situations were seen as consequential in that they (a) served as arenas where negative representations of Muslim men and manhood would be conjured and tested, and (b) where these young men could—through exercising stigma consciousness and management—project impressions that belied these representations. Once again, a proper (read: normative) gender display was identified as a way to mitigate the effects of anti-Islamic stigma.

The potential for handshakes to cause definitional disruptions was not only a dilemma in mixed-contacts, but also in terms of the identity norms of Muslim men. In particular, for many participants, the controversy surrounding such gestures created confusion over masculine gender socialization in Islam. For instance, Karim emphasized that abstaining from coed handshakes was “a show of respect to both genders.” This practice was understood and conveyed as the opposite of sexism. For Omar, refusal to shake hands with women was problematic not only because of perceived sexism but also because of personal misgivings about gender codes of conduct in Islam. “I, personally, if a female extends her hand, I’ll shake it,” he stated. I try to

look them in the eye, which is just so hard. It's a habit you have to get used to and that's still something I have to work out." Omar explained that *ghad al bassar* and related practices were taught to him as ways to show honor and respect for women, and conduct himself as a Muslim man. The discomfort he experienced in mixed-contacts reflected the tension such rules and expectations produced for these men—a tension that was only heightened by their commitment to Islam. Omar elaborated with a story of an anxiety-producing interaction he had with a guest speaker at a MSA event. The speaker, a non-Muslim woman, was initiating handshakes with some of the attendees before the talk and eventually approached him. "I was just sitting there thinking, what should I do? What do you do? I went ahead and shook her hand." Again, in this instance, concerns over the meaning and implications of a gender display meant certain capitulations. For these young men, the path of least resistance was to abandon such displays in the presence of non-Muslims or, in Goffmanian terms, to accommodate the normals.

Along with allaying embodiment, then, some of the young men managed stigmatized identities by reconsidering and refraining from gender displays that could convey or confirm negative stereotypes about them. Besides embodied stigma, participants were concerned with religious rules and rituals that deviated from Western gender norms. In their view, agreeing to shake hands and making eye-contact with women during mixed-contacts prevented incidents by facilitating their alignment with non-Muslim majorities. To paraphrase Goffman (1976: 1), such alignment helped to "tentatively establish the terms of the contact" between these young men and their non-Muslim audiences by offering a corrective to accounts of their apparent and inherent misogyny, in "real-time." As a technique of impression management, shaking hands was more often mentioned than shaving or other physical changes to appearance, reinforcing Goffman's (1963: 102) assertion that, among the stigmatized, "many of those who rarely try to pass,

routinely try to cover.” As was the case with shaving the Sunna beard, this impression was contingent upon a normative gender display.

These participants rationalized their decisions to forego *ghad al-basar* in mixed-contacts on the basis of situational pressures and supportive opinions espoused by Islamic scholars—i.e., those which deemed such decisions as permissible in certain cases and contexts. In this way, shaking hands with women was re/defined as a forgivable indiscretion, and not an irredeemable transgression. Insofar as these indiscretions were perceived as minor, lacking the religious significance and repercussions of other forbidden acts, they were deemed benign. Benign accommodation therefore constituted a second stigma management strategy, whereby participants attempted to influence the definition of social situations through gestures and bracket rituals that appeased non-Muslim majorities. This strategy revealed their capacities to anticipate and avoid slips, scenes, and faux pas that perpetuated stereotypes about Muslim men, as well as apprehend and emulate normative gender displays in American culture. In action, they were code-switching; in effect, they were “covering” (Goffman 1963: 102). By engaging in such benign accommodation, participants also avoided the “social and personal misrepresentation” that was associated with shaving the Sunna beard—a coping strategy that nevertheless produced feelings of ambivalence, guilt, shame, deception, and disapproval among some participants. This strategy was defined in terms of participants’ abilities to exert control over their situations and to read their actions as, for instance, shows of respect rather than capitulation to the host society. In this sense, their gender displays were *haraamless*.

Claiming Normality: “We’re Just Normal, Average Guys”

The third stigma management strategy could be summed up by a single quote and claim from Omar: “We’re just normal, average guys.” That is to say, young Muslim men are usual,

typical, and acceptable, as are their ways of doing masculinity. Unlike the previous strategies, such an approach was about resisting stigma through a process of “laying claim to the normal” (Ryan 2011: 3). This process was twofold: on the one hand, participants denounced the gender displays of Islamic extremists and, on the other hand, proffered definitions and descriptions of masculine practices in Islam that coincided with traditional gender roles in Western cultures. They claimed normality by establishing *social distance*⁵³ and emphasizing *gender normativity*.⁵⁴ For instance, both the young men and women rejected notions of honor, courage, and altruism used by jihadists to define themselves and their actions—instead they described these men as “brainwashed.” In turn, they drew on passages in the Qur’an, Hadith, and on experiential reality to define Muslim manhood in terms of providing and caretaking. While their statements often interwove subtexts of social distancing and gender normativity, I distinguish them here in order to specify the different bases for claiming normality as yet another stigma management strategy.

Establishing Social Distance

Not surprisingly, all participants expressed negative emotions (e.g., anger, distress, grief, sadness, shock, and shame) over the events of 9/11 and other acts of mass violence carried out by jihadists. The interpretation and exhibition of jihad in these movements was seen as tragically misguided, departing from core Islamic principles of non-violence. The correct view of jihad, participants explained, was as a personal struggle to overcome non-virtuous desires and to lead an honorable life, what scholars have distinguished as the “greater jihad” (Aslan 2006: 81). Interestingly, their disapprovals of militant jihad were often articulated in terms of the deviant

⁵³ I define “social distancing” here as the process of disassociating one’s self and identities from individuals and groups with whom one share’s certain social characteristics, including age, sex/gender, race, and religion.

⁵⁴ By “gender normativity,” I refer to expressions and performances of gender identity that correspond with prevailing cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity.

gender displays of jihadists themselves. For example, when asked what, if anything, the perpetrators of 9/11 were trying to achieve, participants responded in the following ways:

I still have a hard time with that, that they would consider themselves Muslims. And like the whole I am promised all these virgins. Like I am pretty sure that's a metaphor, but you are taking it literally for seventy-two virgins, which kind of makes you a pervert (Fatimah, 21).

Their seventy-two virgins (Maryam, 21).

That's not how I have been taught, how I learned to be a Muslim, you know, to be a man. I didn't learn to kill people and get these women... They definitely thought that what they were doing was full of honor and they wanted to get that kind of respect from other people and other nations and religions. They were definitely trying to show their power, but ultimately I don't feel—I feel they just humiliated our religion. They used the name of Islam and humiliated the religion. (Omar, 20).

Far from restoring the honor of the ummah, jihadists were seen as undermining Islam in pursuit of their own delusional masculine desires. For instance, the prospect of seventy-two virgins⁵⁵ promised to Muslim martyrs (*shahid*) in the afterlife was understood as an illegitimate motivation for violent acts—more so an indication of perversion than piety. In their view, the jihadi interpretation of martyrdom perpetuated the false view that *violence gets you sex in Islam* and that such violence was an acceptable display of Islamic masculinity. However, as Omar affirms above, such displays departed from proper male gender socialization in Islam. His expressed sense of humiliation was echoed by several participants in recalling the events of 9/11 and other acts of “Islamic terrorism,” a noteworthy finding considering that jihadists have often framed their violence as a means of redressing humiliations that they and fellow Muslims have been subjected to (Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005: Chapter 3; Hafez 2007; Sageman 2008: Introduction; also see Chapter 2 of this dissertation). In the eyes of participants, these men were not praiseworthy but rather a manipulated minority whose self-serving actions have effectively

⁵⁵ References to seventy-two virgins in paradise are found in both the Qu'ran and Hadith, including *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* volume IV, chapter 21, hadith 2687.

stigmatized *all* Muslims. The management of spoiled identities thus entailed a resounding rejection of these men and their shirk⁵⁶ manhood acts.

Participants also challenged depictions of Muslim men and manhood in Western media.

For example, Salem stated:

I don't see Muslims like me on TV or Muslim like my friends on TV at all, like I don't, in fact, I don't see any Muslims that I know of on TV at all. The Muslims on TV, these guys with turbans on their head, with a beard, doing this, maybe a gun or sword on their hand and they are doing this kind of talk or giving speeches, usually when they have kidnapped somebody, that's the Muslims that they show. I mean, I don't see Muslim guys like me—and those guys, they are not even Muslims! (Salem, 21)

Such quotes were telling in the fluid manner with which they linked the attributes of Muslim men (e.g., the Sunna beard, turban, and/or taqiyah) to deviant behavior (e.g., acts of aggression and oppression). In their defense, young men like Salem argued that the images of Muslim men broadcast on Western television bear no resemblance to them and that they do not share jihadists' inclinations toward violence or fundamental disregard for human life. Such statements were consistent with the social distancing strategies of Muslim women observed by Ryan (2011) and in line with Goffman's (1963) assertion that identity norms are often defined in contrast to attributes deemed "abnormal." In this case, participants laid claim to the normal by distinguishing between genuine and deviant gender displays.

The role of gender in social distancing was even more apparent in responses to follow up questions and probes. For example, when asked how important, if at all, notions of honor, glory, and bravery were to the men who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks, Yasmine, a first-generation Muslim-American, claimed:

No one is glorifying them. No one is honoring them, besides those who are of that terrorist group. That's it. So, it's just the group which, when you look at it, it's not a lot of people. But the depictions they made in our country seems like there is a million of

⁵⁶ In Islam, the concept of "shirk" refers to actions that directly undermine the unity of God (Aslan 2006).

them out there, but no one else is glorifying them, no one else is honoring them. This is not called bravery! Even their own people, their own countries, are calling them cowards. I mean everyone is calling them cowards, except that group—the terrorists (Yasmine, 26).

The tone and terminology used by Yasmine above to describe the 9/11 hijackers says it all: these men are defined as “terrorists” and “cowards,” and the label “them” appears six times in the span of four complete sentences. Cowardice, in particular, is a hallmark of unmanliness (Nagel 2005; Ouzgane 2008). Participants claimed normality by expressly de-Islamifying the masculinity of militant jihadists. Such statements thus indicated their disassociation—or lack of alignment—with the gender displays of jihadists. To borrow from Goffman (1976: 3), even as these displays were “conveyed” as “natural” expressions of masculinity by militant jihadists, they were not “received” as such by young Muslims, like Yasmine. Although a few participants likened the motives and displays of jihadists to those of American soldiers,⁵⁷ the vast majority agreed, in way or another, with Yasmine’s complete and utter rejection of these men and the movement.

Emphasizing Gender Normativity

In addition to establishing social distance between the identities of actual Muslim men and the virtual men of jihad, these participants also emphasized the normative dimensions of gender in Islam. In particular, they emphasized the ways in which masculine practices in Islam were compatible with traditional gender roles in Western cultures. This was expressed through personal stories, anecdotes, and advice-lending about who Muslim men are and ought to be, as well as invocations of the virtues and values of the (all-male) Muslim prophets.⁵⁸ They often

⁵⁷ For example, “These are all men who do awful acts to defend their countries” (Noor, 20).

⁵⁸ There are twenty-five prophets mentioned in the Quran, all of whom are male and are believed to serve as exemplars of Muslim values and conduct. These prophets may be considered “reliable indicators of ideal Islamic masculinity” (Aslam 2012: 95).

described “real” Muslim men as “family men.” For example, when asked to elaborate about how to talk to others about being Muslim, Mohamed, a second-generation Muslim-American of Saudi descent, claimed:

I will say [to others] the endpoints of our desires are the same. We want a family, we want kids, we want a stable job, and I don't think that's seen. I think, obviously, due to the media portrayals, it's kind of hard to see a family man portrayal of a Muslim man. But the reality is, that's what we want. We want just to work, take care of the kids, take care of our family, and live a content life. I don't think a lot of Americans see that (Mohamed, 22).

Similarly, Omar, 20, stated:

You have to lead by example. If you experience it [anti-Muslim prejudice], you are going to have to deal with it. Now, you can respond with violence or you can respond with integrity. The media portrays us as violent, arrogant, and whatnot, but we're just, normal average guys. I mean, I'm not al-Qa'ida. I'm not here establishing Sharia Law...I want to get my degree and go to a prestigious law school and after that I want to work, work, work, and reap the benefits of my labor. I am pretty sure that's what you want to. We have very similar goals at that point.

These quotes illustrated how some participants resisted stigma by appealing directly to normative conceptions of traditional masculinity in American society. That is, despite media portrayals that suggest otherwise, these young men expressed desires to pursue accepted and respected roles in Western societies. Their emphasis on family roles and responsibilities served as a form of dis-identification, or establishing an identity claim by “throwing severe doubt on the validity of a virtual one” (Goffman 1963: 44). Such claims also constituted an attempt to correct the “objective basis” of their “failing” (p. 9) by highlighting similarities between the identity norms of Muslim and non-Muslim men. In particular, they detailed the Islamic principle of *qawwam* that defines men's roles in terms of breadwinning (Brekke 2012: 257). In line with the claims of Islamic scholars interviewed by Aslam (2012: 109), their statements stressed “the role of caregiver rather than warrior as an ideal for young Muslim men.” In this sense, participants

claimed normality by distinguishing between authentic and deviant masculinity in Islam, and emphasizing the normative dimensions of their ways of doing gender.

According to participants, like Omar, Muslim men must “lead by example,” exercising restraint when provoked and continuing to emphasize commonalities and shared goals with non-Muslim majorities. He and other Muslim men faced a choice when confronted with prejudice, misrepresentation, and discrimination: “either” respond with “violence” *or* with “integrity.” The course and impact anti-Islamic stigma was seen as contingent on strategic actions during mixed-contacts. In Goffmanian terms, their “defensiveness” in these situations may be construed by others as “a direct expression” of their “defect” (1963: 6). Rather, they should adhere to the religious virtues and role modeling of exemplary Muslim men, like the Prophet Muhammed. For many of the young men, such adherence involved joining professional associations and groups that substantiated their roles as upstanding men. As articulated by Omar above, they often talked about their career goals and paths—be it practicing law, medicine, or running a business—as showing their commitments to caretaking and to the community. To be sure, they were not out proselytizing the Sharia or partaking in militant jihadism because they were too busy *doing* real men’s work.

Interestingly, and relevant to the central question in this chapter, many of the young women also challenged anti-Muslim stigma and stereotypes by emphasizing the normative dimensions of masculinity in Islam. In contrasting the depictions and actions of jihadists with those of ordinary Muslim men, Maryam, 21 argued: “they have their own families, they take their kids to school and bring them back, they love their wives and do their job, they do their business, and at the same time they go pray. They don’t terrorize anybody. They don’t kill anybody.” She pointed to *surahs* (chapters) in the Qur’an that specifically encourage family role

performances. She even clarified controversies over *qawwam*, the guardianship or “custodial reign” of Muslim men over women (p. 92) as a misunderstood and misleading basis for anti-Islamic stigma. Rather than representing a set of male privileges, she explained that *qawwam* placed great pressure on men to provide for and protect their families. Such religious practices were seen as making Muslim men more accountable to Muslim women and not as a pretext for abusing them. The practice of *pardah*⁵⁹ and the oppression of women in Islamic fundamentalist cultures, like the Taliban, was, in her view, a perversion of *qawwam* and not a reflection of the “natural” inclinations or “true” inner desires of Muslim men. In mounting their own challenges to ideas about the limited power and agency of women in Islam (issues I explore in Chapter 4), these participants also supported the stigma management efforts of the men—in this case, by claiming normality on their behalf.

Similarly, Noor described how she personally confronted stereotypes about Muslim men in encounters with non-Muslim women:

You get these women who are, like, oh you poor thing, I must liberate you. I feel so bad for you. I bet your husband beats you. I bet he rapes you, or I bet you are putting on that scarf—you dress that way because these men need you to do that. I didn’t used to, but now I’ll correct them. I’ll tell them, I don’t need to be liberated and that, you know, we’re treated very well by the guys, thank you! I mean, what makes them so different? They want a wife and kids, and good job, and they work hard for it. They don’t just force it on us (Noor, 20).

Mixed-contact encounters like this meant not only facing pity and derision directed at her situation, but also suspicion and aversion directed at Muslim men. In this case, Noor confronted stigma by challenging the labeling of the men as terrorists, rebels, and rapists. Mixed-contacts were thus an opportunity to confirm the significant responsibilities and obligations of Muslim

⁵⁹ “Purdah” refers to a system of gender separation or apartheid (Aslam 2012).

men related to *qawwam* and the various consequences of failing to do so. In other words, ideal masculinity in Islam was “that of a family man rather than an unbridled one” (p. 109). The problem, as Mohamed pointed out, was that “a lot of Americans don’t see that.” Such expressed frustration was a grim reminder that, in the eyes of these participants, non-Muslims publics had considerable power to define (read: spoil) their social identities and yet a limited understanding of Islam and Muslim ways of doing gender. For these reasons, Noor and a number of other young women claimed the Muslim men actually “have it worse.” While such solidarity was not all that surprising, the focus on exonerating Muslim men by way of their privileges was.

These testimonies indicate that, in addition to rejecting the acts and aims of jihadists, and challenging related portrayals of Muslim men and manhood in the West, participants coped with stigma by asserting normative gender displays. In particular, they pointed to the ways in which masculine gender roles in Islam were compatible with traditional arrangements in American culture. In other words, far from being a “deviation from the norm,” the identities of Muslim men were imbued with the same values and predilections of traditional American men. Again, this strategy involved laying claim to the normal through establishing social distance, on the one hand, and emphasizing gender normativity, on the other. Similar to allaying embodiment and benign accommodation, the claiming of normality constituted a form of stigma management, whereby these young Muslim men and women managed anti-Islamic stigma in mixed-contacts. The quotes and accounts above illustrate the extent to which participants were sensitive to how they were viewed by non-Muslim majorities, how the displays and depictions of Muslim men contributed to negative stereotypes, and, in turn, why they felt the need to communicate to others (including me as a researcher) what gender in Islam really entails. Their responses revealed not only an acute awareness of discrepancies between their virtual and actual identities, but also of

the specific signs that perpetuate them. At issue were differences between how Muslim men and manhood are depicted, what they ought to be, and who and how they actually are. The effects and management of stigma was also understood as most consequential in mixed-contacts—social situations where Muslims encounter non-Muslim publics. Together, these strategies revealed how participants not only coped with collective stigmatization, but did so in gender-specific ways. With these cases and connections in mind, I now turn to a discussion of the findings.

CONCLUSION: *Gender Displays and Managing Stigma*

As Gerami (2005: 450) had anticipated following 9/11, “Western popular cultures have seen their demons and they are Muslim men.” The ease and anguish with which my participants described this demonization process revealed both the impact and extent of their awareness of stigma labels. Such stigma consciousness resulted in feelings of intergroup anxiety that led, in part, to passing and covering strategies, out of “fear and expected rejection” (Link and Phelan 2001: 374), as well as individual efforts to disabuse others of anti-Muslim stereotypes during mixed-contacts. Their frustration and strategic responses to portrayals of Muslim men not only “underlines the dehumanizing nature of discourses and practices” that stigmatize (Howarth 2006: 443), but also highlights how gender is part and parcel of this process. More specifically, the basis for being stigmatized were particular gender displays, including the discredited bodies and deviant inclinations of Muslim men. According to Goffman (1979: 8), because these displays reveal an actor’s alignment in social situations, they wield more power to define and affirm “our ultimate nature” than practically any other social division. That certain gender displays serve to discredit Muslim identities and must be managed further supports the role they play in the formation and perpetuation of stigma.

Although gender displays constrain and distinguish the lives of stigmatized persons, they can also be employed in ways that mitigate the effects of stigma labels in mixed-contacts. In this sense, gender displays indicate agency. Whether they engaged in allaying embodiment or benign accommodation, these young men demonstrated their awareness and abilities to do gender “by design” (p. 3). These strategies suggest that gender performances are not purely a product of coercion, but a tool that can influence the definition of situations and enable minority men to exert some control over the stigma process. As Goffman (p. 9) points out, “*Any scene... can be defined as any an occasion for the depiction of gender difference, and in any scene a resource can be found for affecting this display.*” These resources range from embodied to gestural signs of gender identity, or “genderisms,” that facilitate the alignment with normals (or at least present the prospect of doing so). As well as shaping stigma labels, these gender displays also mitigate the effects. Minority men may draw on normative genderisms to confront and counter stigma in everyday life.

Gender displays are an integral part of how young Muslim men experience and manage stigma. These displays constitute both a discursive frame for defining Muslim identities and a social tool for coping with anti-Islamic stigma. In line with Goffman’s dramaturgical claims, the stigma surrounding these identities led to the development of specific strategies for mitigating the associated and adverse effects, especially in mixed-contacts. As shown by the findings, these strategies ranged from directly correcting to challenging the basis for stigmatization and may be conceptualized as allaying embodiment, benign accommodation, and claiming normality. These strategies were also gendered in that each involved projecting certain definitions of masculinity in Islam, and so indicate that gender displays are (1) integral to stigma management and (2) may be strategically deployed in order to protect the self in mixed-contacts. This process involves a

complex interplay between the normative expectations and demands of the stigmatized person's own group (in this case, other devout Muslims) and those of "normal" audiences (in this case, non-Muslim publics). This research offers an explanation for why certain coping strategies are used in various social situations—explanations that remain rare in the literature on stigma (Lebel 2006: 420). In this section, I further discuss how gender displays are involved in the creation, perpetuation of stigma labels, and are thus an important aspect of stigma management. I then describe what the above strategies reveal about the agency of stigmatized persons—specifically, the degree to which strategic displays of masculinity can protect and stabilize the self. I close by considering how these displays may serve as a distinct survival strategy for minority men.

First, the findings indicate that men's gendered bodies are a critical dimension of stigma. Participants described the physical attributes and appearance of Muslim men as discredited and in need of management. In terms of allaying embodiment, the young men discussed shaving in anticipation of mixed-contact situations. They were aware that the Sunna beard, in particular, signified "dangerousness," a key aspect of stigma and social rejection (Feldman and Crandall 2007), and considered removing it in order to avoid or minimize negative reactions. They hoped that unmarking their bodies in this way would assuage or "allay" the fears and suspicions of others. This way of coping further suggests that visibility or "perceptibility" is a consequential aspect of stigma (Goffman 1963: 48; Jones et al. 1984; Lebel 2008: 411). Decisions about shaving not only reveal the degree to which stigma symbols vary in meaning from person to person and group to group (e.g., the Sunna beard does not have the same connotation or status as the so-called "hipster beard" donned by white American men), but also how these symbols can constrain or facilitate people's agency—as something to be covered or confronted. So, while shaving-to-pass constituted a "momentary" strategy (Goffman 1963: 80) and was not

unanimously accepted by participants in this study, it was nevertheless considered an effective overlay in everyday interactions. The proof was in the pudding, so to speak: participants that shaved ahead of mixed-contacts admitted less discomfort and greater ease in traversing these situations. Insofar as such gender displays are conducive to the interactional goals of stigmatized persons, they constitute a way of passing. For minority men, whose intersecting identities have often been deemed deviant and dangerous, this suggests that allaying embodiment via gender is one way to cope with stigma.

In addition to embodied changes, the young men managed their impressions in mixed-contacts by refraining from certain religious codes of conduct, particularly those perceived as violating Western gender norms. This strategy of benign accommodation involved and invoked Islamic rules on gender interaction, namely *ghad al-basar*. Considering the stigma surrounding the identities of Muslim men, participants were sensitive about any and all actions that indicated sexism. To avoid confirming and perpetuating such negative stereotypes, many chose to heed prevailing gender norms by shaking hands and making eye contact with women during mixed-contacts. Again, by accommodating non-Muslim majorities in this way, participants engaged in covering, preventing the stigma from “looming large” (Goffman 1963: 102). They recognized the importance and impact of what is “given” and “given off” in interaction, especially in terms of shaping the attitudes and actions of others toward them, and believed that doing gender in normative ways would enable them to present favorable impressions and, as a result, influence the definition of these situations (Goffman’s 1959: 2-4). As Mead (1934: 141) long-ago put it, “the conversation of gestures is the beginning of communication” and this communication structures social interactions and experiences. The findings suggest that, for some stigmatized persons, gender displays greatly influence these conversations.

These participants also challenged stereotypical portrayals of Muslim men by laying claim to normative identities and ways of doing gender. They did so by establishing social distance and emphasizing gender normativity. For instance, they defined Muslim men as family men. In Goffmanian terms, they challenged stigma by attempting to bridge the gap between the actual and virtual identities of Muslim men. Like Ryan (2012: 4-7) observed among Muslim women in Britain, these participants challenged collective stigmatization by “distancing themselves from the ‘abnormal’” (in this case, the activities and accounts of Islamic extremists) and by asserting their normality and “moral standing” as good members of society (in this case, as good Muslim men). These findings indicate that Ryan’s conceptualization of “laying claim to the normal” (p. 7) may be extended to the stigma management strategies of other Muslims—men as well as women. While this particular strategy is not new, this research delineates the specific manner in which it manifests in mixed-contacts: as contested gender displays.

Together, these strategies reveal the anticipated and acted-upon changes through which young Muslim men cope with collective stigmatization, and how this process involved gender. Allaying embodiment and benign accommodation consisted of gender displays that deflected attention from the stigmatized identities of Muslim men. In addition, participants expressly challenged the suggested links between these identities and those represented in both Western media and Islamic extremist movements by defining and displaying Muslim manhood as in keeping with traditional gender roles in American culture. They were attempting to clear the record about masculinity (and femininity) in Islam by laying claim to normative ways of doing gender, rather than resigning themselves to passing or covering. While the first pair of strategies were described in terms of self-defense or damage-control, the claiming of normality was more confrontational. These different strategies correspond with previous arguments that stigma

management exists along a “reactive-proactive” continuum (Siegel et al. 1998). Along this continuum, allaying embodiment and benign accommodation both involve the concealment, selective disclosure, and present no challenge to stigma labels, all characteristic of reactive strategies, whereas claiming normality entailed active resistance of discrediting information, in line with intermediate strategies. There was implicit assumption that mixed-contacts were arenas where stereotypes about Islam and Muslim identities would be tested, and that perceptions and actions of these Muslims were linked to their gender performances in these situations. For young Muslim men, such performances constitute some truth about their nature that can either confirm or counter stereotypes, and reduce or intensify the associated social consequences.

Each of these strategies also reveals the significance of teamwork and the power of audiences to define the situations of stigmatized persons. Both the young men and women defined masculine practices in Islam as normative, further indicating that stigma management is a “collaborative” process (Howarth 2006: 447-48). While the young men managed their spoiled identities through self-presentations and performances that coincided with acceptable scripts of masculinity in Western cultures, the young women did so by drawing on their own experiences and observations to validate those presentations and performances. For example, they clarified the Islamic practice of *qawwam*, for example, by emphasizing the great responsibility it places on Muslim men to perform as providers and to honor women. Such clarifications were made in mixed-contacts (e.g., when questions about the conduct of Muslim men were raised by others) and constituted a challenge to depictions of “Muslim man as ‘the oppressor’/Muslim woman as ‘the victim’” (Khosravi 2012: 69). Contrary to this deviant dichotomy, masculinity in Islam was defined as fundamentally non-violent, family-oriented, and otherwise amenable to social life in the West. Interestingly, then, in discussing their own views and experiences of being cast as

objects of oppressive gender regimes, these young women also discussed the pressures and privations faced by the men—the apparent source of their misery. So, although these young women were not able to control the portrayals of Muslim men, they could still engage in “protective measures” in mixed-contacts by confirming their identity claims and corroborating the normativity of their gender displays (p. 212). Considering the powerful role that Muslim women’s voices have in either lending legitimacy or offering a corrective to stereotypes about gender relations in Islam, such testimonies are an indispensable part of Muslim men’s efforts to manage stigma.

The findings further indicate the considerable influence that audiences exert over the experience of stigma, in large part by setting the contingencies of acceptance and approval in interaction. As evidenced above, these contingencies were connected to certain gender displays. Again, for example, many of these young men feared the immediate consequences of refusing to shake hands with women in mixed-contacts. In their view, the source of stigma and the image that needed to be disconfirmed in these situations were one and the same: deviant ways of doing gender. There were two main audiences in this regard: discrete audiences, channeled through mass media and policy discourses, and immediate audiences, those encountered face-to-face. Even though participants blamed discrete audiences for manufacturing, perpetuating, and exacerbating anti-Muslim stereotypes, especially those about Muslim men, their focus and concerns remained with immediate audiences. What truly mattered, then, was *the vicinity of stigma*—i.e., how and in what ways stigmatizing discourses intruded upon their daily lives and what they could do about it. That being said, when detailing these strategies, none of the men mentioned insecurities over jobs. Most seemed concerned with being improperly detained and questioned for involvement with terrorism, not so much about finding work, providing for their

families, or otherwise “making it” American society. These concerns stand in contrast to those expressed by Muslims in European countries (e.g., Kunst et al. 2013; Aslan 2009), suggesting that Islamophobia in the U.S. is different and perhaps less institutionalized than in Europe. In both contexts, however, gender is identified as an important part of the stigma process—one that contours the level of approval and acceptance Muslims experience in daily life.

CHAPTER 3

Capturing the Veil: The Nexus of Commitment, Salience, and Stigma in the Moral Careers of Young Muslim Women

Abstract

Young women that embrace Muslim identities remain targets of criticism and controversy in Western societies. In this chapter, I examine the consequences of this process by analyzing interviews with twenty-six young Muslims living in the Midwestern United States. I find that young Muslim women cope with collective stigmatization through strategic action, including *allaying embodiment* and *embracing stigma*. Such strategies indicate that the extent to which stigmatized identities are invoked in daily life is dependent on the patterns of socialization and strength of social ties associated with these identities. Drawing on Identity theory and Goffman's concept of moral careers, I argue that the stigma management strategies of participants are linked to increased commitment, salience, role-related behavior, and self-esteem. The findings support this argument and suggest that the stigma process may have self-protective properties, increasing feelings of self-worth and strengthening bonds with fellow members of stigmatized groups.

9/11 and the Moral Careers of Young Muslim Women in America

To be sure, the stigmatized have distinct standpoints and develop particular conceptions of self through everyday encounters with non-stigmatized persons. These processes constitute their “moral careers” whereby they become aware of and learn to deal with discredited attributes. For Goffman (1963: 32-35) there are four general patterns of socialization that moral careers take depending on the onset, form, and type of stigma, the protective efforts of the social circle of the stigmatized, and the social contexts within which they are embedded. In terms of these patterns, Muslim identities in the U.S. have followed the course of “sudden stigmatization,” which occurs when an identity is abruptly transformed on the basis of an unanticipated event or condition that discredits it (e.g., the September 11th attacks). This career often begins after stigmatized persons have developed a sense of normative boundaries—i.e., what it means to be a “normal” person. The moral careers of Muslim women have not only been shaped by the events and aftermath of 9/11, but also by their ages and awareness of American cultural norms. Following Goffman (1963: 38-39), “a life event,” such as 9/11, “can thus have a double meaning on moral careers, first as immediate objective grounds for an actual turning point and later...as a means of accounting for a position currently taken.” These careers help shed light on how stigma is acquired, understood, and managed in daily life, including the coping strategies young Muslim women in America use to deal with sudden and collective stigmatization.

The moral careers of the stigmatized often involve changing or new-found relationships to others that bear and share their deviant treat. For instance, in an effort to gain acceptance, these individuals may strengthen ties to in-group members. Conversely and with the same intention, they may distance themselves from those individuals and groups perceived as of their “own” kind. These degrees or “cycles” of affiliation (p. 38) are a key indicator of the strength of

stigmatized identities, as well as one's connection to them over time. For Muslim minorities, these affiliations consist of ties to Islamic centers and mosques, and involvements in online Muslim groups—the “virtual Ummah” (Zaman 2008: 467). Not only are these spaces designated for religious practice but, in the wake of 9/11, a sanctuary for devout Muslims: places where they will be accepted, protected, and free to explore and construct identities (Ewing and Grady 2013). At the same time, these spaces have been scrutinized by politicians, pundits, media personalities, and average citizens as hostile to American culture and interests, where young, impressionable people are manipulated, radicalized, and even recruited into extremist groups (U.S. Cong. Committee on Homeland Security 2011; Post and Sheffer 2006; Pipes 2003; Emerson 2002). Such discourses have made the affiliative cycles of Muslim minorities an important dimension of their moral careers, in need of further study.

Although researchers have documented the impact that 9/11 and subsequent acts of “Islamic terrorism” have had on Muslim minorities in the U.S. (Peek 2011; Bayoumi 2009; Jamal and Naber 2008), there are particular aspects of the stigma process that remain unknown. In particular, how have Muslims that “came of age” in the wake of 9/11 dealt with anti-Islamic stigma? What coping strategies have they used and what do they suggest about the salience of Muslim identities among younger generations of Americans? Insofar as age and social context are critical facets of one's moral career, the answers to such questions would be instructive and novel. Not surprisingly, major contributions along these lines have featured Muslims that clearly recollect 9/11 (e.g., Naber 2008; Peek 2011). Many of these studies have also focused on issues of prejudice and discrimination, racial assimilation, and various facets of civic engagement (e.g., Kunst et al. 2012; Bayoumi 2009; Jamal and Naber 2008). We have yet to learn how collective stigmatization is managed by younger generations of Muslim women in America, such as how

they define themselves and deal with Islamophobia in everyday life. Exploring these issues is necessary for further developing our understanding this stigma process, including the negotiation of deviant identities and the dramaturgical effects of mixed-contacts. With this focus in mind, I now turn to a discussion of Identity theory and what it claims about role-behavior that can shed light on the management of anti-Islamic stigma.

Muslim Identities in Western Contexts: The Salience of Spoiled Identities

In an early treatise on Identity Theory, sociologists Sheldon Stryker and Richard Serpe (1982) argued that future analyses of the self and identity must develop more precise concepts that can be measured empirically. In their view, Symbolic Interactionists (SI) have cogently laid the groundwork for explaining the quintessential and consequential relationship between society and the self, but many SI studies continue to face methodological challenges. These challenges were seen as stemming from a combination of underspecified concepts, theoretical propositions, and empirical evidence, as well as a lack of hypothesis-driven research. Hence, they proposed a theory of identity that would enable both qualitative and quantitative researchers to develop and improve explanations of social behavior by focusing on a particular kind: *role-related behavior*. Such a focus would also help refine and extend the SI perspective by better situating concepts within the microsociological framework of self and identity. Among the key concepts they defined for making sense of role-related behavior were *commitment*, the extent to which a person's relationships to others rests on attachment to a social role, and *salience*, a way that a person's identities are organized and ordered in relation to the self (pp. 206-07). Commitment and salience are "particularized terms" that reflect and specify larger theoretical constructs (e.g., social structure) and may be operationalized in sociological studies of stigma, including those examining the effects of stigma on the role behavior of Muslim women. Before delving into this

issue specifically, I briefly discuss the relationship of the aforementioned concepts to the stigma process, particularly stigma management.

For identity theorists, deciding who and how we are in everyday life is a fluid, context-contingent, and precarious process. They direct analytic attention to the “choices” people make in defining themselves and selecting social roles. In their view, role-identities⁶⁰ and the social situations in which they arise are “ambiguous in the performance expectations that define them.” This matters because the role performances that are chosen and how they unfold in interaction is a critical part of constructing the self and social identities in society (p. 205). These role performances also indicate one’s social status and sense of belonging in “organized structures of social relationships” (p. 206). In theory, a person can have as many role-identities as the discrete sets of relationships they hold (e.g., son, daughter, student, Muslim) and must organize them in order to manage the relative demands of each. This prioritizing process involves arranging and ranking role-identities in relation to societal norms—making choices based on what identities are available, accessible, and socially valued. The result is a system of social identities that together comprise and constitute the self. This approach to the self suggests that members of stigmatized groups do have some agency, that “choice assumes a social structure that provides options” (p. 208), and that being stigmatized does not necessarily mean being passive, that “stigma is as much about the resistance of identities as the reduction of identities” (Howarth 2006: 450). Thus, how young Muslim women in America organize their role-identities may reflect (and be rooted in) their moral careers.

These theorists further posit that role-identities are organized into a hierarchy based on the probability that they will be invoked in a given social situation or across different situations.

⁶⁰ Insofar as roles and identities are inextricably linked, Stryker and Serpe (1982) proposed the term *role-identities* to refer to these positional designations; a term I too adopt going forward.

In other words, these identities are organized based on their “salience.” The salience of a role-identity reflects its location within this hierarchy and, theoretically, represents one way that identities influence behavior. A key prediction of Identity theory, then, is that salience will influence how, when, and where a role-identity will be brought into play in daily life, as well as what specific behaviors will be associated with it (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 206-07). Besides, whether or not a behavior occurs depends on how a role-identity interacts with (a) the “defining characteristics of the situation (such as the degree to which the situation permits alternative identities to be expressed behaviorally),” and (b) other dimensions of the self, such as self-esteem. In terms of stigma, the reaction of others as well as one’s self-image influence which identities will be salient. This work suggests that prevailing cultural discourses, mixed-contact situations, and individual self-esteem are all manifest in the salience of Muslim identities. This may be gleaned in part from the role behavior of Muslim women, especially in and through their responses to stigma.

The concept of salience sheds light on how and why a particular identity may be brought to the fore in mixed-contacts, and is related to one’s level of commitment. Here, commitment refers to “the degree to which a person’s relationship to specified sets of others depends on his or her being a particular kind of person” (p. 207). For example, the commitment of Muslim women to religious identities is understood in terms of “occupying” a certain status or position within the Muslim community (*ummah*) and “playing” the role. Commitment is therefore connected to one’s social involvements, memberships, and networks, or “the number of others to whom one relates by occupancy of a given position” (p. 207). For instance, individuals are committed to gender identities to the extent that their most important roles and relationships are based on being men and women (Schwalbe and Staples 1991: 165). Given the more strict systems of gender

separation in Islam, the standpoints of Muslims are heavily premised on being a man or woman, suggesting that greater commitment to Islam entails greater commitment to one's gender roles and identity. Again, according to Stryker and Serpe (1982: 207), the greater the strength of one's commitment to an identity, the greater the likelihood it will be invoked in a variety of social situations. Such commitment is central to defining who and what we are, and predicting the relationships and activities we are likely to engage in. In conceptual terms, then, "commitment affects identity salience which in turn affects role-related behavior" (p. 207). This process may be observed among different individuals in order to gain new insights into social behavior, including coping with stigma.

The concepts of commitment and salience appear relevant, if not integral, to the stigma process, and yet few studies have examined to these concepts in relation to stigma management. For example, how are they related to the coping strategies of Muslim women? Such a question reflects and extends the review of stigma research by Lebel (2008) that points to "outcomes" of stigmatization as important and yet under-explored aspects of the process, especially studies that can explain the "tremendous amount of variations" in coping and their impact on psychological health and well-being (p. 421). These explanations may also be bolstered by theories of identity (p. 421) that explicate the role and relevance of concepts like commitment and salience. In this regard, a study of how Muslim minorities manage stigma in mixed-contacts represents an opportunity to apply and extend identity theory. Considering the extent to which the social roles and involvements of Muslims have been scrutinized since 9/11 (Lyon 2002; Mir 2006; Jamal and Naber 2008; Bayuomi 2009; Ghaffari 2009; Peek 2011), this research may show how and in what specific ways their choices are contoured by stigma labels.

Even though religious identity routinely serves as a basis for stigma, knowledge of how Muslims create and negotiate role-identities remains limited. This is especially the case for newer and younger generations of Muslims in the U.S., leading scholars to call for more research on the dynamics and experiences of this population (e.g., Hermansen 2003; Leonard 2003; Peek 2005). For example, in her study of identity formation among second-generation Muslim-Americans, Peek (2005), identified various stages of religious commitment and salience. In particular, she described these stages as existing on a continuum, from little reflection about the meaning of being Muslim to increasing awareness and acceptance of Muslim identities, and, eventually, to complete and open acknowledgement of them. These stages—defined as “ascribed,” “chosen,” and “declared,” respectively—indicated and helped to explain why Muslim youth in America are affirming their religious identities, even more so than previous generations. In addition, Peek situates her findings within Identity theory, concluding that 9/11 “solidified” the commitment and increased the salience of religious identity for most of her interviewees (p. 237). That being said, such studies have not specified the ways in which young Muslims show commitment to religious identities, especially in terms of gender. For instance, how do the stigma management strategies of young Muslim women signify, facilitate, and reflect commitment? How and to what extent does gender influence the salience of Muslim identities in mixed-contacts? Answers to these questions will further develop the theoretical claims of Peek (2005) and other scholars (e.g., O’Brien 2011), by verifying the constructs and evidence used to explain the formation of religious identities, as “spoiled identities” (Goffman 1963), and by clarifying the role of gender in this stigma process.

Considering the potential of Identity theory to further our understanding of coping with anti-Islamic stigma, I re-examine a number of predictions put forth by Stryker and Serpe (1982).

Specifically, I explore the influence of commitment and salience on the role-related behavior and self-esteem of young Muslim women in America. The significance of this study is threefold: (1) it speaks to the “paucity of research” that explains why stigmatized persons prefer certain coping strategies over others, especially in different settings and social contexts (Lebel 2008: 420); (2) it adds to the limited knowledge of the variability of such coping strategies among stigmatized persons (p. 424). Despite the increased attention on Muslim minorities since 9/11, there appears to be many elusive and subtle differences in how Muslim identities are displayed and managed in everyday life; and (3), as mentioned above, it is an opportunity to empirically reassess Identity theory concepts and claims, and its relevance to stigma management. In the next section, I review one other important facet of social stigma: self-esteem.

Stigma and Self-Esteem

Stigma and identity salience have significant implications for self-esteem. That is, self-esteem may vary considerably based on the discrediting information associated with a particular identity and its prominence relative to others. In sociology, self-esteem has been defined as “a positive affective response to the self deriving from beliefs that one is competent and moral” (Schwalbe and Staples 1991: 159). In their empirical analysis of self-esteem, Schwalbe and Staples (1991) distinguished the key sources as “reflected-appraisals,” “self-perceptions,” and “social comparisons.”⁶¹ While there may be other possible sources for self-esteem, these have been observed in sociological studies of the self dating back to the work of Cooley ([1902] 1964) (also see Mead 1934; Rosenberg 1979; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). The socialization process informs and influences the value of one source over another and, as a result, these sources tend to

⁶¹ Reflected appraisals refer to other people’s reactions toward us and our interpretation of these reactions (p. 159). Self-perceptions refer to personal observations of behavior and its various effects (p. 159). Social comparisons refer to the use of others as “benchmarks” for evaluating ourselves, including differences between men and women (p. 159).

be gendered. For instance, young men in the U.S. have been found to place more importance on social comparisons than young women, who have been found to value reflected appraisals to a greater degree (Schwalbe and Staples 1991). In this sense, self-esteem reflects identity norms associated with masculinity and femininity—i.e., what constitutes appropriate and acceptable behavior for men and women in society. It is largely “a matter of culture” (p. 160). And yet, relatively little sociological research has been directed at the gender-based differences in self-esteem. This is unfortunate considering that sociologists are particularly equipped to explain how gender, race, religion, and other important social structures are associated with stigma, not to mention the self. The course and character of Islamophobia following 9/11 suggests that gender ideologies, reference groups, and social settings all affect the self-esteem of Muslims in America (e.g., see Zine 2006; Naber 2008; Ryan 2011; Mahon 2014).

Sociologists have long argued that self-esteem is related to one’s awareness of others’ appraisals and evaluations, and since these aspects of the self are developed in interaction, those who receive negative feedback do and will feel worse about themselves. In this sense, being stigmatized is believed to lower self-esteem. For example, according to the looking-glass self idea proposed by Cooley (1956: 184), self-esteem is tied to one’s self-concept or the cyclical social process consisting of (a) our imagined appearance, (b) what we imagine others’ judgments of our appearance to be, and (c) the ensuing personal feelings, such as “pride and mortification.” In this sense, those who are aware of being stigmatized will, to a degree, internalize stigma labels and have, relative to non-stigmatized persons, less self-esteem. Research on gender and self-esteem has supported this claim, showing how peers, teachers, and media representations are apparent in women’s negative attitudes and feelings toward themselves, compared to men (e.g., Schwalbe et al. 1991). In addition, researchers have conceptualized efficacy-based self-esteem

that highlights how individuals can “earn” self-esteem through displays of competence and assertiveness in interaction (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Franks and Marolla 1976: 326). Since members of stigmatized groups presumably have opportunities for such displays “blocked,” this theory suggests that they will feel worse about themselves. In this sense, a lack of power lowers self-esteem. These theories indicate that, owing to more limited opportunities for demonstrating competence, Muslim minorities will, as a group, have lower self-esteem than average Americans. Whether self-esteem is approached from the looking-glass self or efficacy-based perspective, the consensus is that stigmatization adversely affects self-esteem.

While these earlier theories and conventional wisdom suggest that stigmatized persons have lower self-esteem than their non-stigmatized counterparts, this may not always or actually be the case. In an important corrective to these predictions, Crocker and Major (1989) illustrated how the use of specific coping strategies can facilitate social and self-acceptance—i.e., being stigmatized may not necessarily mean having less self-esteem. They listed a number of studies that either failed to establish the negative impact of stigmatization on self-esteem or found the opposite: that members of stigmatized groups exhibited high self-esteem. Without suggesting that stigma is somehow an innocuous or salubrious social phenomenon, these scholars showed how stigmatized persons can safeguard or even bolster feelings of personal self-worth in the face of prejudice and discrimination. For example, they might (a) attribute negative feedback and personal failures to other’s prejudicial views toward their group, and not themselves personally, (b) compare their experiences only to in-group members—i.e., their “own” (Goffman 1963: 27), or (c) choose to devalue only those attributes and displays that reflect poorly on their group and, at the same time, selectively value those which shine more positively on their group (Crocker and Major 1989: 614-18). Among Muslims, the use of such self-protective strategies might

involve re/defining individual experiences of stigma in terms of aversion directed at *all* Muslims, comparing their experience of rejection or mistreatment only to those of fellow Muslims (e.g., Muslims who have been severely harassed, involuntarily detained, physically assaulted, or killed), and distancing themselves from violent extremists by espousing pro-Western values; the net effect of these strategies being the preservation of self-esteem. In terms of identity theory, such strategic responses to anti-Islamic stigma should be influenced by commitment to Muslim identity, its relative salience, and its display in daily life.

Since commitment denotes the number and strength of relationships tied to an identity, it is closely tied to self-esteem and the aforementioned sources. That is, commitment to an identity extends in part from an individual's experience of its "value" for generating positive feedback, especially in terms of one's competence and moral standing (Schwalbe and Staples 1991: 160). This suggests, for instance, that Muslims will be committed to their religious role-identities insofar as these identities can help them achieve interactional goals and maintain good feelings about themselves. Schwalbe and Staples (1991) believe that the salience of an identity is not just contingent on commitment, but also on the kinds of self-evaluations that arise from invoking them in social situations. The salience of Muslims' religious identities will therefore be affected by positive and negative encounters with non-Muslim publics. These "mixed-contacts" (Goffman 1963: 12) thus inform the salience hierarchies and self-esteem of stigmatized persons. Despite the potential for such work to explain variations in self-esteem among stigmatized persons, studies of the self-protective properties of commitment and salience remain rare (e.g., Peek 2005). So, in order to assess the impact of collective stigmatization on the individual self-esteem of Muslim women, it is necessary to clarify the role and relevance of these concepts.

While Stryker and Serpe (1982: 207-08) suggested more than ten “hypotheses” to pursue in future studies of identity formation, a number have yet to be tailored or “tested.” I focus here on adopting, adapting, and addressing the following four as tendencies rather than hypotheses:

- 1) The greater the commitment premised on an identity, in this case Muslim identity, the more salient will be the identity.
- 2) The greater the commitment premised on Muslim identity, the more salient the identity will be, and the more positive will be the evaluation of this identity.
- 3) The greater the commitment premised on Muslim identity, the more salient the identity will be, and the more general self-esteem will be based on this identity.
- 4) The greater the commitment, the more salient Muslim identity will be, and the greater will be the impact on role-performances, on role-specific self-esteem, and on general self-esteem.

The choice of these four was predicated on three factors: (1) various findings on the weakening and strengthening of Muslim identities in Western contexts, post-9/11, (2) the degree to which the predictions “hang together” conceptually and are relevant to the negotiation of these identities, and (3) the extent to which they may increase our understanding or otherwise “get at” the management of anti-Islamic stigma. These predictions also reflect my own methodological assessment of what could be reasonably extrapolated from the data, interview questions, and the number of interviews conducted in this study. The focus on Muslim women, in this case, also heeds previous calls to examine differences in how groups deal with stigma (e.g., Major and O’Brien 2005; Lebel 2008: 416). For example, in reviewing the social scientific literature on perceptions of and responses to stigma, Lebel (p. 415) finds few studies that have conceptualized the vast differences in coping strategies among stigmatized persons and how these strategies “fit together.” To understand the impact of stigma on self-esteem, for instance, more research is necessary, especially from an insider’s perspective (p. 416). Evaluating the predictions listed above is also a way to address a gap in the literature on stigma management by measuring and explaining variations in coping strategies and the extent to which individuals internalize stigma

labels. The concept of moral careers informs these levels of commitment to and salience, situating them within a range of social ties and affiliative cycles.

DATA & METHODS

Data for this study were based on in-depth interviews with twenty-six young Muslim men and women living in the Midwestern United States. These data were gathered as part of a larger project on the construction and negotiation of Muslim identities in Western societies. The focus of this chapter is on how young Muslim women manage stigmatized identities; a similar inquiry into the effects of stigma on the self and identities of young Muslim men is made in a separate chapter. Interview participants varied in terms of ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation (e.g., Sunni or Shi'a). About half of participant identified as men (14) or women (12) and the majority were either second-generation U.S. citizens or 1.5 generation naturalized citizens. For a complete description of study participants' backgrounds and information, as well as the analytic technique used in this study see Chapter 2 and Appendix B.

THE PROBLEM: *Being Hijabi and Facing Stigma*

Once again, this research asks how young Muslim women cope with stigma in everyday life, especially in mixed-contacts. Not surprisingly, the hijab (the Muslim practice of veiling) featured prominently in accounts of this coping process. Nearly all participants pointed to the hijab as a fundamental and persistent source of stigma. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Ryan 2011; Khosravi 2012; Kunst et al. 2012), this practice was viewed as both an central and consequential expression of commitment to Islam. In their words, it was a “walking symbol” and “a huge political statement” about Muslim women’s status and self-concepts (Khaled, 23). In spite of its “beautiful spiritual meaning,” this practice was understood as “representing our oppression [as Muslim women]” (Sana, 19). While none of the main questions in the interview

guide were about Muslim women's attire and appearances per se, the hijab was often mentioned as a key constituent of stigma management. For example, when asked about how Muslims are portrayed in Western media, participants often started by distinguishing them in terms of gender displays and discussing the controversies over veiling in Western countries. These controversies were seen as most serious and scary in legislative efforts to ban the veil. Their accounts clearly indicated that women's decisions to wear hijab or "be hijabi" was stigmatized. For example, as Sana, a second-generation Muslim-American of Pakistani descent, recalled:

I remember when 9/11 happened, I was in elementary school and during recess, one of my friend's moms would come drop her son off in kindergarten. So I'd always see her walking through the playground her son and she wore hijab. And then after 9/11, in the coming weeks we consulted with our *ulama* about what we should do. My mom was, like, 'should we stop wearing hijab? Is it a safety concern?' He said, 'you make whatever decision you're comfortable with, but if you are wearing the hijab, God will protect you and keep you safe.' My two older sisters decided to keep their hijab on and so did I. But I remember seeing my friend's mom after that, she came back to school and she didn't have her hijab on. It's weird how that like one of those scenes I will never forget, her holding her son's hand and just walking through the playground without her hijab on (Sana, 19).

Such vivid memories of the post-9/11 controversies about veiling practices reflected participants' awareness of discredited stigma and the ensuing decisions that needed to be made about them. That is, commitment to religious role-identities was an integral part of their moral careers. Statements like Sana's also indicated how being hijabi invoked the kinds of negative feedback detrimental to self-esteem, if not one's very sense of physical security. These women were presented with a choice: *keep or cover the veil*. The visibility or concealability of stigma has important implications for self-esteem (Jones et al. 1984) and, as we shall see, was often apparent in how participants understood and managed mixed-contact situations. Although they did not have a personal hand in 9/11 or other acts of "Islamic terrorism," many felt that their choices to continue wearing hijab made them seem complicit. In other words, they were deemed

responsible for maintaining a stigmatizing condition, even though they didn't technically bring it on themselves (Brickman et al. 1982). Being hijabi resolved questions of how, where, and when to disclose discreditable information and clearly showed commitment to Muslim identities. The important questions that remained were about whether or not to do so, or be so, and the impact of such decisions on the self.

The hijab was also recognized as a stigma symbol⁶² by the young men in this study. In the course of discussing the Sunna beard, many of them also brought up veiling as a comparable and more detrimental embodiment of stigma. For example, Ali, a second generation Muslim-American professed:

The fact is if you're a Muslim man, people still might not think you're Muslim or you still might pass off as something else. Your name can give it away but if you aren't knowledgeable with names then, you know, you can—they won't know that you're a Muslim...but when you're a hijabi, that is like flashing a beacon of Islam. I think they're much more prone to ostracism or these questions, and in terms of that, I think it's harder for the sisters, to be a Muslim hijabi women than it is to be a Muslim man (Ali, 19).

Here, the severity and management of stigma are understood in terms of ability to “pass” as normal (Goffman 1963: 61). Devout Muslim women, by virtue of veiling, are not likely to navigate mixed-contacts undetected and were thus seen as more likely to experience the adverse effects of stigma than Muslim men. In Ali's words, wearing hijab was tantamount to “flashing a beacon” and drawing undesirable attention to his Muslim sisters. In a Goffmanian sense (1963: 48-49), the visibility or “evidentness” of the hijab clearly conveys commitment to spoiled identity. Such commitment can serve as a basis for social rejection. As Mohamed, 22, pointed out: “They get these ridiculous questions like, ‘What do you wear at night?’ ‘Do you shower

⁶² Stigma symbols are defined by Goffman (1963: 43-44) as “signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity discrepancy, breaking up what would be a coherent picture, with a consequent reduction in our valuation of the individual.”

with it?’ I mean, come on!’ These types of questions were, in his view, an expression of ignorance and not-so-subtle contempt for the decisions of hijabis. The recognition of stigma symbols and the choice to endure them indicated participants’ level of commitment to religious role-identities, as well as the salience of these identities relative to others.

These assertions about wearing hijab reflected participants’ awareness of displays that others viewed negatively—what scholars refer to as “stigma consciousness” (Link and Phelan 2001; Pinel 1990). Such consciousness informed not just the choices they made in daily life, but also the importance of the aforementioned sources of self-esteem, issues previously identified by sociologists as in need of clarification (e.g., Schwalbe and Staples 1991: 166; Crocker and Major 1989; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Also, in line with the findings in Chapter 3, their assessments of the hijab and other signifiers revealed the integral role of gender displays in the stigma process. Even as these young women described being hijabi as “a personal choice” (Dara, 23) and a decision driven by “inner needs” (Sufiyah, 18), they felt discredited and devalued for such displays. This further suggests that coping with anti-Islamic stigma is a gendered process linked to commitment and salience. In order to specify the bases for such links, I present an analysis of how some young Muslim women in the U.S. have created and negotiated their role-identities in the years since 9/11.

SHOWING COMMITMENT TO MUSLIM WOMANHOOD

According to the accounts of these young Muslim women, they managed stigmatized identities through a combination of (1) *allaying embodiment*, defined in the previous chapter as altering the overt, perceivable manifestations of stigma on the body, and (2) *embracing stigma*, reinterpreting the experience of stigmatization in positive terms or as a “blessing in disguise” (Goffman 1963: 11). With regard to the latter strategy, many of the young women emphasized

their commitment to Islam and the special status they held as Muslim women. For instance, they embraced the hijab or chose to “re-veil” in the years since 9/11, and became more active in the exclusive (and gender-based) activities of their communities. They ranked their religious role-identities higher relative to others identities and eagerly engaged in more role-related behavior. As these changes were often discussed in terms of embracing stigma, I address them below as sub-themes of this strategy. Of course, participants employed more than just one way of coping (i.e., these strategies are not mutually exclusive), but for the sake of analysis, I distinguish them here as distinct forms of stigma management.

Allaying Embodiment: Livening Up the Veil

First, like the young Muslim men interview in this study, a number of the young women also managed mixed-contacts through allaying embodiment. For one, they attempted to “liven up” their appearance through incorporating Western fashion. This strategy was often discussed in relation to the hijab,⁶³ especially wearing the full length abaya or chador, and their decisions to cover in light of normative gender displays in Western cultures. For example, when asked about how she deals with the portrayal of Muslims in the media, Noor, a second-generation Muslim-American, said:

I dress up or try to, like, put on colors and things that, you know, so I won't seem oppressed or seem intimidating, because I feel like the association people have made with Islam. Like, if someone were to see me walking down the street in a black abaya and a black or grey scarf, or something like that, they are going to be like, ‘oh my God, what is this, what's going on?’ So I rarely wear abaya. Most of the time I wear skirts and stuff like that, depending on where I am going, because I don't want to seem intimidating or like seem oppressed. Because, I mean, now even women dressed in all black are being associated as being like the suicide bombers and things like that and so I don't want any kind of association with me and that. And I feel like people become more angry at a Muslim woman who is wearing black or wearing the abaya than a Muslim woman who is more Americanized wearing, like, a skirt or jeans or something like that. So I think my

⁶³ To illustrate by contrast: whereas the men engaged in allaying embodiment by shaving the Sunna beard (see Chapter 2), the women did so by making various changes to the hijab.

dress is one of my ways of, like, disarming myself and seeming more approachable, and trying to not entice people's negative reaction. Because, I mean, I am already wearing the scarf (Noor, 20).

Intimidating, oppressed; intimidating, oppressed. These words were often used to capture the negative representations of Muslim women in Western societies. According to participants, such representations not only discredited Muslim identities but particular kinds of dress in Islam. The dark, ominous abaya was seen as eliciting the most negative response and was thus viewed as very disruptive in mixed-contacts. At least in terms of clothing, participants saw the bases for anti-Islamic stereotypes and sentiment as existing on a spectrum. A stigma gradient, if you will, where some gender displays are more stigmatizing and severe than others. For young women like Noor, managing stigma meant “disarming” oneself in the presence of non-Muslim publics by incorporating fashionable styles and colors that reflect the sensibilities of Western audiences. This strategy was consistent with other recent studies that have illustrated how religious clothing affects Muslim women, making them feel susceptible to “labeling” and “abuse” (Ryan 2011: 10). By anticipating that non-Muslim majorities would react more harshly toward women who wore the hijab and traditional abaya as opposed to an Americanized appearance, such statements also indicated that the level of commitment to Muslim identities somehow made these women more “blameworthy” (Lebel 2008: 412; Feldman and Crandall 2007; Corrigan et al. 2003; Falk 2001). The quote ends with “I mean, I am already wearing the scarf,” indicating that participants’ were not only aware of stigma but also their commitment to Muslim identities. So, even though stigma consciousness contributed to minor modifications to attire, their identification with Islam remained intact.

The desire of these young women to come across as “approachable” was an invitation to others (in this case, non-Muslims) to have an interaction. They considered covering to facilitate this process. In this sense, mixed-contacts were understood as an occasion to belie stereotypes

about Muslim women and engage in role-related behavior. While it is not surprising that Muslim women experience and manage stigma on the basis of their appearances, these were not seen as deterrents to role performance. Their reasons for engaging in what I call allaying embodiment were similar to those identified in other studies, including concerns over prejudice and discrimination, and negative portrayals of Muslims in Western media (e.g. Khosravi 2012; 70-75), but none of these young women distanced themselves from Islam. Instead, they used gender displays to reconcile their religious role-identities with others' expectations. They "covered," in Goffmanian terms, by subtly mixing in colors and clothing that signified both familiarity with Western culture *as well as* their commitment to Muslim identities. What was distinct about this form of allaying embodiment, then, was its limited scope. Unlike the men's decisions to shave the Sunna beard, for instance, there was less subterfuge involved or sought-after. In this sense, allaying embodiment was an accepted way of covering and had little impact on commitment, salience, and, in turn, role-related behavior.

Embracing Stigma: The Strengthening of Muslim Identities since 9/11

Another way participants coped with anti-Islamic stigma was through redefining their experience of 9/11 in terms of personal growth and gains. In retrospect, many of these women saw this tragic event and its aftermath as a blessing disguise, an event that has strengthened their commitment to Islam and buttressed their self-esteem. They shared stories and examples of how this process unfolded and eventually led them to becoming more devout Muslims. This outcome was surprising and counterintuitive, especially in light of the post-9/11 backlash against Muslims in the U.S. (Peek 2011). After all, wouldn't sudden stigmatization reduce commitment to spoiled identities by compelling reactive strategies? Or, as suggested by Cooley and company, shouldn't the mere awareness of stigma adversely affect self-esteem? In this case and in line with the

fundamental paradox of stigma,⁶⁴ not necessarily. Similar to other young Muslims in America, my participants became increasingly committed to religious role-identities since 9/11 (e.g., see Schanzer et al. 2012). The immediate aftermath of 9/11 was so disorienting and deeply painful for these young men and women that such commitment seemed untenable. Eventually, however, the sense of turbulence and turmoil that marred their youth gave way to feelings of perseverance and pride. Rather than just resigning themselves to passing and covering, these young women reexamined Islam and themselves. Through this investigative process they developed greater self-acceptance and more proactive ways of dealing with non-Muslim publics. For example, Maryam talked about how she spent the years following 9/11 exploring Islam and her place in it. She then described her new-found confidence as apparent in a mixed-contact encounter:

It was one weekend and I was off [of work]. Me and my old roommates, we decided to go out...as soon as I get on the bus, as soon as I am walking on, there are these guys and one of them yells out ‘all you jihadi women, you are going to blow up this bus,’ and he starts laughing. So, from where I was a decade ago, when September 11th happened, when people would say something like that, I would kind of go to a corner and hide. But like now, this time, I turned around and I went up to the guy and started poking his chest really hard, just like jabbing a knife into his chest, and I was like ‘who are you to call me a terrorist? Who are you to label my people?’ It is not a joke. You just called us jihadis, you called us terrorists and you said we are going to bomb the bus. And so for a good 30 minutes I was arguing with this guy...

Eventually, she recounted, local security guards were called in to handle the situation on the bus.

And the security cops came up and I was texting my cousin, he was on the phone with me, and I was, like, oh my God I shouldn’t get into fights. This is all my fault. But the security guards, they heard what happened and the Caucasian guy was taken away, because he discriminated and said hateful things toward us, a group of girls who said nothing to them whatsoever...I mean, I didn’t do anything violent, I poked him, but I stood up for myself and I stood up for my people, and I would do it again if I have to.

⁶⁴ Corrigan and Watson (2002) define the fundamental paradox of stigma as perceptions of stigma that produce coping strategies opposite of what we would expect.

First, Maryam's story shows how coping strategies can and do change over time. In line with Siegel et al. (1998), Maryam and others initially used "reactive" strategies—i.e., they were more likely to avoid or cower in mixed-contacts than be assertive in them. However, their moral careers eventually developed a confrontational side. In Maryam's case, feelings of shame and apprehension about being Muslim were no longer strong and no longer prevented her from "challenging moral attributions" and using other "intermediate" strategies (Siegel et al. 1998; Lebel 2008). Interestingly, and similar to other stigmatized groups (e.g., Link et al. 2003), such challenges appeared to be a means and an end for self-esteem. There was a palpable sense of pride in simultaneously standing up for themselves and fellow Muslims. The willingness of young women like Maryam to resist the stigmatizing behaviors of others demonstrated their "voice." In this case, strong identification with one's stigmatized group was an important way to maintain a positive self-image and self-esteem. Aside from the moderating factor of time, the personal transformation that Maryam and other women went through revealed a more inverse relationship between stigma and self-esteem. In this case, rather than allowing anti-Muslim stigma to lower their self-esteem, participants confronted the appraisals of others directly by defining mixed-contacts as opportunities to resist stereotypes and convey in-group solidarity.

Communicating Commitment

Maryam's experience highlighted the degree to which, over time, many of these young women embraced stigma and engaged in more proactive strategies in managing mixed-contacts. In delving further into the bases for such strategies, it became obvious that they emanated from a strengthening commitment to Muslim identities. For example, Noor stated:

I think, if anything, it's definitely inspired me to do like a lot more for the community. It's one of the reasons why I am majoring in Islamic and Arabic studies, so I can become a scholar and one day become a real expert. Because some of the people that they show

as experts of Islam in the media, it's ridiculous. It's like, where did you get this person from? I can do that, you know, show what Islam really is about and promote it. I also hope to work with the government as, like, an ambassador for the Muslim community, to let them know what Islam is really about.

In response to follow up question about what is necessary for accomplishing this goal, she elaborated:

I think it's all about becoming a leader and participating more in the community. If anything good has come out of how Muslims like me have been depicted, it's that I'm establishing myself as leader and, like, being active as active as I am in this community. And having the confidence to do what I am doing. I'm able to talk to people now without holding back because of whatever reasons, like gender issues and things like that...I've definitely gained a lot of confidence to show people that I can act as a leader. I mean, I can do this in Islam. I can be a Muslim woman and I can do this (Noor, 20).

The events and aftermath of 9/11 prompted Noor and other participants to become more active in Muslim communities and, as expressed here, focus their careers on representing Islam. They embraced stigma by communicating commitment to Muslim identities and attributing their personal potential and self-esteem to them. Noor's strategy was intermediate (Segel et al. 1998) in that it involved resisting stereotypes through direct engagement with non-Muslim publics, for example, by using formal education as a way to change people's attitudes toward Islam and Muslim ways of doing gender. Much like Zoya, a young Muslim woman interviewed by Peek (2005: 227), Noor decided to focus on serving the ummah and her faith community, rather than pursuing just any degree. This choice was made in spite of resistance from her parents, who encouraged a more practical (read: non-confrontational) career path. The merits of this strategy are not unfounded—educational measures and contact with stigmatized persons have been shown to improve public attitudes (e.g., see Brown et al. 2003; Couture and Penn 2003; Corrigan et al. 2002; Alexander and Link 2003). The confidence with which Noor and other participants took these measures was also consistent with the observed and associated psychological benefits (e.g., see Lebel 2008; Shih 2004; Link et al. 2002; Major et al. 2002). The self-esteem allied

with communicating commitment to religious role-identities (articulated above in terms of “not holding back” and developing an “I can” attitude toward achievement) was a recurring theme in the interviews. Later, Noor stated that her standpoint made her particularly well-suited for the highest of leadership positions: “I mean, definitely see myself in the White House. Or, at least, as one of the experts that the President is going to have.” Such assertions indicated that actively helping one’s “own” group had a positive impact on the self-concepts of these women. That is, commitment was not seen as a barrier to self-esteem and social mobility, but as a facilitator of them. In turn, these young women defined their strengths, merits, and future trajectories in terms of religious role-identities.

For other young women, 9/11 was a watershed moment that significantly increased their commitment to religious role-identities. For example, Sana stated:

It has made me stronger. I can honestly tell you, if 9/11 wouldn't have happened, I don't know where I would be right now. I don't know how practicing I would be because my aunts and uncles, some of my dad's cousins, they're not that religious...I've had to gain more knowledge because now people ask: 'Oh, well, are you Muslim by choice?' Or 'Did your parents force you into it or what?' To answer these questions or to really make sure this is my choice, I had to do my research. I had to be more aware of things going on around me because when someone turns around and asks me, "What do you think about the attacks of 9/11?" Or, "Why are men and women always separated?" So, I feel like because of 9/11, so many questions were brought up and if you're identifying yourself as a Muslim woman, you have to know what you're standing for. So in order to answer these questions, I say, "Hey this is who we are, I know you've seen everything in the news, but this is who I am. Let's talk (Sana, 19)

Similarly, for Fatima, 9/11 was both a blessing and a curse.

I feel like because of 9/11, I really know what my faith is now, because I am representing it every single day. It's like 9/11 brought me awareness to try to understand quickly, like, who I'm trying to emulate and how I'm going to repair this damage that has happened. I'm not saying I'm thankful for it, but it really brought light to who I'm going to be and having to understand myself as a Muslim in this society. And understand the role quickly (Fatimah, 21).

Along with social context and timing, such statements also revealed the importance of social comparisons and agency in shaping the moral career of participants. Young women like Sana often juxtaposed their experiences of stigma with those of parents, relatives, and previous generations of Muslims. Certainly growing up in the wake of 9/11 has meant facing particular kinds of scrutiny and developing distinct standpoints. This process was evidenced by the relative salience of participants' Muslim identities. As Sana stated, she is "more practicing" than ever before and this stems in large part from her experience of a stigma-inducing event. Just as Peek (2005: 231) found among her participants, the tragedy and aftermath of 9/11 had the "inadvertent effect" of getting young Muslims, like Sana and Fatimah, to engage with Islam and ultimately strengthen their commitment to religious identity. The tendency of participants to compare in-group experiences of stigma was not only used to detail strengthening commitment but also to protect their self-concepts from more "threatening comparisons" (Crocker and Major 1989), such as with non-Muslim American (read: privileged) women, which they rarely ever made. Instead, they talked about the salience of their religious identities in terms of personal "choice." Recall, that choice behavior is considered a key component of commitment and salience (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 211). In light of the stereotypes surrounding gender roles and relations in Islam, these young women often addressed their choices in terms of gender, such as their understanding and acceptance of *pardah*, the practice of gender separation. For instance, as illustrated above, they talked about eagerly learning Islam and their particular "roles" as Muslim women following 9/11. This eventually led to increased attendance of Muslim services, like the Friday Prayer, more involvement in peer groups like the MSAs, and greater overall adherence to *pardah*.

Whether out of personal desire or the need to repair the damage that has been done to Muslim identities, these young women embarked on a journey that involved investigating Islam

and their place in it, and considered themselves quite fortunate as a result. This was apparent with respect to understanding gender roles and relations in Islam. For example, many said they discovered that, as Muslim women, they actually had substantial privileges and authority, including preeminent positions in the family, a myriad of legal rights (in some cases, more so than men), and perhaps most importantly, the unrivaled love, honor, and respect of the ummah. They then identified ways in which these advantages empowered them as women, for instance, by giving them the confidence to be themselves and handle mixed-contacts. And so, rather than blaming the event and aftermath of 9/11 for their challenges and discomforts in daily life, what Goffman calls “secondary gains” (1963: 10), these young women defined 9/11 and their ensuing experiences of Islamophobia as a blessing in disguise (p. 11). Here, coping with stigma meant becoming more devout Muslim women—i.e., communicating greater commitment to religious role-identities.

Although the vast majority of participants detailed instances and encounters that signified commitment to Muslim identities, there were a few exceptions. For example, Maryam, pointed to negative depictions of Islam and Muslim women as too overwhelming for her to continue to veiling. In spite of having an active role and participation in the Muslim community, she felt vulnerable to harassment and abuse in mixed-contacts, and could not bring herself to veil. In comparing her decision to Muslim sisters that wore hijab, she stated: “It takes a lot of courage. I wish I had the courage.” Much like the Sunna beard donned by Muslim men, such gender displays were viewed in terms of their social consequences. Of course, as has been well-established, the visibility or concealability of stigma plays a major role in eliciting the negative feedback from others (Lebel 2008: 616; Jones et al. 1984; Goffman 1963: 48-51). Maryam’s admitted lack of “courage” to face such feedback suggested that reflected appraisals remained a

key source of self-esteem for some participants. Still, Maryam’s sensitivity to the effects of stigma did not deter her from continuing her involvement in the Muslim community (i.e., engaging in role-related behavior). For example, she talked about speaking at her masjid’s Ashura ceremony during the Islamic month of Muharram. For Shi’a Muslims like Maryam, Muharram is a sacred time to mourn the loss and honor the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala.⁶⁵ Ashura, occurring on the tenth day of the month, consists of public displays and storytelling (*ta’ziyeh*) about the massacre of Huseyn and members of his family that resisted the Caliph.⁶⁶ “So, now” she said, “I write speeches and it so cool, to sit and read our history, and to recite it. I wouldn’t get to do this if I didn’t practice, and keep researching to find the true Islam”

Harkening back to Maryam’s vivid memory of her friend’s mother who “unveiled” herself following 9/11, such strategies revealed the importance of commitment and salience in coping with stigma. In this case, participants chose to emphasize the positive outcomes of sudden stigmatization, including becoming more devout Muslims, being more vocal in mixed-contacts, refusing to accept mistreatment and abuse, and displaying themselves with pride. Their actions both revealed and reinforced their self-esteem—points I discuss further below.

Claiming Exceptionality

For many of these young women, being Muslim made them “special.” They were treated with the utmost respect by fellow Muslims and had privileges unbeknownst to outsiders. In their view, being stigmatized on the basis of their intersecting identities was not only detrimental and confusing, it was inappropriate. Their power and potential was not only on par with other (non-Muslim) women, but, in fact, exceeded them. So, for example, they talked about the exceptional

⁶⁵ See Aslan (2006: 171-81) for a detailed discussion of Husayn’s resistance of the Caliph and the events of Karbala.

⁶⁶ The Caliph is considered the successor to the Prophet Muhammad and leader of the ummah (Aslan 2006).

qualities of Muslim women detailed in the Qur'an, they mentioned major female figures in Islam like Khadija (Muhammed's first wife), without whom Islam as a social institution may not have survived to present day, and they pointed to the remarkable accomplishments of contemporary Muslim women, such as Shireen Ijadi (winner of the 2006 Noble Peace Prize). These qualities and contributions were also part of their moral careers: where once they felt may have felt shame, they now felt unique for being Muslim. In this sense, they did not just "lay claim to the normal" like other Muslim women living in Western societies (Ryan 2011), they claimed to be *exceptional*. For example, Dara, claimed:

I feel like other people wouldn't comprehend it [being Muslim], not only is it okay, it's awesome! I mean, I know it's hard to feel comfortable with who you are when, like, people are constantly telling you that it is not okay. I mean, who you are in your religion is not okay. But it's something so special and beautiful and if other people actually knew that, I feel like they would embrace it. We just have to show [others] how special it is and, how much, like, more we're respected (Dara, 23).

Similarly, Sufiya, stated:

I try to be very confident in front of other people, in front of other guys and girls of other faiths and religions, so they can see that we Muslim women aren't oppressed. And that's a big thing, because you definitely have to show them that, like, hijab or anything like that is not oppressing us. In fact, Islam is one of the few religions that women are held in such a high level of respect and dignity. And our rights are even more numerous. I don't want to brag, but it's true! (Sufiya, 18)

For these young women, being Muslim was a great thing. It conferred copious rights, special status, and positive feelings. In contrast to outsiders' ideas about Muslim women, they were not oppressed, but liberated; not disenfranchised, but empowered. As suggested above, Islam far from favored men. This view was often corroborated by the young men, who would also point out the important positions and privileges women held, especially in relation to the family. For instance, mothers were discussed as having the most revered and influential role in Muslim communities. Meanwhile, the absence of women in leadership positions in Muslim-

majority countries and well-known cases of women's oppression (e.g., under Taliban rule), were carefully dismissed in terms of cultural deviance (*aib*), and not rooted in religious scriptures. This is consistent with the selective valuing/devaluing process outlined earlier. In this case, participants selectively valued those qualities that favored Muslim women, or at least gave favorable impressions, and devalued those which appeared unfavorably in Western contexts. Their focus on being mothers and leaders also corresponded with American cultural values and Western ways of doing gender. They were not forced to place "greater value" on other domains (Crocker and Major 1989: 617), such as being a rebel—or, as Sufiyah described, "feeling the wind blow throw my hair whenever I want." Aside from the important implications of this strategy for self-esteem, laying claim to the exceptional meant placing religious role-identities at the top of participants' salience hierarchies. In turn, they saw mixed-contacts as occasions to represent Islam and, if broached on the topic, to discuss its distinct gender-based benefits.

Of the three strategies, the claiming of exceptionality most clearly indicated the salience and selective valuing of Muslim identities. Despite the negative portrayals of these identities, these young women did not see them as chains of oppression but as windows of opportunity—i.e., they could do all and be all by virtue of their standing in Islam. Such variation in what types of qualities and involvements were valued by participants seemed strongly related to their self-esteem. Nearly all of the young women that embraced stigma and their religious role-identities did so with confidence. Although some did engage in social distancing by selectively devaluing performances that reflected poorly on them (e.g., the gender displays of jihadists, see Chapter 2), they focused their energies on convincing others, including me as the researcher, how they fared well or had advantages relative to other groups of women. Interestingly, then, commitment and salience were not discussed in terms of emotional security, feelings we might otherwise associate

with seeking refuge among members of one's "own" (Goffman 1963: 20), but rather in terms of social exclusivity. This strategic response to stigma was reminiscent of the "Black is Beautiful" identity movement (Anderson and Cromwell 1977), in this case, suggesting that being "Muslim is Marvelous." The implications of this for self-esteem are significant when considering the damage that stigma and "othering" have done to the self-images of women of color (e.g., see Collins 2000). The moral careers of these participants were thus defined by post-9/11 affiliative cycles, leading to the recognition and espousal of "special" opportunities to be in-group members (Goffman 1963: 38).

Whereas the young men I interviewed used embodiment and accommodating gestures in order to manage stigmatized identities, these young women communicated commitment. In particular, they described how the traumatic events of 9/11 had, in effect, drawn them closer to Islam and their Muslim communities, and motivated them to reexamine, reassess, and reorganize their religious role-identities. This process was apparent in their stigma management strategies. For example, even as Noor acknowledged altering her physical self-presentation to be more approachable in mixed-contacts (allaying embodiment), she discussed the invaluable insights and strengths she gained because of 9/11 (embracing stigma). When asked what they considered to be the most important roles for Muslim women, Noor and many others eschewed stereotypes of passivity/domesticity and instead focused on the importance of Muslim women being "leaders," both in their communities and American society. It appeared that the length of time since 9/11 had indeed helped participants adjust and adapt to being stigmatized. And yet, the specter of "Islamic terrorism" made the issue of time a problematic feature of coping. Many felt that anti-Islamic sentiment was again on the rise in the U.S. and that every act of mass violence carried out by Muslims in Western countries was like hitting a "reset button." Still, they believed that

their choices and current approach to mixed-contacts was best, at the very least representing a culmination of their stigma experiences. As Sufiya put it, “We know we’re targets, but now, I think, we also know what we need to do about it, and that’s getting out there. You know, being seen and being heard...and just not scared to show people but ready to.” In this sense, commitment, salience, and stigma management were inextricably linked. I now turn to a discussion of these links and what they suggest about the self-esteem of stigmatized persons.

CONCLUSION: *Greater Commitment, More Self-Esteem for Muslim Women*

The findings reviewed here indicate that greater levels of commitment to Muslim identity corresponded with more salience, role-related behavior, and high self-esteem. These conceptual links were evident in and evidenced by their stigma management strategies, which included both allaying embodiment and embracing stigma. These strategies reflect several sociological claims. First, much like those detailed in Chapter 2, these strategies underscore the self process and the importance of mixed-contacts in shaping the standpoints of stigmatized persons. Consistent with dramaturgical and identity theories, these young women defined their situations, and ranked their role-identities in order to deal with sudden and collective stigmatization. Second, they suggest that being collectively stigmatized does not necessarily result in lower individual self-esteem. In line with Crocker and Major (1986: 612), their strategies suggest how membership in a deviant group affords some “special opportunities for self-protection.” In this section, I further discuss these key conclusions, as well as how the social context of tribal stigma contributes to the coping strategies of minority women.

First and foremost, the findings reinforce the reality of the self. Establishing this reality is not only important for theoretical reasons, but also for illustrating, on an empirical level, how stigma causes suffering. Among my participants, the self was evident in how they talked about

their experience and management of spoiled identities. These young women imagined how they appeared to non-Muslim publics and associated judgments with 9/11, developing mixed-feelings as a result. They then attempted to control this social process in and through mixed-contacts. In order to move these interactions in a direction they desired, they had to determine and more fully understand their commitment to Muslim identities and the salience of these identities relative to others. For example, these young women felt targeted for being hijabi and forced to decide how (and how much) to be Muslim. For many of them, this meant investigating Islam and ultimately developing a stronger connection to it. So, even as the fears and pain following 9/11 initially led some to cover and pass, in Goffmanian terms, or distance themselves from Islam, nearly all regained and eventually embraced their Muslims identities. Their moral careers led them to, on the one hand, make slight modifications to their physical appearances and, on the other hand, display their religious commitment. In this sense, the findings reflect the very basis of self-construction—a process that arises in interaction between actors and audiences, and is affected by social contexts and resources (Goffman 1959; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Callero 2003).

While this research does not offer any major empirical surprises, it does support some previous claims about religious identity and render some theoretical insights, particularly into the process of stigma management and the development of self-esteem. First, the strategies used by these participants to cope with collective stigmatization may be a reflection of commitment and the salience of their religious role-identities relative to others. As I expected, participants were committed to being Muslim, which increased the salience of their Muslim identities, and resulted in more proactive ways of dealing with anti-Islamic stigma. This process also suggests that their moral careers were marked by transitions toward greater religiosity. This is consistent with recent studies that find stronger identification with Islam among Muslim minorities in the West,

especially the younger generations (e.g., Peek 2005). The strategies reflect the latter stages of religious identity development detailed by Peek (2005), namely, religion as chosen and declared identities. That is, nearly all of these young women responded to the tragic events and effects of 9/11 by pursuing and taking pride in their Muslim identities. Also, as was expected, those who expressed more commitment to being Muslim exhibited higher self-esteem, manifest in the coping strategies they used. The strategy of claiming exceptionality, for instance, coincides with research that finds social and psychological benefits of identifying with a religious community, in spite of negative portrayals and feedback from outsiders (e.g., Chen 2002; Hurh and Kim 1990). The theoretical take-way being that stigma management can confer self-esteem.

The social context of anti-Islamic stigma also influences the predictions and findings—i.e., the social, political, and economic context of the U.S. War on Terror. For example, the strategy of allaying embodiment may reflect a well-established mode of resistance in Western contexts: consumption or using consumer practices to cope with stigma (Conrad and Caldwell 2006). Specifically, these women co-opted mainstream fashions in anticipation of mixed-contacts, but few chose to “de-veil.” As observed in other contexts (e.g., Sandikci and Ger 2010), consumerism plays a role in the “adoption and transformation” of stigmatized identities (p. 16). As a sub-strategy of embracing stigma, communicating commitment also suggests that American society does not place the same types or levels of constraints on Muslims as do those in Europe. These young women did not appear afraid that religious commitment would prevent them from finding employment or exercising political rights. This is a noteworthy implication given the degree to which marginalization along these lines is recognized by Muslims as major consequences of Islamophobia in European countries (Kunst et al. 2013; Ryan 2011), not to mention an expressed cause of radicalization and violence linked to Islam (Sageman 2008;

Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005: Chapter 3). Such stigma management strategies may reflect an underlying belief among participants that U.S. societal structures do not harm the self nor hinder social mobility in severe ways.

As anticipated, the salience of Muslim identities was also associated with higher levels of self-esteem among participants in this study. These young women not only prioritized but also showed pride in their religion and themselves. This is consistent with earlier studies that found higher levels of self-esteem among stigmatized versus non-stigmatized groups (e.g., Hoelter 1983; Jensen et al. 1982; Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000). The findings also suggest that self-esteem is not “passively acquired” (Crocker and Major 1989: 610; Franks and Morella 1976: 326) but “earned” through competent action and effective identity management. Again, while it may seem unusual or paradoxical that the experience of stigma would increase self-esteem, this may be explained by the aforementioned research on the sociological sources of self-esteem. In this case, participants placed less importance on the reflected appraisals of non-Muslim publics than they did on in-group comparisons and self-perceptions. For example, although these young women recognized the media as a “generalized other” that portrayed them in a negative light, they were less phased by it. What mattered more was their own understanding of Islam, how their experience compared to fellow Muslims, and the evaluations of their own peers and faith communities. Moreover, they attributed negative portrayals and feedback as directed at Muslim people in general, and not themselves personally. As surmised by Crocker and Major (1989), such attributions and in-group comparisons may actually protect the self-esteem of these and other young Muslims.⁶⁷ As these scholars claim, “felt contentment is relative to the comparison

⁶⁷ Specifically, this correspond with the claim that “the more an individual has structured his or her self-concept around membership in a group that is devalued, deprived, or discriminated against, the better that individual feels about him or herself in terms of global self-esteem” (Crocker and Major 1989: 620).

standard used” (p. 615). In this case, participants used a combination of social comparison and group-based selective valuing strategies to secure and even enhance their self-esteem.

A few additional factors to consider in reading the self-esteem of participants are time, blame, and visibility. These moderating factors are related to how persons learn and adjust to their stigmatized identities (i.e., their moral careers). The findings further indicate that time, in this case the ages of participants when 9/11 happened and the years since, plays a fundamental role in the stigma process. Most participants were in middle school in the U.S. on 9/11 and so their moral careers were defined by youth and place. Not surprisingly, as adolescents, they were shocked, scared, confused, and distressed by the attacks. Even though many felt vulnerable to prejudicial treatment and abuse, virtually none abandoned their religious beliefs. Instead, these young women chose to investigate Islam and their roles in it, eventually redefining their experience of 9/11, and becoming more devout Muslims. Whatever self-esteem was lost in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was recovered and, as suggested by these findings, enhanced. The strategies of communicating commitment and claiming exceptionality, in particular, indicate higher self-esteem. These responses are remarkable when considering that stigmatization that occurs suddenly is often much more difficult to endure than those which come on gradually (Jones et al. 1984; Malcolm et al. 1998; Falk 2001). Time may also be defined in terms of “time spent in religious role activities” (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 209) and as a function of commitment and identity salience. As illustrated above, these young women chose behaviors, activities, and involvements based on religious role-identities. The strategies of communicating commitment and claiming exceptionality speak specifically to this process. It felt very good (enhanced self-esteem) to be a good Muslim woman (increase commitment).

Participants also did not accept personal blame and responsibility for 9/11 and believed that negative feedback in mixed-contacts was not directed at them, personally. This belief may also have contributed to their higher levels of self-esteem. Indeed, society is much tougher on those believed to bring stigma on themselves (Feldman and Crandall 2007; Siegel et al. 1998), and so by redirecting the source of anti-Islamic stigma to the group, these young women could protect themselves and their feelings as individuals. To be sure, recognizing you are not at fault for an adverse condition can make it much easier to love and accept oneself.

The visibility of stigma also relates to self-esteem in this study. This “crucial factor” is considered central to the type and quality of feedback that stigmatized persons receive (Goffman 1963: 48), and yet for these participants, visibility did not sustain feelings of shame, depression, and anxiety as observed in other cases (e.g., Goffman 1963: 87; Lazarus 1993; Link et al. 2002; Cole and Ahmadi 2003; Couture and Penn 2003; Khosravi 2012). Their stigma management strategies suggest that, for the most part, these women accepted themselves and their situations, and were less affected by what Goffman (1963: 111) calls “the contingencies of acceptance and disclosure” in mixed-contacts. Instead, they talked about being more devout than their parents and relatives, and how that meant being more visible. Even though individuals who are able to pass off as “normal” are considered more well-adjusted than those whose “blemishes are apparent” (Jones et al. 1984; Crocker and Major 1989; Lebel 2008), this research suggests that being visible may facilitate self-esteem in part by preventing negative emotions. Also, were these women to be treated unfairly without others’ knowing they are Muslim, they could not easily attribute such treatment or feedback to Islamophobia—the problem would be personal. In this sense, being visibly Muslim has more self-protective properties than passing.

This research stops short at observing these young Muslim women actually engaging in role-related behavior and presupposes further analysis of their daily routines and involvements. Such analysis could help explain why young Muslims in America chose to adopt and maintain the ecological and religious boundaries of their communities, in spite of the social consequences. The relationship between this boundary work and concerns over radicalization and terrorism in Western societies means the “choices” Muslim women make—e.g., in managing stigma and constructing identities—will continue to be a key and contested issue. As Aslan (2006: 73) aptly points out, both “the traditional colonial image of the veiled Muslim woman as the sheltered, docile sexual property of her husband” and “the postmodernist image of the veil as the emblem of female freedom and empowerment from Western cultural hegemony” are simplistic, if not extreme. “The veil may be both or neither of these things, but that is up to Muslim women to decide for themselves.”

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to explicate the role of gender in various aspects of contemporary Islam, particularly how gender influences the violent acts of militant jihadists, and how Muslim men and women manage the stigma placed on them as a result of jihadists' actions. In this research, I asked three main questions: how are martyrdom acts framed in militant jihad? How do young Muslims experience and manage anti-Islamic stigma? And what role does gender play in these processes? The data I used to address these questions consisted of a combination of statements from leaders and rank-and-file members of jihadist movements, as well as in-depth interviews with young devout Muslims living in the U.S. The statements were derived from the compendium *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad* (Aaron 2008). The interview data were drawn primarily from MSAs at two large Midwestern universities and collected using snowball sampling techniques. Both sets of data were analyzed using grounded methods. The choice of these data was based on their relevance to the research questions and the recommendations of scholars to further study the experiences of Muslims living in the West (e.g., Khosravi 2012; Peek 2011; Ryan 2011). In this final chapter, I synthesize the findings of the three previous chapters and introduce an integrative theory of gender that addresses the research questions, and situates my studies within ongoing discussions and debates in the sociological literature. I also detail the strengths and limitations of this research and propose a couple of important avenues for future study. I begin by I briefly summarizing the major findings and theoretical contributions.

In Chapter 1, I examined the framing of martyrdom in militant jihad and found these acts to be defined as self-defense, restorative rituals, and honor displays. For jihadists, such violence was deemed necessary for defending the ummah from perceived threats, affirming true Islamic identities, and “re”establishing a Salafi-inspired Islamic state. Again, these martyrdom frames

were motivational, a basis for ameliorative action (Benford and Snow 2000). The findings provided qualified support for Blackian theories of collective and self-inflicted violence, indicating that martyrdom in militant jihad is a way of handling grievances by unilateral aggression. However, rather than inferring the motivations of martyrs, as Black (1998) and fellow pure sociologists have proposed, this research focused on the subjective interpretations and aims of these acts—i.e., the *meaning of martyrdom*. The findings show support for both Blackian scholars and their critics in conceptualizing this violence: the ideological framing of martyrdom suggests that these acts are a form of violent self-help. Moreover, these frames cast martyrdom as men’s duty complete with masculine rewards. Following the theoretical scheme advocated by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), martyrdom acts are, in effect, “manhood acts” that enable aggrieved men to resist domination, elicit deference, claim (male) privileges. Integrating Blackian and social constructionist perspectives, I conceptualized these acts as *masculine self-help*: a gender-signifying act that expresses a grievance through self-sacrificial and embodied aggression. While theories of martyrdom continue to be debated, especially in the context of social movements like Global Jihad, the concept of masculine self-help provides one way of understanding why some men come to see themselves as responsible for sacrificing their lives along with taking the lives of others. This conceptualization of martyrdom may help explain men’s violence in other social contexts and conflicts.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I moved the analysis to those acutely affected by the violent actions of jihadists: Muslims living in the West. I examined how and in what ways these individuals managed stigmatized identities, especially in mixed-contacts. I drew on the scholarship of sociologist Erving Goffman, particularly the dramaturgical theories put forth in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963),

and *Interactional Ritual* (1967). The decision to engage these texts was threefold: First, these are considered seminal works in the sociology of the self and thus provided a proper framework for exploring the creation and negotiation of Muslim identities. Second, the course and character of stigma surrounding these identities, and the strategies used to manage them in mixed-contacts further develop Goffman's original works. Lastly, the decision to take this approach reflected my own belief in the power of dramaturgical theory to make sense of the plight and problematic situations of Muslims minorities. Focusing on how the self is sustained through dramatic and strategic performances offers a way to understand how young devout Muslims reconciled their incongruent and "spoiled" identities, interpreted the prevailing norms of Western cultures, and managed the expectations and reactions of others (e.g., non-Muslim publics). I discovered that these men and women used certain strategies to mitigate the effects of stigma in mixed-contacts, including allaying embodiment, benign accommodation, claiming normality, embracing stigma through communicating commitment and claiming exceptionality. These coping strategies were conscious and collective, and, as I discuss next, involved normative gender displays.

Gender was integral to stigma management among my participants. That is, each of the observed strategies entailed displays of Muslim manhood and womanhood. To make sense of this pattern, I drew on the overlooked and yet revelatory essay *Gender Advertisements* (1979). Here, Goffman illustrated how gestures, poses, and other social signals are used to define the "essential nature" of men and women, and normative masculinity and femininity in American society. Such "gender displays" serve as social scripts, reflecting and reinforcing ideas about how men and women ought to be.⁶⁸ This inquiry thus offered a way to theorize the relationship

⁶⁸ For instance, he observed that American men "tend to be located higher than women" in scenes depicting intimate relationships and family life, "thus allowing elevation to be exploited as a delineative resource" (Goffman 1979: 146). That is, they were displayed in terms of the privileged roles and expectations associated with manhood in American culture.

among cultural representations, norms, and performances of gender in Western societies. The findings further illuminate the interplay between such displays and societal notions of “normal” and “natural” behavior, showing how stereotypes about gender in Islam develop and are dealt with by young Muslim men and women. My participants shared many opinions and feelings about Islamophobia, including the significant role gender plays in mitigating the adverse effects, but their responses also indicated some important differences. For example, the young men more often engaged in covering and passing compared to the young women, who preferred shows of commitment. Although this difference may be attributed to many factors, the findings suggest that Muslim men feel more vulnerable to the consequences of stigma than Muslim women, the latter feeling more secure and emboldened to challenge stigma on behalf of themselves and their communities. To place such patterns of similarities and differences in greater context, I now turn to interpreting the main findings.

What to Make of Beards and Headscarves?

The finding that Muslim beards and scarves serve as stigma symbols is not surprising, but the specific ways in which my participants perceived and managed these symbols during mixed-contacts was. The variation in coping strategies indicate a *gender gradient in stigma*. That is, the acute experiences and effects of stigma are related to normative patterns of gender in society. Social stigma has an inevitable impact on the lives of every individual, but the course and extent of the impact depends in part on the complex interplay of in-group and out-group gender norms. In the U.S. context, this gender gradient has been apparent for Black men (e.g., Anderson 1998), Black women (e.g., Collins 2000), and other minorities stigmatized in part on the basis of gender (e.g., Kenny 2006). Young Muslim men and women are just the most recent group subjected to stigma in this way. The gender gradient is also apparent in the difference responses to stigma.

Although the strategy of allaying embodiment was discussed by many participants, the young men I interviewed were less adamant than the young women about the special significance of their Muslim identities—e.g., the former focused on normativity while the latter focused on exceptionality. The particular role and consequences of gender displays, then, may account for the choice of coping strategies, what may be described in this case as passing-versus-purdah responses to stigma. The self-esteem exhibited by women that belong to similarly stigmatized groups may also be related to this gender gradient.

This research also qualifies and extends the literature on stigma management, especially in terms of the contextual dimensions of Islamophobia. Again, most studies of Muslim identities in Western contexts have taken place in Europe and few have theorized the specific and strategic role of gender. For example, the strategy of claiming normality is in line with Ryan's (2011) conceptualization of coping among Muslim women in Britain. Along with traditional religious clothing, I distinguish embodiment and gender-signifying gestures as symbolic communications that "impact one's experience and negotiation of stigma" (p. 10). However, other strategies, such as communicating commitment and claiming exceptionality, were about challenging stigma openly and directly—often by emphasizing the power of Muslim women as "mothers" of the ummah. That being said, these participants articulated their strategies primarily on the basis of everyday exclusion rather than structural discrimination. That is, they feared shaming, not job loss. At a glance, such findings suggest that being a young Muslim in America, man or woman, is "better" than in Europe. This is, of course, an arguable suggestion worth pursuing: are the life chances of young Muslims in the U.S. comparably greater than in other Western countries, and if so, why? Based on my interviews, I argue here that "feeling hated" (p. 5) is perceived as a more mundane matter for Muslims in America than in other Western contexts.

Similarly, this research further develops the ethnographic work of Peek (2011, 2005) and others (e.g., Hermansen 2003; Ghaffari 2009; Mishra and Shirazi 2010; Mahon 2013) that have explored the formation and negotiation of social identity among younger Muslim-Americans. For example, the stigma management strategies identified in this study suggest that some these young Muslims have progressed to later stages of religious identification, distinguished by Peek (2005) as “chosen” and “declared” identities, respectively. My participants reflected little on the meaning of being Muslim prior to 9/11 and have since come to see their religious identities as something achieved rather than ascribed. Much like the Muslims interviewed by Peek (p. 230-231), most of my participants expressed a strengthening of their religious identities in the wake of 9/11. And yet, the stages of religious identity formation proposed by Peek and the levels of stigma detailed by other sociologists do not explore or delineate the role of gender. My research does by showing how gender displays serve as both an impetus for religious violence and a basis for stigma management and self-esteem. These displays are thus a significant mediating factor through which aggrieved and stigmatized individuals signify and secure their identities.

This research has a few implications for current sociological debates. First and foremost, it affirms the explanatory power of social constructionist perspectives and methods for theorizing gender. For example, the masculine self-help concept can help to explain the violent repertoires of contention in global jihad and other militant movements. Of course, violent acts carried out by members of Christian fundamentalist and White nationalist movements also “take the veneer of restoring manhood” (Kimmel 2005: 416). Aside from particular religious and political distinctions, these “martyrs” appear to be disaffected and marginalized men attempting to restore their “lost” privileges and place in society. Therefore, developing effective interventions for preventing violent radicalization of these and other groups of men means deciphering how their

subjectivities are conditioned through gender socialization and male-peer culture, collaboration and competition (especially in terms of access to resources and recourse), as well as the contested definitions of exploitation and empowerment.

Specifically, the conceptualization of gender put forth in this study is situated within the sociological framework outlined and advocated by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009). Again, these scholars contend that the prevailing multiple masculinities approach or “men and (fill-in-the-blank) pattern” of studying gender, has yielded diminishing theoretical returns (p. 278). For new insights to be gained, sociologists must refocus attention on what males actually do to construct identities as “men” and claim the associated privileges. This dramaturgical process starts with distinguishing the signifying practices through which these identities are affirmed in interaction. In other words, males must learn and convey a “convincing manhood act” (p. 279). My research explicates this process in two ways. First, the framing of martyrdom by militant jihadists shows not only the significance of the male body in carrying out such violence, but also the subjective aims: to resist domination, elicit deference, and claim gender-based rewards. Second, the specific stigma management strategies used by young Muslims shows how central manhood acts are to the daily lives of stigmatized persons, both as controlling images and methods of coping. In order to manage stigmatized identities, these men and women must also put on a convincing (read: normative) gender performance, one that facilitates acceptance and gains approval. For Muslim minorities, shaving and veiling are part and parcel of this process. In this case and way, gender constitutes an avenue of power.

Strengths & Limitations

There are some limitations to this research, most of which pertain to the data sources and standpoints of participants. Chapter 1 illustrates the importance of jihadists’ subjective views for

understanding martyrdom acts, but must also be viewed in light of RAND Corporation objectives and affiliations. RAND, which published *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad*, is a non-profit organization that receives part of its funding from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD lists jihadist groups, like al-Qa'ida and ISIS, as threats to national security and American interests abroad.⁶⁹ The trustworthiness of these data and the knowledge extrapolated from them must therefore take into account RAND stakeholders and the editor's decisions regarding the organization and content of the text—e.g., what quotes to include. A second limitation is that the compendium includes quotations from both Islamists and jihadists, groups which have distinct grievances and goals (e.g., see Aslan 2009; Khosrokhavar and Macey 2005).⁷⁰ Again, unlike Islamist groups, like Hamas and the Taliban, militant jihadists view martyrdom operations as part of an overall strategy to establish a transnational caliphate that encompasses much of the Muslim world. In other words, such operations are not simply a means of defending territories or fighting for independence, but a means for conquest. These operations are thus directed at *both* near and far enemies. Bearing these important differences in mind, I was careful to parse the quotes and claims of self-identified jihadists or espoused the ideologies of Global Jihadism (Gerges 2009; Aslan 2009). This sorting process had a marginal effect on the amount of data that was eventually excluded from the analysis.

In spite of these limitations, the RAND data are arguably more substantial and reliable for analyzing the framing activities of militant jihadists than works which rely on biographical information and/or psychopathological inferences (e.g., Kimmel 2005; Lankford 2012). Many of the quotations included in the compendium were drawn from *Sawt-al Jihad, Al-Battar Training*

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of State. 2014. Foreign Terrorist Organizations: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> (Retrieved July 6, 2014).

⁷⁰ See Aslan (2009) for more detailed discussion of the differences between Islamists and jihadists.

Camp, 39 Ways to Join Jihad, and other primary sources of jihadi literature. The full text also included statements from historical figures, current leaders, and rank-and-file members of the movement. This inclusivity is important because framing has primarily been studied as a top-down process and “intentional activity of movement entrepreneurs at the organizational level” (Oliver and Johnston 2001: 8), and these data provided a broader set of viewpoints for examining martyrdom frames. The constructivist methodological approach taken in this study also places the data and findings in further context. Again, the point of this inquiry was to offer a way of understanding martyrdom in militant jihad, not to claim generalizability or an assertion of “truth” about these acts in Islam and/or other religions.

It is also important to note that although researchers have tried clarifying and highlighting the roles of women in violent jihad (e.g., Davis 2013; Von Knop 2007; Skaine 2006; Schweitzer 2006), martyrdom remains almost exclusively a male enterprise. To be sure, the participation of women in suicide bombings belies an androcentric impetus for violence, not to mention the strict system of gender separation espoused by many Islamic extremist groups (Aslam 2012; Kimmel 2005). Media attention directed at Muslim women who carry out suicide missions, so-called “Black widows” (CNN Newsroom 2014), is both excessive and misleading. For instance, of the 462 suicide attacks carried out between 1980 and 2003, only 59 (roughly twelve percent) were successfully carried out by women, and *none* of these involved al-Qa’ida (Pape 2005). Their role in more recent movements like ISIS continues to be ancillary, nurturing a culture of violence rather than directly participating in it (Abdul-Alim 2015). This difference appears related to boundary work on the part of jihadi men. Scholars have found that women tend to play more symbolic and supportive roles in militant movements, such as luring potential recruits in chat rooms and inspiring them to carry out violent acts, as well as being careworkers and doing

traditionally feminized tasks. The exclusion of women from participating in violent jihad is “not because of religious proscription,” Sageman (2008: 111-12) has observed, “...but because of the masculine conception of heroism” among jihadists and fear that “a more active role for women might lessen the repute of men’s actions.” This also corresponds with literature on gender and war (e.g., Hutchings 2008; Goldstein 2001; Morgan 1994) in that martyrdom conjures notions of manhood and soldiering. This gendering process may explain why so few women commit these acts, and how incidents of female suicide bombing may simply reflect cases of women engaging in other forms of violence—alarming and yet novel. In this case, men maintain a monopoly on martyrdom.

This research also concedes some limitations based on the characteristics and collection of the interviews. Again, study participants were identified through the non-probabilistic method of snowball sampling. Although this method is well-established and well-suited for research on sensitive topics and hard-to-reach populations, it does present some “inherent dangers” (Penrod et al. 2003). Among these are potential biases with respect to site selection and the social network of participants, both of which have implications for the application and theoretical scope of the findings. For example, initial informants were drawn from a pair of MSAs and an Islamic Center and mosque, and the immediate referrals were also linked to these organizations. These were primarily devout Muslims and, as such, may have been less likely to engage in covering and passing to cope with stigma to begin with. To overcome the limitations associated with narrow sampling frames and improve upon snowball sampling methodologies, Penrod et al. (2003: 102) have proposed a chain-referral method of sampling that “permeates multiple social networks in which the phenomenon of interest occurs.” This method involves “multiple snowballs” from various settings and thereby reducing biases and increasing the scope and

richness of the findings. In terms of exploring the stigma experiences of Muslim minorities, such an approach could yield a wider variety of coping strategies and more nuanced accounts going forward. That being said, this form of sampling also presents methodological challenges (Harry 1986). My use of selective and theoretical sampling methods reduced these problems, for instance, they did not impede or interfere with the conceptualization of the study population and identifying participants. Also, to reiterate, my focus was on stigma management among *young* Muslims who considered themselves to be *devout*. This focus insured that location and network biases would not convolute the sampling frame nor undermine the reliability of the findings.

In addition to the site selection and sampling process, the actual interviews can also introduce biases that impede the trustworthiness and implications of the findings. As noted by Ryan (2011: 8), “the interview situation is also a performance during which the interviewees sought to positively present themselves and their faiths to the non-Muslim researcher.” In the Goffmanian sense (1959: 238-239), this situation was more likely part of the “front stage” where participants represented themselves and their actions in ways that are difficult to verify without direct observation or triangulation. Team techniques for “saving the show” (p. 212) may also influence responses to certain questions, such as the extent to which the young Muslim women support the assertions of young Muslim men about negative portrayals in Western media. In this regard, the interview process is also an occasion for impression management, where participants strive to be “disciplined performers” (p. 216), both aware of stigmatizing discourses and able to project impressions that belie them. The potential for these biases are considered common and unavoidable aspects of interview research, and self-report data more generally. That being said, it is worth noting that several participants recommended others that they thought might have alternative or even opposing perspectives during the referral process, rather than just suggesting

others that shared their views and opinions about the issues at hand. To me, this was an indication of their genuine stake in the prospective findings, as well as the seriousness with which they took their roles as research participants. Such sincere investment in presenting a range of accounts surely helped the trustworthiness of the findings.

Aside from these general limitations, there are a couple of gender-specific issues that are also important to consider in interpreting these findings. First, being a man or woman not only influenced the coping strategies of these young Muslims, but also their interaction with me as the researcher—and me with them as participants. Even though I may be seen as a member of the “wise” based on my more intimate knowledge of participant standpoints, I am also an embodied male imbued with androcentric biases and pre-conceived notions that could very well influence the meaning and analysis of the data. Gender has been identified—even more so than race and ethnicity—as impacting the interview process in ethnographic studies (Song and Parker 1995; Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron 2011). Though I followed up with participants regarding key themes (e.g., member-checking) and routinely questioned my conceptualization of stigma in this case and context, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of (my) gender-based assumptions in this research. The interpretation and implications of the findings must therefore be situated within the (complicated and consequential) historical context of men interviewing women for research purposes (Bell, Caplan, and Karim 1993; Warren 1988). To mitigate the effects of gender in this regard, I followed the suggestions of Padfield and Procter (1996) by recognizing gender as an important factor in shaping the expressed views and perspectives of participants (a factor that continues to be taken for granted in the production of knowledge), elucidating their

definitions of masculinity and femininity, and making them feel heard and at ease.⁷¹ The audio recording and repeatedly listening to the interviews also helped to clarify the emergent themes, in part by juxtaposing them with my notes and initial thoughts during the actual interviews.

Recognizing my positionality in terms of gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, generation, and religious affiliation was also influential in how I identified and built trust with participants. In other words, my standpoint affected how and why I defined the study population as a “stigma category” (Goffman 1963: 23-24), and related to their experiences of stigma. Compared to other qualitative studies of Muslim identities in Western contexts (e.g., Ryan et al. 2011; Peek 2005), I also identified and collected the interview data without having to rely on peer researchers.⁷² As a result, I was more intimately connected with aspects of the research process than other studies of Muslims in Western societies (e.g., see Ryan et al. 2011: 56). While researchers have attempted to overcome such limitations through focus groups and other methodological techniques (pp. 56-58), my direct involvement at each stage of data collection conferred greater confidence in the validity of the findings. As Mahsa, 18, put it, “We need someone like *you* to tell our stories”

Future Research Directions

While these findings suggest several questions for future study, I highlight two that I believe are significant and worth pursuing: (1) What constitutes the social structure of anti-Islamic stigma in American society? And (2) how are the lived-experiences of Muslims in

⁷¹ For example, in closing, I also asked all interviewees if there were any questions they would like to ask me. Aside from more general questions about the direction of the research, a number of participants used this time to give me positive feedback, such as telling me how “easy” I was to talk to and how well I appeared to listen. Such comments were not just personally validating, but, I believe, lessened the degree to which my gender performance interfered with their willingness to share more intimate details about themselves and their experiences.

⁷² Peer researchers are defined as people who would normally be the subjects of study, but due to their “insider” positions and knowledge, are enlisted as part of the research design—e.g., helping to recruit subjects, conducting interviews, administering questionnaires, organizing and participating in focus groups, and taking part in research training (Lushey and Munro 2014). According to Ryan et al. (2011: 51) such researchers are “frequently used by researchers to carry out fieldwork involving hard-to-reach populations. The enlisting of peer researchers arguably strengthens the research process by overcoming distrust and other barriers in studies of these populations.

America shaped by intersections of privilege and oppression? Beginning with the first question, researchers have identified certain individuals and organizations that have contributed to the rise of Islamophobia by documenting their rhetoric and activities (e.g., Wajahat et al. 2011). They include public intellectuals, conservative news media, and talk shows, politicians, pundits, and wealthy donors. For example, Wajahat et al. (2011) have shown how media outlets like Fox News, the *Washington Times*, and the *National Review*, along with popular media programs, like those run by Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, and Pamela Geller, “amplify harmful, anti-Muslim views to wide audiences” (p. 85). Goffman (1963: 71) recognized the power of mass media to transform one’s personal identity into a stigmatized social identity. This power is arguably greater and more pervasive in the Internet age. My interviews included questions about the portrayal of Muslims in the media and many participants raised the issue even without being asked specifically about the media’s role in initiating and perpetuating anti-Islamic stereotypes. Their accounts alongside the apparent “echo chamber” of anti-Muslim discourse (p. 5) suggest there is an Islamophobia network that remains unstudied and yet central to the daily lives of Muslims in America. Comparing the views of my participants and other young Muslims with the activities and objectives of this network can help to place anti-Islamic stigma in a larger social, cultural, and political context. This research may show stigma labels, levied against Muslims and other minorities, to be political products with a specific purpose and outcome: the creation “others” through conscious and collective action.

Although the findings indicate that gender, race, religion, nationality, and age intersected in a particular way in the lives of these participants and shaped the stigma management strategies they used, this process also requires further investigation. For instance, how and to what effect have the subject positions young Muslim men and women living in the U.S. structured their daily

lives and contoured their experiences of stigma? As indicated by my findings, the gender identities of stigmatized persons are defined (and become meaningful) in relation to other social categories, including race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, ability, and age. Much like the depictions of Black manhood in U.S. society (Anderson 1998; hooks 2004: Chapter 4), Muslim manhood has been cast as volatile, violent, and dangerous. The findings detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 indicate that one's location within intersecting social structures also influences self-esteem. In this sense, "stigma and intersectionality are very much intertwined" (Rolston 2012: 289). Intersectionality perspectives provide another analytical framework for exploring Islamophobia and linking everyday encounters to larger social structures and inequalities in American society. I believe these types of inquiries are important for understanding anti-Islamic stigma in Western societies and constitute a potential trajectory for my own research program.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

As I mentioned, I am interested in understanding the experiences of being Muslim, post-9/11. First, I will ask you a few questions about your thoughts on Muslims in the news media. After that, I will ask you to respond a few vignettes/examples about the U.S. response to 9/11. I will then ask you a few questions about your daily life and about gender differences.

MUSLIMS IN THE MEDIA, POST-9/11

1. What do you think are the most influential news media sources to Americans?
 - a. How about for you, personally?
2. Could you talk about how the news media portrays Muslims?
 - a. What do you think about this?
 - b. *Probe*: What do you think about the news media coverage of the different military aspects of the post-9/11 response (for example, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of drone missiles in Pakistan)?
 - c. *Probe*: What, if any, impact do you think media coverage has had on how other Americans view Muslims
 - d. *Probe*: What, if any, differences do you think there are in how Muslim men and women are portrayed in the media?
3. How do you think someone like you was portrayed in the U.S. mainstream news media before 9/11?
 - a. How about immediately after?
 - b. And now, ten years later?

U.S. RESPONSE TO 9/11 & VIGNETTES

4. What do you think about the ways the U.S. has responded to the events of 9/11?
 - a. *Probe*: How do you think these actions are viewed by other Americans?
5. How do you think that someone like you, from (ethnic background, religious affiliation and nationality) is viewed by the U.S. government?
 - a. *Probe*: What, if any, differences do you think there are between how Muslim men and women are viewed?
 - b. *Probe*: Why do you think this is?
6. **Vignette A**: Excerpt about Islam in the context of the U.S. War on Terror.
READ QUOTE: "I've made it clear, that the war against terrorism is not a war against Muslims, nor is it a war against Arabs. It's a war against evil people who conduct crimes against innocent people...Islam is a vibrant faith. Millions of our fellow citizens are Muslim. We respect the faith. We honor its traditions. Our enemy does not. Our enemy doesn't follow the great traditions of Islam. They've hijacked a great religion." Former U.S. President George W. Bush

READ QUOTE: “The United States is not and never will be at war with Islam. In fact, our partnership with the Muslim world is critical ... in rolling back a fringe ideology that people of all faiths reject.” Current U.S. President Barack Obama.

- a. What do you think about these statements?
- b. How do you think other Americans perceive the “War on Terror?”

7. **Vignette B:** Excerpt from Muslim Radicalization Hearings:

READ QUOTE: “Unfortunately, we have too many mosques in this country. There are too many people who are sympathetic to radical Islam. We should be looking at them more carefully. We should be finding out how we can infiltrate them.” --Peter King, U.S. House Representative (R), New York.

- a. What do you think about this quote?
- b. What do you think about conducting these hearings?
- c. *Probe:* What, if any, impact do you think these hearings have had on someone like you?
- d. *Probe:* How do you think these hearings are perceived by other Americans?

STIGMA EXPERIENCES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Now, I would now like to ask you a few questions about your experiences in daily life.

8. How would you describe your daily interactions with people in your community?
9. What, if any, impact do you think media portrayals of Muslims have had on your day-to-day life?
10. What, if any, acts of prejudice or discrimination have you experienced because of who you are?
 - a. *Probe:* When did you first experience this?
 - b. *Probe:* What do you think of these experiences?
 - c. *Probe:* How, if it all, have you experienced such problems with people in your community?
 - d. *Probe:* How, if it all, have you experienced such problems at work/at school/elsewhere?
 - e. *Probe:* What makes it easier or more difficult to deal with experiences of prejudice or discrimination for someone like you?
11. How, if it all, have you changed your behavior to avoid harassment because of who you are?
 - a. Could you give me an example of this?
12. What do you think are the most challenging aspects of daily life for young Muslims living in the U.S.?
 - a. *Probe:* Do you see any differences in these challenges for young Muslim women and men?
 - b. *Probe:* How about for you personally?

GENDER

Now, I would now like to ask you a few questions about gender.

13. What do you think are the most important roles for a man [and woman] to play in their community?
 - a. *Probe*: What about the relations between men and women in Muslim communities?
14. Could you tell me how you think Muslim men and Muslim women are portrayed in the media? (Circle back)
 - a. How do you think other Americans perceive these portrayals?
 - b. *Probe*: How would you compare and contrast these portrayals with your identity as young Muslim man [/woman]?
 - c. *Probe*: How concerned have you become with how you interact with women [/others] because of the way Muslim men [/women] have been portrayed?
15. What did you think when you first learned that those who orchestrated the 9/11 were young Muslim men?
 - a. How about now, ten years later?
 - b. What do you think these men were trying to achieve?
 - c. *Probe*: How important do you think ideas about “honor,” “bravery” and “glory” were to these men?
16. **Vignette C**: Excerpt on depictions of Muslim manhood in the media and by the state.
READ QUOTE: “In the post September 11th context... Western popular cultures have seen their demons, and they are Muslim men.”--Shahin Gerami, Professor of Women’s Studies, San Jose State University.
 - a. What do you think about this quote?
 - b. How do you think these portrayals of Muslim men are perceived by other Americans?
 - c. *Probe*: What, if any, impact have these portrayals of Muslim men had on someone like you?
 - d. Could you give me an example?

ENDING QUESTIONS

Now, I would now like to ask you a few questions in closing.

17. As you look back on 9/11, how, if at all, have your views of being Muslim changed?
 - a. Tell me about some of the strengths you’ve discovered about yourself through experiencing 9/11?
18. What have you learned that you think would be important for others to know about being a young Muslim man [/woman] in America?

19. Would it be possible to contact you if I have any additional follow-up questions?
20. Is there anything you would like add to the things you have told me, or is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you thought I would?
21. Can you recommend a person for me to interview, like yourself, who may share you background and experiences of 9/11?
22. Now, that we are at the end of the interview, is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE & DATA

Age _____

Gender ___ Man ___ Woman

Ethnic Background _____

Nationality _____

Religious Identification (Please be specific): _____

Marital Status

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never Married

Employment Status

- Employed for Wages
- Self-Employed
- Out of Work for Less than 1 Year
- Out of Work for More than 1 Year
- Student
- Homemaker
- Retired
- Unable to Work

Occupation, If Applicable _____

Education

- Less than 12 years
- Some College
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's or Professional Degree

Citizenship Status

- U.S. Citizen
- U.S. Naturalized Citizen
- If yes, how long have you lived in the U.S.? _____
- Permanent Resident
- Other (Please Indicate): _____

AGE	GENDER	ETHNIC BACKGROUND	NATIONALITY	RELIGIOUS ID	MARITAL STATUS	EMPLOYMENT	CITIZENSHIP STATUS	PSEUDONYM
28	M	Bengali	Bangladeshi	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Employed (FT)	Permanent Resident	Karim
20	M	South Asian	Pakistani-American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Naturalized Citizen	Omar
21	M	Bengali	Bangladeshi	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Employed (FT)	F1 VISA	Salim
20	W	African	American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Noor
21	W	Afghani	American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Maryam
26	W	Pashtun	Pakistani-American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Employed (FT)	Permanent Resident	Yasmine
24	M	Greek	American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Idris
22	M	Korean	American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Mohamed
21	W	Bengali	Bangladeshi	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Aasif
24	M	South Asian	Pakistani-American	Muslim (Sunni)	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Javed
21	W	South Asian	Pakistani-American	Muslim (Sunni)	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Zahra
21	M	Arab	Palestinian	Muslim (Sunni)	Never Married	Student	Permanent Resident	Ahmed
19	M	Hydrabad	Indian-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Ali
19	W	Punjabi	Pakistani-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Naturalized Citizen	Sana
22	W	Pakistani	Pakistani-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	Permanent Resident	Bilal
20	M	Iranian	American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Naseem
18	W	Indian	Indian-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Sufiya
23	W	Iranian	American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Dara
21	W	African	American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Fatmah
19	M	Persian	Iranian-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Paymon
23	M	Indian	Indian-American	Shia Muslim	Married	Employed (FT)	U.S. Citizen	Khalid
22	M	Azeri	Iranian	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	F1 VISA	Mehdi
21	M	Arab	Saudi-American	Muslim (Sunni)	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Ayman
20	M	Arab	Saudi-American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Hani
22	W	Arab	Qatari-American	Sunni Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Arwa
18	W	Persian	Iranian-American	Shia Muslim	Never Married	Student	U.S. Citizen	Mahsa