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AMERICAN MUSLIM MEN AND STIGMA: THE USE OF  
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AS MECHANISMS FOR  
STIGMA MANAGEMENT

By

Jack R. Allen III  
B.A., Asbury University, 2015

A Thesis  
Submitted to the faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in Sociology

Department of Sociology  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2017

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B.A., Asbury University, 2015

A Thesis Approved on

May 31, 2017

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Dr. Lisa S. Allen

and

Jack R. Allen Jr.

with love

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Thesis Committee Chair, Dr. Brooms: for guiding me through the research process and engaging with me in discussion about research and teaching. To the Department of Sociology at the University of Louisville: thank you for instructing me and providing me space to find my research voice. To my beautiful wife, Sara: I owe my sanity to you, thank you for loving me and enduring the past two years with me. To the men who participated in this project, thank you for trusting your stories with me.

# ABSTRACT

## AMERICAN MUSLIM MEN AND STIGMA: THE USE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF STIGMA

Jack R. Allen III

May 31, 2017

The experiences of American Muslim men deserve further study because they are relevant to current civil rights discussions, especially in a social-political climate that is growing increasingly hostile toward the Islamic world. Despite acknowledging the significant impact of gender, relatively little research has focused exclusively on masculine Muslim experiences of stigmatization. This research addresses the experiences of religiously practicing Muslim men and addresses the following questions: How do Muslim men experience stigma in their communities? What experience do these men have with religious institutions? And finally, how do these experiences with religious institutions inform how these individuals manage stigma? Using semi-structured qualitative research interviews with men who attend Islamic religious services in a large mid-western United States city and observation sessions at the religious services these men attend, this research finds that these men use stigma management techniques to navigate their social environments and combat racialized stigmatization.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States is becoming an increasingly hostile place for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim following military involvement in the Middle East and international acts of terror attributed to groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Several government and private agencies, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, report that hate crimes committed against those perceived to be Muslim have increased 1,700% since 9/11 (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009: 48). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2012) reported a 50% increase in hate crimes against Muslims in 2012; this increase is likely tied to hateful rhetoric from politicians and activists. Given this increase in the rate of hate crimes, discussions that center on the experiences of Muslim Americans have become the forefront of civil rights discussions. This study analyzes how Muslim men experience and manage anti-Islamic hostility. Greater understanding of these experiences can inform public policy that ought to protect these individuals amid national and international terror.

Islam is a major world religion, and its constituents come from an incredibly diverse array of nationalities. However, American scholarship generally discusses the experiences of Arab Americans and religiously practicing Muslims in terms of “racialization” (Garner and Selod 2015; Jaffe-Walter 2016; Rana 2011; Razack 2008; Selod 2014). Omi and Winant (2015) define racialization in terms of “the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (111). In the case of Muslim men, their religious identity and practice is transformed

into a racial designation. Rana (2011) builds on this argument stating that, “the Muslim is understood not only as a totalized biological body, but also as a cultural and social entity constructed within a number of discursive regimes, including those of terrorism, fundamentalism, patriarchy, sexism, and labor migration” (26). Scholars point to religious signifiers and practices (Selod 2014) as well as cues of foreignness (Brown et. al. 2013) as markers of this newly conflated racial category. Muslim religious signifiers include but are not limited to the hijab, beards, traditional clothing (primarily the thobe – a long robe worn by Muslim men) names, and phenotypes such as skin tone (Brown et. al. 2013; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2007: 20; Selod 2014). Popular discussions surrounding the mistreatment and hateful rhetoric that surrounds Muslims uses the term Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a relatively young term and can be simply used to describe racism against Muslims (Garner and Selod 2015; Rana 2011).

The use of the word “Muslim” becomes confusing because it could refer to a religious or racial designation. Meer (2008) argues that racially or religiously classified Muslims can be viewed as a “quasi-ethnic sociological formation” (66). This distinction is “quasi-ethnic” because ethnic and religious identities “intersect and are rarely clearly demarcated” (Meer 2008: 66). Individuals can personally identify as Muslims because they observe the religious practices of Islam, they were born into a religiously practicing family, or because they belong to ethnic groups who have been associated with the Islamic faith. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and can be difficult to differentiate even for individuals who self-identify as Muslims. This

research analyzes Islamophobia against religiously practicing Muslims through a racial lens.

In addition to racialization, this study explores the experiences of Muslim American men in terms of stigma. Using stigma to analyze the experiences of Muslim men is not in contradiction to previous studies' assertion that Muslim men carry a racialized identity. Rather, this study seeks to understand how Muslim men manage and live with stigmatizing racial and religious identities. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as "an attribute which is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction" (3). Using this definition, practicing Muslims can be understood to carry stigma related to their racial and religious identities. This stigma associates the practice of Islam with terrorism and casts Muslim men as threats. In addition to general Muslim stigma, literature suggests that men experience a gendered stigma as sexist (Razack 2008: 16). Despite these theoretical positions, relatively little research exclusively addresses the stigma experiences of Muslim men. Thus, in exploring the experiences of men, the current study seeks to contribute to this research gap.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following research questions: How do Muslim men experience stigma in their communities? What experience do these men have with religious institutions? And finally, how do these experiences with religious institutions inform how these individuals come to manage stigma? This investigation is relevant to current discussions which center around the rights and mistreatment of individuals who are perceived to be Muslim.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a growing body of research on the experiences of Muslim Americans in the social sciences. This review explores the literature using several questions. First, the review will begin by discussing the history of Muslim experience in the United States using 9/11 as the turning point: What experiences did Muslims have before 9/11? And what experiences did they have after 9/11? Then this review will discuss literature on specific gendered Muslim experiences of stigma: Do the experiences of men and women differ? The literature review will then focus on how stigma management has been discussed in the current body of research. And finally, the review will discuss the importance of religious structures for Muslims as a stigmatized group.

### MUSLIM STIGMA IN HISTORY

Though there has been a resurgence in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a consensus among scholars that the mistreatment of Muslims is not new. Akram and Johnson (2002: 302) claim, “the post-September 11 targeting of Muslims and Arabs is simply the latest chapter in history.” In many ways, religious designations of superior and inferior people predate the division of people based on race (Rana 2011; Selod 2016). The socially constructed notion that Muslims are unusually violent dates as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Europe (Mastnak 2010; Selod 2016: 63). In United States history, “Islam represented a liberatory identification for African Americans; however, this presented a threat to white Christian supremacy that was then used to further racialize

immigrant and Black Muslims” (Rana 2011: 28). The racialization of the Muslim other saw a resurgence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Current scholarship argues that Islam has been crafted as the new conceptual opponent of Western Democracies after the fall of Communism (Mastnak 2010; Rana 2011; Werbner 2005). In current time, Muslim’s racialized identities come to take on nationalist meanings and stand in contradiction to a normative White Christian America and the United States nation-state. The framing of Muslims as anti-American contributes to the experiences of religiously practicing Muslim men in modern time.

#### POST-9/11 MUSLIM EXPERIENCES

The experiences of Muslims in the United States during the most recent century are like the experiences of other disenfranchised racial groups. These experiences include the threat of hate crimes, negative media, and legally mandated discrimination (Akram and Johnson 2002: 304). Most scholarship views 9/11 as one of the most pivotal points in modern history. Singh (2002: 3) states:

Over the past twenty years backlash hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in the United States have become predictable, triggered by conflict in the Middle East and acts of terrorism associated with Arabs or Muslims. The hate crimes that followed the September 11 attacks nonetheless were unique in their severity and extent.

9/11 is understood as an international terrorist attack attributed to al-Qaeda that occurred on September 11, 2001. Conventional narratives state that four commercial airliners were hijacked by al-Qaeda operatives. Two of these airliners were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City and a third struck the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field outside of Pennsylvania. Muslims received heightened mistreatment after these events because

9/11 was attributed to Islamic extremism. For example, Cainkar (2002) describes the immediate aftermath from these attacks in Chicago:

In Chicago, more than 100 hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, as well as persons mistaken for them, were reported to the Chicago Commission on Human Relations by the end of December 2001. On September 12, the largest predominantly Arab mosque in the Chicago metropolitan area was surrounded by a mob of hundreds of angry whites, some shouting 'kill the Arabs,' some wielding weapons. ... An Assyrian church on the north side and an Arab community organization on the southwest side were damaged by arson in the late fall. The rebuilt community center was again vandalized in March 2002. In the months immediately following September, Muslim women in Chicago repeatedly reported having their head scarves yanked off or being spit at in the street (23).

While the Council on American-Islamic relations (CAIR) (2004:11) recorded a steady increase in reports of discrimination prior to 2001, threats against Muslims have increased after 9/11. Reported physical violence against Muslims increased from 42 reported incidents to 93 between 2002 and 2003 (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2004: 10). Reported hate crimes increased from 153 to 167 between 2005 and 2006 (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2007: 9). In fact, the number of hate crimes against Muslims reported increased each year after 9/11 until 2007, when it began a two-year decline until the last public human rights report by CAIR. Prior to 9/11, hate-groups targeted Muslim and Arab Americans. Organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rit have illegally monitored thousands of Arab Americans and organizations for much of the twentieth century (Akram and Johnson 2002: 304). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2017) reports and increase in the number of anti-Muslim hate groups since 9/11. This number increased the most between 2015 and 2016, jumping from 34 to 101.



Prejudice against Muslims has been cultivated by popular media images depicting Muslims in stereotypical roles. American media and cinematography is historically linked to stereotyping of racial groups (Hazell and Clarke 2008). Muslims have been frequently portrayed in film as misogynistic, fundamentalists, terrorists, and violent enemies to democracy (Rana 2011: 79). Akram and Johnson (2002) argue that this stereotyping goes largely unnoticed because these views are consistent with general attitudes in United States society.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States and other Western Powers passed legislation directed at policing Arabs and Muslims under the guise of national security (Werbner 2005). The policing of Muslim bodies preceded the 9/11 attacks. The United States has systematically profiled Arabs and Muslims in national airports since 1996 (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002: 4). However, the treatment of American Muslims as a threat has surged and gained political support following Islamic terror. Perhaps the most notable legislation after 9/11 is the Patriot Act, which the United States in direct response to those attacks. This act allows federal agents to issue National Security Letters without approval from a judge. These letters are used to authorize the surveillance of American citizens determined to be a threat to national security. Even if in suspected terrorists are found to be innocent, data collected is not required to be destroyed (American Civil Liberties Union). Some scholars suggest that the government is the primary source of discrimination against Muslims in the United States (Cainkar 2002: 23). The Council on American-Islamic Relations reported in April of 2002 that over 60,000 individuals experienced discrimination from the United States government by means of “interrogation, raids,

arrests, detentions, and institutional closures” (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002; Cainkar 2002: 23).

The 2016 presidential debates provide a unique setting to analyze how the Islamic faith is becoming increasingly politicized (Hussain and Bagguley 2012; Read 2015; Shyrock 2010: 8). During the 2016 Presidential campaign, major political leaders appealed to a fear of “Radical Islamic Terror” in the voting populous. When asked what they planned to do about Islamophobia and Muslim Americans being labeled as a threat to national security during the second presidential debate, both Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton and Republican nominee Donald Trump made the claim that American Muslims needed to be the United States’ “eyes and ears” when it comes to terrorist activity (New York Times 2016). These statements imply that religious Muslims have heightened associations with terrorist activity. Anti-Islamic rhetoric was especially central to the campaign of President Donald J. Trump. Though in many ways his proposed political agenda has lightened in intensity, one of his first executive orders in office was a temporary halt on immigration from many majority Muslim countries, followed by “extreme vetting” of all refugees and immigrants from these countries (BBC 2017; White House 2017).

#### GENDER AND MUSLIM STIGMA

Scholars have recognized gender as a central variable that contributes to the experience of stigma. Razack (2008) discusses the importance of gender to the stigmatization of Muslims:

Gender is crucial to the confinement of Muslims to the pre-modern as post-colonial scholarship has long shown. Considered irredeemably fanatical, irrational, and thus dangerous, Muslim men are also marked as deeply misogynist patriarchs who have not progressed into the age of gender equality,

and who indeed cannot. For the West, Muslim women are the markers of their communities' place in modernity (16).

This analysis does not mean that Muslim women do not experience stigmatization. Scholarship has documented instances of women being discriminated against and mistreated by anti-Islamic perpetrators (Cainkar 2002; Selod 2014). This statement means that men face a double stigma. According to Razack (2008), Muslim men are viewed as opponents to western democracy, social progress, and have become symbolic of a rigid gender oppressing regime (16).

Despite the acknowledgement that gender is central to the experience of anti-Islamic stigma, there is a dearth of masculine experiences with post-terror backlash and discrimination in research literature. This research seeks to develop and contribute to this gap. Scholarship has focused on Muslim women's experiences with discrimination. This focus is likely in response to an increase in hate crimes committed against Muslim women who identified as Muslim by perpetrators because of the religious practice of wearing the hijab (Selod 2014; Ahmed 2011). For instance, Selod (2014) discusses an American fascination with the hijab, noting "the hijab does not just signify foreignness; it represents an ambiguously defined geographic part of the world that is antagonistic to democracy and American values: the Muslim world" (8). One example of stigmatization is in the experiences of even American born Muslim women being told to "go back to" the countries that they came from (Council on American-Islamic Relations 1998: 4). The cues of foreignness that men possess are not as explicit as the hijab. Thus, it can be presumed that Muslim men experience stigma and discrimination differently than Muslim women.

While scarce, there are some studies that focus on the experiences of American Muslim men as they compare to the experiences of women. In a questionnaire study of 102 Muslim men and women, Abu-Ras and Suarez (2009) report likely differences in the types of discrimination that men and women face as well as differences in the likelihood that gendered individuals would experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Women were more likely to report being the victims of hate crimes (86.3%, n = 44) than men (54.9%, n = 28) (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009: 54), while men were more likely to report the loss of a job as a form of discrimination (10.8%, n = 10) than women (3.9%, n = 4) (Abu-Ras and Suarez, 2009: 54). With respect to symptoms of post-traumatic stress, men scored higher in anger/irritability, hopelessness, guilt or shame, feelings of numbness, problems with concentration and problems with decision making (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009: 56). However, women scored higher in difficulty falling or staying asleep, feelings of sadness or tearful, feelings of anxiety, use of drugs (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009: 56). Similarly, Selod (2016) retroactively reviews responses from a larger study of the experiences of both men and women in the post-9/11 America. She argues, “Muslim American men are criminalized as potential terrorists and are not afforded the protections of citizenship because of the racialization of their religious identity” (Selod 2016: 63). These studies suggest that men and women are stigmatized differently. While Muslim men may be less visible than Muslim women, they experience a criminalization and stigmatization that is unique to their gender identities.

## NEGOTIATING STIGMATIZED RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

Studies on Muslim American experiences after 9/11 demonstrate that individuals who are perceived to be Muslim experience mistreatment and stigma due to conflated religious and racial identification. Individuals also undertake explicit action to counteract this mistreatment. Using the findings of a survey and focus group based research study on Muslim American adolescents in New York, Sirin and Fine (2007: 151) assert that adolescents who are both Muslim and American experience internal conflict, whereby they must reconcile their American identities with their Muslim identities. This need for reconciliation is the result of popular discussions that position Muslims as oppositional to the United States. In an ethnographic study of a mosque in a major American city, O'Brien (2011) reported instances of Muslim American youth rehearsing strategies for stigma management. These rehearsals included literally acting out or talking through real or hypothetical scenarios where discrimination occurred in a safe location. O'Brien (2011) observed that rehearsals allow adolescents to "openly discuss strategies, and express emotions" in ways that they are unable to when facing discrimination (296). In a study where 48 Muslim Americans were interviewed, Selod (2014) records incidences of Muslim women feeling pressured to discontinue religious practices, specifically wearing a hijab, to eliminate potential threats of stigma and discrimination. In the American context, Muslim Americans are caught in the cross-fire of racialization and stigmatization, but religious Muslims are the target of discrimination and mistreatment.

Religious identity is especially important in the current study because all of the participants self-identify as practicing Muslims. Furthermore, this research

focuses on religious institutions and their role in socializing the stigma management strategies of religiously practicing Muslim men. O'Brien (2011) observed Muslim American adolescents using a mosque as a setting for backstage stigma management rehearsals. Thus, religious identity and communities can both be important and intersecting factors regarding the experience and management of stigma. O'Brien (2011) discussed two types of stigma management rehearsals: "direct preparation stigma rehearsals," and "deep education stigma rehearsals." Direct preparation stigma rehearsals involved literally acting out and practicing responses to stigmatizing scenarios in the mosque. For the deep education stigma rehearsals, leaders most often provided "religious reasoning" for the rehearsed response (O'Brien 2011: 301). Thus, the response to stigma can be directly tied to religious teaching. This project will expand on this research by examining how these religious settings might be central to the management of stigma among adult men.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study expands on the current body of research by incorporating theoretical understandings of stigma management and intersectionality to the racialization of Muslim men. Men in this study experience stigma and use strategies discussed by stigma management literature. Men also discussed the ways that attributes that are central to their racial, religious, and gendered identities likely contribute to their experiences as Muslim men. This section will discuss the theoretical concepts that are used to understand these experiences.

### *Stigma Management*

Goffman (1963) discusses three distinct forms of stigma. These are: physical deformities; blemishes of individual character; and a stigma of race, nationality or religion (4).” The stigmatization that American Muslims face exists in an overlap of “race, nationality and religion”; and because of narratives of recent history, the “blemishes of personal character” category. O’Brien (2011) identifies stigma and stigma management as a key theoretical framework for the study of the experiences of Muslim Americans (295).

The experience of stigma forces individuals who hold these identities into a heightened double-consciousness. Individuals facing stigma must learn to manage this perceived identity without forfeiting the realities of their self-identification. Stigma management is defined as “the attempt by persons with stigmatized social identities to approach interpersonal interactions in ways aimed at minimizing the social costs of carrying these identities” (O’Brien 2011: 292). According to Modified Labeling Theory, stigma has a powerful influence on the identity development of stigmatized individuals (Link et. al. 1989: 401). Stigma can be managed by withdrawing from relationships with others, attempting to hide one’s stigmatizing status, and educating others to avoid the negative consequences of one’s stigma (Schroeder and Mowen 2014: 459). This study focuses on the ways that Muslim men engage these strategies in managing their stigmatized racial identities.

The prominence or visibility of social information that connects individuals to a stigmatizing category has significant impact on experiences of stigma or abilities to manage stigma (Goffman 1963: 49). Decisions regarding concealing and revealing

stigmatizing identities are dynamic. Poindexter and Shippy (2010) state: “decisions about to whom, how, and when to disclose occur not as discrete events or simple decisions, but as ongoing, reoccurring, and complex decisions that people revisit and revise” (368). These decisions are related to characteristics or attributes which may or may not be out of control of social actors. Goffman (1963) coined the term *stigma symbol* to refer to: “signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity discrepancy, breaking up what would otherwise be a coherent overall picture, with a consequent reduction in our valuation of the individual” (44). Poindexter and Shippy (2010) found that stigmatized individuals experienced what they called “partial disclosure,” (370) where participants did not have full control over whether others identified them as belonging to a stigmatizing category. Partial disclosure is relevant to the stigmatization of Muslim men because several variables or *stigma symbols* contribute to individuals experience of and options for managing stigma. Potential stigma symbols include: Phenotype, nationality of origin, racial categorization, names, religious practice, dress, and social environment.

According to Goffman (1963), complete social withdrawal is not possible for an individual who must still function in society (73). Rather than discussing complete social withdrawal as a possibility, Goffman (1963) focuses on three types of social environments that stigmatized individuals must negotiate with their stigmatized identities (81). These include: 1) “out-of-bounds” places, where the threat of revealing or presenting stigma is too great for social functioning; 2) “civil” places, where stigmatized individuals can interact with dominant group members freely and are able to present stigma without facing scrutiny; and 3) “back” places, where



stigmatized individuals can interact with other in-group stigmatized members outside of the view of dominant group members (81). Handling a stigmatized identity within a social space requires an understanding of Goffman's three spaces. Religiously practicing Muslim men's social environments are likely shaped by their religious and other intersecting identities. Therefore, social withdrawal may or may not require active effort on their behalf.

"Passing" is relevant to discussions of concealing stigmatizing status (Goffman 1963: 73; Park 2002: 32). The possession, or lack, of the variables listed above contribute to differing abilities of stigma possessing individuals to pass as normative, dominant group members. Muslim men, who do not possess outwardly visible symbols of their Muslim identity, may be able to pass as non-Muslim to avoid a potentially stigmatizing identity. For example, dominant group members may not suspect a man who others would classify as white or black rather than Arab and who does not wear traditional religious garb or sport a long beard to be Muslim. Passing can involve active efforts by stigmatized individuals to deflect their stigmatizing identity. Goffman (1963) coins the term *disidentifiers* to refer to symbols that are employed to disrupt a coherent identity, but in a positive direction (44). An example that will be discussed in this study is the use of a westernized nickname to conceal association with Muslim identities. Individuals who are unable or unwilling to pass have more limited options for managing stigma.

Strategies for stigma management that seek to educate others focus on eliminating negative associations surrounding a particular attribute. In their work on Stigma and HIV, Poindexter and Shippy (2010) discuss educational stigma managing

strategies in terms of *stigma resistance* (376). They argue that individuals who employ stigma resistance as a coping strategy move beyond merely managing their stigma.” “They represent examples of assertive, resilient choices to disclose” (Poindexter and Shippy 2010: 377). Goffman (1963) suggests that forms of stigma management that do not conceal identity can be described as mature (102). If religious Muslim identity is central to how individuals view themselves, educational techniques could become central strategies for managing stigma.

### *Intersectionality*

Intersectional research seeks to address limitations in research that fails to discuss how differing identities contribute to lived experiences. McCall (2005) discusses the origins of intersectionality:

*“Interest in intersectionality arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection—ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations” (1780).*

This research uses paradigms of intersectionality to understand the experiences of American Muslim men. Crenshaw (1991) discusses the experiences of black women using three distinct types of intersectionality. These are: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Again, using this theory to discuss the experiences of women of color, Crenshaw (1991) first defines structural intersectionality as “the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes their actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of white women” (1245). Second, “Political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently

pursue conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw 1991: 1252). Finally, Crenshaw defines representational intersectionality as “the cultural construction of women of color” (Crenshaw 1991: 1245). These definitions are relevant to discussions of Muslim men’s experiences in the post 9/11 United states because, like women of color, their location at the intersection of race, religion, and gender could cause them to have qualitatively different experiences than Muslim men of different races or ethnicities and Muslim women. Furthermore, Muslim men could have political interests that differ from those of Muslim women because they are casted as opponents of both United States interests and Muslim women. Finally, Muslim men could be disempowered by their cultural representations as sexists and terrorist threats.

Most of the intersectional research that explores the experiences of Muslims in the post 9/11 era focuses on Muslim women (Aziz 2012; Essers and Benschop 2009; Mirza 2013). For example, Mirza (2013) uses “the black feminist framework of ‘embodied intersectionality’” to analyze the experiences of three Muslim women living in Britain (5). In this, she focused on how the “intersectionality of race, gender, and religion” was experienced by those three women. The current study seeks to expand the intersectional research paradigm to discuss the stigmatization of Muslim American men and how the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and visibility influence experiences.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address my research questions, I used a mixed methods-qualitative research approach, focusing on the experiences of congregants from four different Islamic religious centers in a large Mid-western city, that we will call “Greensburg” (The actual city has been concealed to protect the identities of research participants and organizations). The decision to study Greensburg is based primarily convenience and my ability to access contacts and religious centers. However, there are theoretical justifications for using this city a setting for study. Greensburg is the largest metropolitan area in its state. Thus, it can logically be inferred that the city contains not only the largest amount of practicing Muslims in the State, but the largest number of religious institutions as well. Furthermore, many current studies of Muslim populations have taken place in the state of Michigan or other much larger cities. While this is justified due to a large Muslim population, it may not accurately represent the experiences of Muslims in other geographic areas of the United States or in more isolated social environments. Greensburg also presents a unique setting for researching the experiences of American Muslims. The city launched a campaign in 2011 that included partnerships with interfaith organizations working toward collective peace and understanding. The city prides itself in its response to the local Islamic community and in its treatment of immigrants and refugees. When a mosque in Greensburg was defaced in 2015, the community banded together to clean the vandalized mosque. In 2017, the mayor of Greensburg organized a rally in response to President Donald Trump’s first executive order to halt immigration and refugee resettlement. The rally was intended to display solidarity with the city’s immigrant

community. Thus, Greensburg appears to be a relatively hospitable environment for Muslim Americans.

## RESEARCH SITES

All interviews and observation sessions are from four religious institutions in the city Greensburg. To further protect the identities of the individuals that attend these locations, these institutions will be referred to as “Sites.” Sites were selected primarily because of the accessibility and convenience that they offered. Secondly, sites were selected based on theoretical justifications and suggestions from Muslim contacts in the field.

Site 1 was selected because I have a previously existing relationship with the Imam at this center from a pilot study and general inquiry. I previously attended Ramadan meals at this site and play basketball with some of the college students who attend here. Thus, overtime, I have been able to develop some rapport with its members. Site 1 is in Greensburg’s downtown area. This site was described as a “missionary venture” in one interview and services largely first-generation immigrants and refugees. However, due to its proximity to university campuses, many college students attend its Friday afternoon services.

Site 2 was selected because I attended an “open house” event after being invited by a friend prior to this study. This event was designed to invite non-Muslims to the mosque to learn about Islam. During this encounter, informants suggested that congregants would be very open to discussing their experiences with researchers. Site 2 is a large mosque in eastern Greensburg, which is typically associated with heightened socio-economic status. Many of its regular congregants live in a

residential area directly beside the religious institution. This mosque services a largely a middle to upper-middle class population.

Site 3 was selected per the recommendation of an informant. This informant suggested that site 3 had the best English translation of services in Greensburg. The importance of this is discussed later in the methods section. Site 3 is a large mosque located on the Eastern side of the city. The congregants of this mosque appear to be the highest educated and have the highest socioeconomic status of any of the sites observed in Greensburg.

Site 4 was also selected for the English translation of its services. Site 4 is a large mosque located on the South end of Greenburg's downtown. Per some interviews, this site services Muslims of lower socioeconomic status's than the other three mosques in this study. This mosque appears to have a high immigrant population with many more people than other sites who would be racially identified as black.

## INTERVIEWING

As previously stated, this is a qualitative mixed methods research study. I use a combination of semi-structured interviewing and participant observation sessions for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews of religious Muslim men is my primary source of data, while I additionally observed the religious services that participants attend as a secondary form of data collection. This project is based on similar research that has used these methods to understand the experiences of Muslims (Jaffe-Walter 2016; O'Brien 2011; Selod 2014). Furthermore, interviewing is appropriate because the experience of stigma can be personally sensitive (Gillman

2004: 15), complex and can require “teasing out” (Gillham 2004: 16). Semi-structured interviewing is used so that as narratives and trends are revealed during data collection, questions can be adapted to inquire more deeply into the experiences of the study participants (Charmaz 2012: 26). The current study consists of fifteen individual interviews split among three of the Islamic centers in Greensburg (Five each). I originally aimed to interview five participants from site 4, but time constraints and difficulty acquiring interviews from this site prevented that. Regardless, this number of interviews is methodologically appropriate because the aim of qualitative research is to develop categories for deep understanding rather than develop generalizable results (Gillham 2004: 11). Interviews focused on: 1) the experience of mistreatment or stigma; 2) how participants generally responded to said mistreatment or stigma; and 3) the role of religious institutions in how participants understood and responded to mistreatment and stigma. These interviews were approximately an hour in duration. All interviews were recorded and transcribed except for one participant from site 2 who did not wish to be recorded. To address this interview, I took physical notes during the interview and immediately after the interview recorded my own account of the interview in my car. An interview guide is presented in *Appendix B*. After collection and transcription, interview and observation data were coded using Atlas-Ti. Atlas-Ti is a program commonly used in qualitative research to analyze data and develop findings. Qualitative methodology may require data to be coded multiple times. This research uses three stages of coding. These three coding run-throughs included 1) line by line coding (Charmaz 2012: 51) to help me generate further research questions to address trends in the data, 2) focused coding

(Charmaz 2012: 57) where I aggregated codes to create groups for analysis, and 3) theoretical coding (Charmaz 2012: 63) where I connected coding groups to piece together a coherent research narrative.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is a secondary method of analysis in this study. For participant observation sessions, I attended ten Friday Jumu'ah services, which are the primary weekly religious services for Muslim men. The ten services were split evenly (5 each) at sites 3 and 4, which were reported to have the most clearly English translated services. These observations focus on what speakers at religious services say and how speakers instruct Muslim men. According to Jorgensen (1989), participant observation can be beneficial in research work when: "1) little is known about the phenomenon; 2) there are significant differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders; and 3) the phenomenon is somehow obscured from the view of outsiders" (13). The religious services of Muslim men, as it pertains to the management of stigma, fulfills these qualifications. Furthermore, "findings of participant observation research are appropriate for critically examining theories and other claims to knowledge" (Jorgensen 1989: 13). Observing the religious services that American Muslim men attend verifies the role of religious institutions in the management of group stigma. Reflections and observations from the session were audio recorded after each service and later transcribed for further analysis.

## SAMPLING

Practicing Muslim men are the sample for this study because they self-identify as Muslim. This sampling decision simplifies the sampling process by moving the



responsibility of discerning the identities of individuals from subjectively determined assignments by the researcher to objective religious self-identification by participants. As discussed previously, scholars have wrestled over just what the operative term “Muslim” refers to (Meer 2008). This study analyzes the experiences of Muslim men that I define as religiously practicing. In the current study, religiously practicing merely refers to men who attend religious services at mosques, as this is where interviews have been acquired. Focusing on the religious identities of Muslims allows for intersectional analysis across lines of ethnicity and nationality. Furthermore, this research analyzes how religious communities can contribute to the management of stigma by focusing on religiously practicing Muslims.

Men are the sample population for study primarily in order to address gaps in the research literature. Additionally, the researcher’s identity as a male allows him to gain entrance to religious services that men attend where observations and contacts were made. Men sampled were required to have lived in the United States for at least five years. This requirement ensures that the men studied have possible American experiences to reflect on and prevents many linguistic barriers that may arise. These men were also required to be at least eighteen years of age.

Sampling procedures varied between research sites in this study. The interviews were procured by a combination of availability, purposive, and snowball sampling (Charmaz 2012: 100; Faugier and Sargeant 1997), contingent on participant availability and receptivity in the field. Interviews from this site 1 were procured exclusively by availability sampling. I attended religious services and talked briefly about my research interests. If the men I spoke to were willing I asked for their phone

number and contacted them at a later time to set up an interview at a location and time of their choice.

Interviews from site 2 were almost exclusively procured by snowball sampling. After attending a Tuesday night prayer services, I revealed my identity as a researcher to two men who then directed me to a gatekeeper. This gatekeeper asked several questions about my research and was willing to provide me with contacts who were willing to be interviewed. Faugier and Sargeant (1997) argue that non- random sampling methods, such as availability and snowball sampling, “are particularly effective in locating members of special populations where the focus of the study is on a sensitive issue” (792). One additional interview was theoretically sampled, to address the experiences of white convert Muslims.

Interviews from site 3 were procured through availability sampling. I attended Friday Jumu’ah services for participant observation sessions. After the service, I approached men and revealed my research identity. If men were receptive to this, I requested phone numbers and contacted them later to set up an interview at a time a place of their choosing. I interviewed one black converted Muslim additionally, for theoretical purposes. Theoretical sampling is purposive and can help to distinguish research categories more fully (Charmaz 2012: 100).

## PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

Eight of the fifteen participants interviewed had immigrated to the United States. These eight men have been living in the States anywhere from seven to fifty-three years with a median of twenty years. Three of the Fifteen participants interviewed were first generation Americans. The remaining four interviewees are

American born Muslims, three of which converted to Islam. These three converts have been religious Muslims for ten, eighteen, and twenty-four years, respectively. Interview participants came from ten nationalities. These participants originate from Africa, America, Egypt, Iraq, India, Libya, Somalia, Palestine, Pakistan, Turkey, and Yemen. Racial designation was somewhat ambiguous in this study. Participants often had difficulty racially classifying themselves. This ambiguity will be discussed later in findings. Racial categories listed included: “American”, African American, Middle-eastern, Mixed, and White. Interview participants ranged in age from eighteen to eighty-one years with a median age of thirty-six. These men came from a variety of occupations, including: Accounting professors, Bilingual Instructors (Public School), Cardiologists, Computer Engineers, Data Administrators (Census), Imams, Islamic School Teachers, Medical Scribes, Medical Researchers, Non-Profit Work, Small Business Owners, Software Engineers, and Students.

For this study, religious practice is primarily measured in terms of the number of religious services that people attend on a regular basis. Interview participants ranged from rarely attending religious services or only attending one service per week to attending five religious services each day seven days per week. Within this range, most participants reported attending public services somewhere between 4 times per week or once a day (seven times per week). A chart of pertinent demographic information on research participants is provided in *Table 1*.

*Table 1*

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Nationality of Origin	Religious Practice	Years in U.S (Immigrants)	Years Muslim (Converts)
Alex	23	White American	“Not often”		10

Kareem	42	African American	Once weekly		24
Red	26	Iraqi - American	Once weekly – Once daily		
Abraham	81	Indian	Twice Weekly	53	
Zain	27	Pakistani	2 – 3 times weekly		
Aidan	49	Pakistani	4 times weekly	45	
Pasha	23	Libyan	4 -10 times weekly		
Johnny	18	Somali	1 – 2 times daily	10	
Mostafa	23	Palestinian	Once or more daily	10	
Hamza	36	Indian	3 times daily	7	
Mohamad	65	Iraqi	5 times daily	30	
Hassan	38	Indian	5 times daily	30	
Ali	37	African American	5 times daily		18
Omar	45	Yemeni	...		
Samir	36	Egyptian	...	7	

## PARTICIPANT NAMING

In the interest of protecting the identities of the men in this study, participants either selected or were assigned pseudonyms. Study participants were given the opportunity to select pseudonyms for themselves. Despite this opportunity, only six interviewees elected to do so. Alex, Johnny, Omar, Pasha, Red, and Zain were all selected by the men in this study. Other names were assigned based on themes from

interviews, for example: Ali mentioned that Muhammad Ali was a hero and Abraham discussed Abrahamic religions extensively. I selected other pseudonyms from other common religious Muslim names. Transcriptions from interviews, including names were member checked with the exception of some interviewees, who I was unable to make contact with after interviews.

## LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

This research is limited on account of the researcher's identity and methodology. First, the identities that I, as a researcher hold, can be seen as limitations to the research conducted in this project. I am a White non-Muslim male. During the interview process many, participants also assumed the researcher to possess a Christian identity, though this identity was not explicitly presented during the research process. These identities and perceptions prevented me from gaining true insider status, and as I discuss in the findings section, positioned me as a dominant group member against subordinate group members. Though I did not perceive it in the field, men may have held back in interviews, given the current political climate of the United States. Furthermore, I was turned down by potential participants who did not want to or were unable to meet to discuss their experiences in the United States. This could have been related to my presumed affiliation with dominant groups. Because of the above-mentioned limitations, I cannot speak on behalf of the experiences of Muslims in the United States. However, I apply social theory to the analysis of the experiences of the Muslim American men in this study. Furthermore, my identity as a dominant group member gives me opportunity to observe stigma

management as an outsider, and grants me to ask question that might otherwise be considered common sense to ingroup members.

Second, the methodology employed during the research process presents its own limitations. My sample is considered small because I only interviewed fifteen men and only observed at ten religious services. Furthermore, my sampling procedures are non-random. Small scale qualitative research methods are useful for collecting rich data from a smaller population. Findings from these methods cannot be generalized to larger populations of Muslims. Rather, this research develops categories that can be utilized to understand and interpret the experiences of religiously practicing Muslim American men. Thus, another aim of this study is to offer transferability of results.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This discussion of research findings is divided into 3 large sections: *Being Muslim Men in the United States*, *Strategies for Stigma Management*, and *Religious Structures*. These sections are further subdivided based on themes from the research data. The section called *Being Muslim Men in the United States* discusses general trends in the experiences of these men. These general trends focus on the following: Muslim racialized identities, interpreted gender differences, Muslims as dichotomously un-American, Muslim dialogue on terror, experiences of heightened surveillance, signifiers of Muslim identity, and passing. The section called *Strategies for Stigma Management* discusses the ways that Muslim men in this study manage their stigmatized identity. This section is subdivided into three primary forms of stigma management developed in the research literature: withdrawing from social relationships, hiding or concealing Muslim identity, and educating others. The final main theme, called *Religious Structures* focuses on the role of religious institutions and education as central to the management of stigma. This section is subdivided into the following subthemes: *Religious Education*, *Mosques and Religious Centers*, *Non-Profit Organizations* and *Interfaith Dialogue*.

### BEING MUSLIM MEN IN THE UNITED STATES

There is no singular Muslim American experience. Rather, a variety of intersecting factors and positions contribute to the diverse experiences of Muslim men in the United States. Most of the participants in this study expressed that their experiences in the United States were positive, despite increasingly anti-Islamic

political rhetoric in the United States and increases in the rates of hate crimes over the past decade (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009). However, certain trends did present themselves during data collection sessions. The trends discussed in this section are the most prominent from the research data. These trends are: Muslims hold an ambiguous racial designation, interpreted gender difference, Muslim men are depicted as un-American, prompts to discuss terror, the heightened surveillance of Muslim men, common identifiers for Muslim men, and Muslim men who pass. These trends verify the existence of stigma in the lives of the men in this study and provide a basis for understanding the mechanisms and ways that these men come to manage stigma.

#### *Muslim Racialized Identities*

Men in this study had difficulty racially classifying themselves. Though responses varied, 7 of the 15 men interviewed communicated ambiguity or struggled to pinpoint a racial designation for themselves. Pasha, a 23-year-old first generation American born Muslim of Libyan descent, discusses holding two racial designations:

Oh, I usually classify myself as African American, technically, but I put myself as other for standardized testing and stuff like that. ... Also, I wanna clarify as well, I also qualify myself as Arab as well. So, I was thinking like standardized testing, but yeah, I'm mostly Arab and then kind of African American on the side ...

Here Pasha first states that on standardized tests he writes that he is African American but then later specifies that this African American identity is secondary to his Arab identity. Other respondents described themselves as Arab or Middle-Eastern and expressed discontent that applications and other forms did not give them accurate categories to describe their identities. Still others declined to answer or disregarded



the racial prompt altogether. For example: Hamza, a 36-year-old immigrant from India, responded to questions about his racial designation with, “Yeah, I don’t know what to say about that.” The ambiguity and confusion that racial self-designation presents these men eludes to the fact that their Muslim identities have become racialized and are more prominent in explaining experiences of mistreatment. This is evident in the fact that Hamza, who spoke confidently about his nationality origin was unable to talk about his own racial designation.

Where defining oneself racially is confusing and does not accurately categorize Muslim men’s experiences, their religious identity does. Ali, an American born black and white racially mixed 35-year-old convert Muslim, discusses how his Muslim identity has taken prominence when discussing his racial identity.

Now, since I've been Muslim I just feel like a Muslim because now I'm looked at not because of the color of my skin, which most people just think ... When they see me dressed like this with a beard, before they hear me talk they'll just think I'm from one of those Muslim countries. I don't really know. I don't really have... I feel like with that question I'm just me, honestly.

Ali finds that although he is racially classified as mixed, African American and white, his experiences are more relevant to his religious identity. Because of a combination of his skin tone and religious signifiers, many people likely mistake or assume his nationality of origin. These factors cause him to be associated with the Muslim world. His newly racialized identity is Muslim. He attaches most to this racialized Muslim identity.

One interviewee provided unique insight into a history of racial ambiguity that Muslim men might experience. Abraham, an 81-year-old immigrant Muslim from

India who has lived in the United States for 53 years, describes two seemingly conflicting racial experiences that he had in 1960s Alabama.

There was a coffee shop on the side of the road, and I said, 'hey, [accompanying friend], let me get a cup of coffee.' So, when I went there, to that little coffee shop they had two windows. One that said, 'Whites only,' and one that said, 'Coloreds only,' and I went to the 'Coloreds only.' (laughter). But, that lady was such a beautiful lady. She kind of smiled and said, 'Sir, I will serve you in the other window,' 'Whites only'. But I told her, 'That's for Whites only, I am not white.' And you know, she defined- that stuck in my mind even to this day. She said, 'Sir, Coloreds means niggers.' Woah, could you believe that? I mean, those days, it was like that. Our definition was so short.

Race is discussed by many sociologists to be a fluid construct that changes through history and between social settings (Omi and Winant 2015: 105). In this example, we see that Abraham classifies himself as colored when he was getting coffee. The shop worker found his classification to be in error and corrected him. He was not colored by her definition. Thus, he was not deserving of negative treatment. In contrast to the first experience, in some scenarios Abraham's racial identity did cause him to experience discrimination. Here he discusses the experience of being denied service because of his race.

And, uh, to come back to Tuscaloosa we had to stop by another city in Alabama. It starts with W. I am forgetting names- it was a big city. So, we wanted to stay overnight, because it was midnight and I didn't want to drive in the night hour. And we saw a Motel, and there was a sign that said, 'Vacancy. Vacancy.' It was a green sign. "Vacancy. Vacancy." So, we went, me and my wife, and I said, 'well, we need a room, Sir.' He said, 'Sir, there is no vacancy.' Do you believe that? And I told him, 'But, we saw the sign. 'Vacancy.' He said, 'Sir, you didn't see it right. Go look at it again.' I go out there and it had been switched to 'no vacancy.' That sign comes on 'no vacancy. No vacancy.' That's another experience. I said, 'okay, we can't sleep here, we've got to go home to Tuscaloosa.'

Abraham was denied service based on his appearance. These examples were given consecutively during the interview to discuss Abraham's racial experiences in the

United States. Here we see the fluidity of Abraham's experience as a Muslim man in the United States even prior to United States military opposition in predominantly Muslim countries. In some scenarios, men have been treated as honorary whites, not subjects of discrimination or racial scrutiny. However, the same individuals experience explicit racial discrimination in different social interactions.

Responses to stigma were present during the racial demographic section of interviews. Zain, a 27-year-old first generation American born Pakistani Muslim, responded to the prompt: *how do you racially classify yourself?* by asserting his American identity: "Um, well I classify myself as American, first and foremost. Racially I guess I would say I am- my family hails from the Indian Sub-continent. So, I guess racially that's, yeah." Racially speaking, Zain never gives an exact designation but instead specifies a general area of the world that he is from. Furthermore, he asserts that his identity as an American is more important to him than his racial identity. Other men brought up their "Americanness" during racial classification. This is relevant to discussions of stigma management. By asserting one's American citizenship, individuals communicate that they are allies to the western world. They distance themselves from an association with terror, and specifically parts of the world that are associated with terror.

Demographic discussions of race provide an insight to trends of racial formation among American Muslim men. The ambiguity of racial self-definition is relevant to current discussions of Muslims as carrying a highly-racialized identity. The experiences of these men validate the use of racialization to discuss their Muslim experiences. The research literature also identifies gender to be central to the

experience of Muslim stigmatization (Razack 2008: 16). The next section focuses on research participants' interpretation of gender differences in the experiences of stigma.

### *Interpreted Gender Difference*

Men in this study expressed their understanding that Muslim women experienced discrimination differently than them on two fronts. First, men expressed differences in the experience of stigma in quantity: they understood women experience discrimination at higher rates than men do. Many men critiqued the focus of the study, stating that research efforts would be best utilized in studying the experiences of women. Second, some participants expressed that men experience a different type of stigma than women did. Religiously practicing men discussed experiencing stigma related to sexism in addition to a stigma related to terror.

All men in this study discussed women as experiencing discrimination and mistreatment at higher rates than themselves. Many of these discussions came early on in interviews and were unprompted by direct questions about the experiences of Muslim women. For instance, Mostafa, a 23-year-old immigrant from Jordan with Palestinian ancestry who self-identifies racially as Middle-Eastern, discussed his understanding of women experiencing mistreatment at greater rates than men when asked: *What is it like to be a Muslim man in the United States?*

So ... I don't think that it's a ... Big issue for men as much it is for women to be honest. Because some women wear the hijab and ... There are some, I can say, a little bit of racism against Muslims, especially now. But, really, I don't think it's as hard for men as it is for women.

When asked further about the experiences of women with discrimination men almost always cited the “hijab” as the primary distinguishing factor for this mistreatment.

For example, Alex, a 23-year-old White Muslim convert, discusses the hijab and his understanding of its relation to women's experiences.

To begin with, females are harassed a hell of a lot more than men. Even here in [Greensburg]. I found out that there was a Muslim sister who was followed by a belligerent individual. She actually had to pull out a taser to get him to back off. Number one it is because they are- the hijab. So, it's like, right there, it's easier. Ironically enough, a lot of the guys that I know have been mistaken for other ethnicities, and so they're not recognized as Muslim as often.

Here, Alex differentiates between women, who he understands to be highly visible to non-Muslims and men whose racial differences could be mistaken. Alex directly attributes his understanding that women face greater rates of harassment than men to the visibility of the hijab. The hijab acts as a signifier, or stigma symbol (Goffman 1963: 44), of Muslim religious identity. This visibility is interpreted to make women an easier target for perpetrators. Men, by contrast, are not as readily identified as Muslim. The stigma symbols that they hold are either not as exclusive to Muslim men or are more transient and not as visible in most social interactions.

Men recalled instances of the women in their lives being verbally harassed, having things thrown at them, and being stalked or followed to the point of being fearful of physical altercations. Mostafa, quoted above, recalls his mother not wearing the hijab initially after settling in the United States. This decision came out of a desire to avoid confrontation. He recalled,

Honestly ... I'll be honest with you, my mom didn't really wear the hijab when she first, when we first came here. She was ... She didn't really like that decision but she knew that there was a lot of mistreatment and people would look at her weird. She decided to put it back on. I was like, 'ah ...' Personally, I was like no, I don't know, maybe if she'd just keep it off so we can avoid harassment.

Mostafa remembers supporting his mother's decision not to wear the hijab, an action aimed at minimizing negative experience which can be considered stigma management. Other men discussed their wives' and daughters' discontinuing the use of the "niqab"- a face covering, and instead wearing the hijab. Men differed in responses as to whether they agreed or disagreed with this practice. However, they were generally more understanding of the discontinuation of the wearing of the hijab than they were of other men who concealed their Muslim identities. These participants' understanding of women as facing mistreatment at higher rates than men are consistent with other research that discusses the hijab as a marker of conflated Muslim religious identity (Selod 2014: 8). The experience of harassment that the hijab elicits is a collective one. Mostafa says that "we" can avoid mistreatment if "she" does not wear the hijab. Men and families who experienced stigma through their association with Muslim women will be discussed in greater detail in the section that focuses on masculine Muslim identifiers.

When asked about the differences in the experiences of Muslim men and women, most interviewees focused on the quantity of mistreatment endured. However, some men discussed unique stigma that they face because of the intersection of their Muslim and gendered identities. Kareem, a 42-year-old African American Muslim convert, discusses the stereotype of Muslim men as being sexist:

I think part of the big stereotypes about Muslims is how Westerners perceive how Muslims separate the sexes to be sexist. I think people come with this assumption of what your view on women would be and that kind of thing. That manifests itself in different ways. I don't know if it goes as far as ... I mean who knows how far the threshold of mistreatment is, but I think it probably does make them assume that they know what I think. They assume a bunch of attitudes that I may or may not have based on knowing that I'm Muslim. Especially among Americans.

Here Kareem discusses the beliefs that he understands Westerners to hold about Muslim men. Though he isn't entirely sure how much this stereotypical view influences his treatment, he is aware that it exists. He presumes that it affects the way that he is perceived and interacted with. Other participants discussed being the recipients of joking about spousal abuse. Portraying Muslim men and their religion as sexist positions them as enemies to the West and to western values. This portrayal is evident of a dichotomy that presented itself in research interviews. Men occupy a social position where they are depicted as enemies to the west and to women in general, which is discussed further in the next section.

#### *Dichotomously Un-American*

Men in this study discussed how the mistreatment that they experienced often casted them as un-American: enemies to democracy and the Western world. This sentiment was present in both the experience of stigma and the consequential management of stigma. Ali is an American-born black and white racially mixed convert Muslim. His wife is also an American-born convert Muslim. Both Ali and his wife wear traditional religious clothing. Ali has a long beard and his wife wears the hijab. During the interview, he recalled a confrontation where he and his wife were criticized as being un-American.

There have been times where me and my wife have been in the mall ... I can remember one guy walked by us and said, 'You're in America.' I was like, 'Yeah, we're both American. We were born here and maybe my ancestors were here before yours.' He said, 'Then you need to act like it.' He's an older gentleman. He's walking around the mall, he's an older person maybe like 70. Those are few and far between.

After providing this initial example, and reflecting on his experiences, he later offered:

Oh man. Yeah, well there's the incident in the mall, we were talking about that, that always stands out because that turned into a really big argument. As I was explaining to the guy that we are American, and we were born here, and we cheer for the United States in the Olympics.' Then another lady saw us arguing and she actually came by and said, 'Go back where you came from.' I turned and I was like, 'I just got done explaining. That's the whole argument.'

Ali's discussion reveals that the presentation of this couple as Muslim automatically designates them as foreign to the United States regardless of their racial background or nationality of origin. It seems that the logic of the perpetrators is that being Muslim automatically makes one less American. Furthermore, individuals who are recognized as Muslim are susceptible to being cast as opponents to the United States. This is clear in both the confrontation of and response to this mistreatment. Participants in this study seem to understand their social environment in dichotomous terms. In this dichotomy, Muslim world and dominant group interests in the western world are in conflict. This relationship is implicit in expressions of stigma and the management of said stigma.

In the dichotomous relationship between Muslim men and the western world, participants often discussed the West as being Christian. The dichotomy is acknowledged by Muslim men as explaining the stigmatization that they experience. For instance, Samir, a 36-year-old Egyptian immigrant Muslim, discusses a frustration with the dichotomous understanding of Muslim-Americans:

This is to clarify, to illustrate my point basically. Someone in Norway, he was Christian. He just basically went and he killed 75 kids. ... When they caught him, he said, 'I'm a religious Christian and I worship Jesus and basically I love Japan because they don't let Muslims inside. Muslim are bad.' They said, 'Okay, those kids were Christian.' He said, 'Oh, but their school support



Muslim people.' He went to kill the 75 kids, Christian kids, because the school they attend support Muslim people which is ...

My point now why we didn't say, 'Oh, see. All Christian are crazy. Look at this man.' No, we said, 'Okay, this man is crazy. That's it. Bye.' For us - now, on the other hand, you see someone like you see Islam do something wrong, 'All Muslim like this.' Sometimes it's bad. Why? Because Muslims and Arab, we have two basically identities or something. Muslim are bad. Arabs, look at them, look at them. Look this like caveman.

Samir discusses how a dichotomous understanding of Muslims as bad serves as not only justification for the persecution and mistreatment of Muslims, but it also enforces stigma by ignoring the actions of dominant group members, Christians, while highlighting those of Muslims. In this dichotomy, dominant group members understand Muslim men as premodern enemies of progress and democracy. They commit ultimate attribution error and attribute the actions of terrorists to the entire Muslim faith. The presence of stigma becomes a greater threat to one's identity if stigma becomes internalized. The fact that men in this study, such as Zain, asserted their "Americanness" in interviews is evidence of this internalization. Furthermore, language used to describe, and in some cases even rationalize experiences of mistreatment, suggest that participants in this study have internalized some level of the American-Muslim dichotomy.

The dichotomy that Muslim men find themselves in has influenced parenting relationships. Kareem discusses limiting his consumption of news media while his children are watching to protect them from the consequences of negative stigma during their early identity development.

Now that I have kids, I am fearful for them. I want to make sure that they're educated and have a sense of being Muslim and also kind of shielding them from the negative perception that's common here. My oldest is seven. I think all those things are way too heavy for a seven-year-old to contemplate. It's

affected me in how I ... I definitely don't watch the news in front of my kids. Before I don't think it would have mattered. I'm nervous about what kind of commentary they'll hear and how I'll have to explain the world. Like all kids, they believe almost everybody's good. People are mostly the same. They go to schools and they have friends who are Muslim and they have friends who they know aren't Muslim, but it doesn't go very deep in their understanding of who people are.

Kareem is fearful for his children and wants to ensure that his children have a sense of being Muslim. The rhetoric and dichotomous language that surrounds Islam is understood as a threat to Muslim identities, specifically those that are developing. Kareem limits watching the news in front of his children to control some of the information that they are exposed to. This is indicative of an ingroup stigma management attempt, which would be a fascinating direction for further study. Kareem does not want his children to internalize an understanding of Muslims as opponents to the West, he is afraid that this is what they would be exposed to in the news.

A dichotomous understanding of American-Islamic relations is evident in most of the trends in the research data. This existence is perhaps most evident in the continued experience of Muslim men in being prompted by dominant group members to denounce acts of terror and defend their faith. Given the importance of these dichotomies, and how people might be framed or labeled, the next section discusses these experiences and the insight that these instances provide to the American-Muslim dichotomy.

#### *Dialogue on Terror*

Men in this study expressed that they were pressed to provide commentary about terrorism, political unrest, or generally defend their faith in the context of

international crisis. This commentary was both an avenue to demonstrate one's personal "Americanness" and an opportunity to educate others about what they believed were the true teachings of Islam. Though most of these men are American citizens, many of which have spent most of their adult lives in the United States, assumed ties to terror forced individuals to denounce acts of terror in a variety of social settings. For instance, Aidan, a 49-year-old Pakistani immigrant who has lived in the United States since the age of 4, recalls having to apologize for the actions of terrorists.

Aidan: If something crazy happens, every time something crazy happens around this world with close to two-billion Muslims, all of a sudden it has to be our headache. Some guy runs into a market in Germany and you're asking me what I think about it? It's like, what do you think I think about it? Innocent people got killed by a crazy guy. I don't care if that crazy guy was white, black, or green, and he ran into a bunch of orphans or a bunch of murderers, you're still killing people that shouldn't be killed, you know. So, those questions do get old, and having to be an apologist for other crazy people gets old.

Interviewer: How often would you say that occurs?

Aidan: After every incident.

Interviewer: Every one?

Aidan: Every time. If something happens at San Bernadino, when something happened in the Christmas market, you know, France, Belgium. You know, whenever it happens, it seems like the Muslims of America, we are supposed to go down there and put our stamp on it that says that we disagree with it, and that it's wrong. Why? Why do we have to say anything?

Here, Aidan expresses that denouncing acts of terror ebbs and flows with changes and events in national and international news. These responses typically were partnered with a discussion of the hypocrisy of dominant group members in insisting that Muslim communities denounce terror while Christianity is rarely the object of

discussion when religiously fueled terror occurs at the hands of Christians. Aidan discusses the fallacy that he is assumed to have insight into terror because of shared religious self-identification. In the Islamic-American dichotomy, Muslim Americans are presumed to have heightened ties to terror even internationally. Muslim Americans are socially positioned to the extent that their allegiance to the United States is questioned routinely. Denouncing terror becomes a means by which Muslim men must prove their “Americanness.”

Interviewees discussed needs or prompts to discuss politics, terror, and their faith on two fronts: personal front and a communal front. Men discussed being requested to discuss their individual religious and political views in response to terrorist activity. Kareem discusses an employer asking him about his personal political and religious views in the context of September 11<sup>th</sup>:

I remember within like a week of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the director where I was working invited me to his office to ask a bunch of questions that I think he thought were benign, but I just thought it was offensive that he would ask me. He was asking about views on, just politics, the world, what I thought about September 11<sup>th</sup>. I know he thought he was just finding out what I thought, but why aren't you asking anyone else? I thought the premise was offensive.

Kareem is singled out in the work place as a Muslim and is asked to engage in dialogue with his employer in response to the 9/11 attacks. Kareem infers that his employer downplayed the interaction. He made it seem small, but Kareem was the only employee asked about his impressions of terror. This request to discuss terror was a chance for Kareem to prove his Americanness, or make the case that he is a good Muslim. Kareem had to engage in this dialogue despite his identity as American-born citizen. Kareem was irritated with this interaction, as were most men who were asked personally about politics surrounding terror.

Other men in this study discussed a community denouncement of terror. This included official statements from religious leaders to the press and demonstrations and marches by community organizations. Johnny, an 18-year-old Somali immigrant Muslim, discusses the condemnation of terror by leaders in the Muslim community.

...and then you feel the need to defend your own faith, every time someone, every single time. Which is what happens with the general Muslim community, every time a terrorist attack happened. I don't know why, someone in the Muslim community has to come out and condemn the act, of it saying, it's just a repeated thing that happens over and over and over.

Similar to Aidan, Johnny expresses that the need to defend one's faith and denounce terror ebbs and flows with international news. He expresses prompts to defend faith as a need. The use of need implies urgency. Men in this study connected the condemnation of terror to reductions in the mistreatment of Muslims. In an effort to manage stigma, men in this study attempted to disassociate themselves and their community from terror. The necessity of denouncing terror implies dichotomous logic: either denounce and separate oneself from terror, or face scrutiny and possible mistreatment. Communities denounce terror publicly similarly to individuals.

Generally, respondents were irritated at the prospect of having to speak on terror. However, some respondents such as Zain viewed condemning terrorist actions as an opportunity to change dominant group perceptions.

I know a lot of people, I guess, feel stronger about this than I do. I think that people do have an issue with the statements that are put out denouncing the attacks. Because Muslim people, their understanding is that amongst ourselves we know that those are crazy people and they are a minority, a subset of a subset that does crazy things, and denouncing that is kind of asinine. But, my understanding is that people of other backgrounds and other faiths, they don't get it the same way, so it is important to us to denounce those acts. In some ways doing it over and over again does get old, like, 'wow, this is getting to be too much', but then I think if it furthers understanding for most people then why not do it.

Zain describes what he believes is a moral obligation to denounce acts of terror and defend Islam. This feeling of obligation is discussed in greater detail in the section on educational stigma management techniques. Participants in this study discussed insiders as having differing understandings of Islam and its supposed relationship to terror than outsiders do. Zain possesses an ingroup understanding that Islam does not condone acts of terror. Because of this insight, he takes on the responsibility to educate others about Islam. By taking advantage of opportunities to denounce terror, Muslim men can stigma through education.

Prompts to denounce terror were not the only manifestation of stigma present in research interviews. Social stigma affected Muslim men in a variety of ways. Almost all participants reported experiencing heightened surveillance. The following section discusses the experiences that Muslim men shared that involve dominant group members watching Muslim bodies.

### *Feelings of Surveillance*

Heightened surveillance in this study refers to men feeling that they were stared at, extraordinary involvement from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and being filmed or photographed by camera phones. These trends of surveillance and the fact that participants are conscious of them are evidence of the presence of stigma in their lives. Experiences of heightened surveillance are important to the studying Muslim American men because they are evidence of both the presence of stigma and general distrust. The implied logic of this surveillance is that Muslim men are enemies to western democracy.

Almost all the men in this study discussed people staring at them in public spaces. These experiences were difficult to discuss and often individuals felt that they had no proof of these experiences. An inability to pinpoint this experience was also consistent across interviews. Mohamad, a 65-year-old Iraqi immigrant Muslim, describes and attempts to justify the stares that he receives.

Uh, you know sometimes you cannot express, when you go, and they look at you, you are a stranger, you know? You know there is something, one of those family, maybe their relative are a killed soldier in the Middle East, maybe those family are victims, maybe one of their relatives are victims of September 11. We have to accept for those to be a little bit, to not have a smiling face towards us. We have to be a little bit easy. Because as they are a victim, we are also a victim. So, we don't take it as target to you as a person, but targeted to the whole thing, you know? We have to take it more easy. That was the point. Do you get the point? (Yes) Yes, I do. Sometimes I see the face of the people when I go gathering or meeting another. When they see Muslims coming they are just a little bit uneasy. But that doesn't mean that because of who I am. No, but because of the idea, the general idea, you understand? Yea.

General stares were common experiences for many of the men in this study.

Participants had difficulty describing how stares happened and in what context they occurred. These stares and the difficulty of pinpointing stares are like the micro-aggressions that other marginalized groups experience. Because these aggressions are subtle, they are often difficult to detect and quantify, though they do influence the lives of marginalized groups. Heightened surveillance in the form of stares casts Muslim men as suspect and enemies to democratic values. Hassan discusses how sentiments about enemies to democracy could be warranted rationale for the stares that he receives. This not only serves as evidence of heightened surveillance but also of an internalization of stigma and the dichotomous relationship between Islam and the West. This heightened surveillance adds pressure to otherwise daily interactions of Muslim men. Men often discussed how if recognized as Muslim, their actions

reflected on the larger Muslim community. Hassan rationalizes the uneasy stares that he receives by discussing the reasons that dominant group members antagonize Muslims.

A second way that participants felt surveilled was through experiencing a heightened involvement with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). For instance, Omar, a 45-year-old American born Muslim whose family is from Yemen, stated during an interview that every foreign-born Muslim that he knew was visited by the FBI following 9/11. (No quote is provided because this interview was not recorded. Omar had previously had negative experiences in being misquoted by news outlets and insisted on not being recorded.) Men positively reviewed how the FBI was present at religious centers to discuss reporting procedures and engage with the Muslim community to find solutions to anti-Islamic discrimination. However, this relationship is complicated by distrust generated by past policing of Muslim bodies. Hassan describes the policing of Muslim bodies has influenced how individuals interact with the United States government.

So there is a law, that used to not be in this country because it contradicts with democracy, that they can come and get you deported or put in prison without telling you why. That is a law. However, it has slowed down now, but it still exists. Anyone can come and exercise it. So this is not expecting democracy of this country, well known in the world, that you can stand up and give your opinion, now people are scared, they don't give their opinion, they lie actually.

Hassan describes what appears to be the Patriot Act and discusses how it seems counterintuitive to American values. He also recalled narratives of Muslim people being detained with a disregard for due process and a respect for their rights.



Populations of Muslims are fearful to share true opinions or voice their concerns when government officials come to the mosque because they do not trust officials.

A final way that the men discussed surveillance was through their observations of how others used technology in their presence. Men were conscious of people with cell phones when they were involved in interactions regarding mistreatment and stigma. Samir discusses an altercation where he was defending his wife and he saw people around him pulling out cell phones.

Okay. If anyone sees the whole situation from the beginning, he will understand I'm defending my wife. I'm defending myself. I didn't go to attack him but this is very bad about YouTube. Sadly, we have YouTube now. ... My point is this: if they took this video, it will be terrorist or something like this or even if someone said fight in Walmart or something. You never know if I try to fight with him or maybe I'm telling him, 'Why you do this to my wife,' and he punched me, I'm going to start. No one would know this man was defending his wife but automatically, he is white, blonde hair and I am beard and I look Muslim Arab and, 'Oh, this Arab trying to attack this angel and he didn't do anything and this is terrorist.' I always take care of this and think about it and also it will give bad name about all Muslims even Arabs.

This was an isolated incident within this study, most interviewees did not discuss personal altercations escalating to this level. Still, it provides some insight into the stigmatizing and surveilled positions of Muslim men. Samir discusses how interactions being caught on film can be manipulated and taken out of context.

Muslims are understood to be a foreign aggressor and White individuals are innocent victims of terror. He fears that this is the perspective that many viewers will have and he is cautious because he doesn't want his actions to reflect poorly on Muslims and Arabs.

Men in this study were not only filmed during interactions with anti-Islamic perpetrators, but also during religious practices such as prayer. Red, a 26-year-old

American born Muslim, discusses people taking pictures of him and his friends while they were praying in the library:

And while we were praying, it was a silent prayer, so you can really focus on the noises that are around you, and I heard some people walking by, and after we finished, someone mentioned that they just took pictures of us, and, and what they did was they walked by and saw us doing something weird so they took pictures of us, so that they could show their friends. And you could kind of hear them you know from the outside saying, saying things like, ‘what are they doing?’ ‘Oh my gosh!’ ‘What’s going on?’ You know, maybe nothing threatening, but they sort of, you could kind of get the feeling that they are sort of making fun of us, because they didn’t know what we were doing. And, you know, they got snap chat now. I can just imagine, they probably took a snapchat and put a little caption on it, you know, but you can only imagine, but you know we didn’t, we didn’t, they just walked by and left, they weren’t there for us to see.

Muslim students being filmed during times of prayer is evidence that Islamic religious practices are deviant to normative American life and values. It also shows how Islamic religious practice is scrutinized. Christian prayer is typically a religious practice that is appreciated and revered in many social settings and among many social groups. This experience suggests that when Muslims pray it becomes a novelty spectacle that warrants documentation and discussion. Statements like “Oh my gosh!” are evidence of the severity of deviance that Muslim practices are to American society. Islamic practices are interpreted as a threat.

If American Muslims carry racialized identities that make them susceptible to stigmatization, a core question becomes: what are features or markers of this conflated racial category? How are Muslims identified as such? The research literature has discussed several markers that contribute to men’s classification as Muslim. This research identifies six identifiers that contribute to masculine experiences of stigma and influence how said stigma is managed.

### *Masculine Muslim Signifiers*

Men experienced stigma and discrimination based on markers that are related to their intersecting identities. Goffman calls these stigma symbols (1963: 44). As previously discussed, racial and gender identities contribute to the experiences of Muslim men. Other identities and statuses that affected the experiences of participants are nationalities, immigrant status, and degree of externally visible religious practice. The following masculine stigma symbols present themselves in the research: association with Muslim women, association with other Muslim men, names, dress/beards, accent, and religious practice. Generally, these markers appear to be more transient than the hijab. That is, they can be manipulated without compromising religious practice. These signifiers may not be exhaustive, but they did appear multiple times during research interviews. Because these signifiers correlate with strategies for concealing stigma, and because they were often discussed in conjunction with efforts to conceal identities, they will be discussed further in the section on stigma management.

### *Association with Muslim women*

Many personal examples of mistreatment that men shared occurred when men were in public with significant women in their lives. The association with Muslim women becomes an identifier for men's Muslim identity. Ali discusses himself and his wife as being clearly Muslim when they are out. A variety of factors contribute to this identification, but he specifically mentions the hijab.

I didn't feel looked at different but then 9/11 happened early on so I'd only been Muslim for a few years but I was practicing, dressing like this, beard and everything. My wife, she wears the head wrap, and everything, and the long dress, and all that. Obviously, when we're out we're clearly Muslim.

In this quote, it appears that Ali and his wife's experience become a collective one. Because the hijab is a clear distinguishing factor of Muslim identity men who are associated with wearers are assumed to be Muslim. Also recall Mostafa's telling of a collective stigma experience with his mom, where he described her identification as Muslim as "our" identification as Muslim. Discussions of identification were often tied to experiences of mistreatment or discrimination.

In some scenarios, men found it necessary to assert their connection to their wives. The men discussed stepping into altercations to defend Muslim women and becoming the focal point of discussion. Samir describes such an instance:

At this time, she was doing something and one of them he was in the middle and he stopped then he said, 'Oh my god! Look at her' loudly. I heard him. Of course, they think she is alone and my wife didn't even look at them. Then I stepped and I stood in front of this guy ... The other guys just left but I went straight in front of this guy and I told him, 'Hey, this is my wife.'

The initial comments in this exchange were directed at Samir's wife. However, once Samir interjected his identity became the focal point of the altercation. This resulted in his own personal stigmatizing experience which nearly led to physicality.

#### *Association with Muslim Men*

In the same way that Muslim men can be identified because of their association with Muslim women, Muslim men can be identified because of their association with other Muslim men. Alex discusses how the religious practice of greeting other Muslims and his association with other Muslims revealed his religious identity to his classmates in High School:

As a white male, I have the benefit of blending in. So, I always tell people, if you did not know me from previous experience, if you just saw me walking down the street you wouldn't go, 'oh, that's a Muslim.' Some people will be

like, 'oh, but you got the beard.' And I will be like, 'but we live in [State], it's not really distinctive.' So, in a way, I view myself as a chameleon. I do blend in. ... But, in terms of personal experience, the only one that I have is I was a Freshman in High School, and you know, I was identified as Muslim by virtue of - there was some Somali's in my High School, so one thing that is very intrinsic to our religion is that we are meant to greet people, you know, 'As-Salaam-Alaikum,' 'Wa-Alaikum-Salaam.' So by virtue of doing that, they found out- one person found out that I was a Muslim and gave me some grief about what happened at 9/11.

Alex discusses how as a white convert he is not identified as Muslim in most social settings. His racial identity allows for him to pass as non-Muslim. This changed for him in school when he greeted other practicing Muslims with a religious greeting in Arabic. It was after this identification that he experienced discrimination and the stigma of being linked to terror. Other participants reported a hesitancy from people that they knew to associate with more visibly recognizable Muslims. This will be discussed in the section on stigma management, but it is indicative that an association with Muslim men can lead to presumptions about one's religious/racial identity.

### *Muslim Names*

Names are a prominent personal identifier of men's Muslim identity. Even convert Muslims hold names that act as a cue of foreignness. Red describes himself as not visibly Muslim and goes by a nickname, here he talks about how his birth name reveals his Muslim identity.

Red: But I know peop- I know some stories with people that didn't get it as easy as I did. Um, probably because of the fact that they couldn't tell, until they heard what my name was, or yeah.

Interviewer: So, you think your name, caused ...

Red: My name gives it away. Maybe not gives it away that I am Muslim, but it gives it away that I am something different, after looking at me and thinking that I'm looking like everyone else, and then finding out I have a different name.

Red's name distinguishes him from others. Even if the name does not mark him as Muslim it singles him out as foreign or other. Names are a transient identifier because the revelation of a man's name depends on certain social interactions. Most altercations associated with name in this study took place in schools or job applications would be given, in environments where perpetrators knew interview participants. The fact that names appear to be the most universal identifier for Muslim men means that men pass with more ease than women do based on religious garb, such as the hijab.

#### *Traditional dress*

Not many of the men in this study wore traditional clothing or long beards, though many men discussed that these visible markers likely contribute to experiences of mistreatment. In this quote presented earlier, Ali discusses how being with his wife and wearing traditional clothing and a beard made him visibly Muslim.

I would say at first I didn't really feel any different. I didn't feel looked at different but then 9/11 happened early on so I'd only been Muslim for a few years but I was practicing, dressing like this, beard and everything. My wife, she wears the head wrap, and everything, and the long dress, and all that. Obviously, when we're out we're clearly Muslim.

Ali unapologetically presents himself as Muslim. He actually desired to be recognized as Muslim. Presenting oneself as a Muslim in this way likely correlates with specific stigma management techniques (which is discussed later in the section called *Stigma Management*). The only men in this study who reported regularly wearing traditional clothing that could identify them as Muslim worked at religious institutions.

However, here Ali recalls how his and his wife's possession of clear stigma symbols

unquestionably identified them as Muslim. This could result in experiences of discrimination.

### *Language*

Language barriers were discussed by individuals as an identifier that contributes to the singling out of Muslim men. Johnny discusses how having a foreign accent and limited English speaking skills allowed others to single him out and mistreat him while he was in school.

Mhm. I do. I think it depends, some people have a little easier time assimilating to the culture. I feel like it's worse when you don't speak English as well, because then- When I had an accent, or when I didn't speak English as well, I felt like people were looking at me even worse than now. But now I can actually defend myself with words, or at least, present the idea. But when you can't even communicate back, then I think that's even worse for them.

Language here is identified as having two-fold consequences. On the front end, a lack of language proficiency or the possession of a foreign accent can oust an individual as a foreign Muslim. Second a lack of language proficiency limits an individual's ability to respond to mistreatment. The development of language skills was discussed as being central to Johnny's ability to deal with stigma.

### *Religious practice*

For many men, religious practices are the only signifiers that can be externally used to identify them as Muslim. Religious practices that identify Muslim men in this study are: prayer, dietary restrictions, and Mosque attendance. Men discussed a need to be conscious in general about where they would be at certain times of the day so that they could find a quiet place to be undisturbed. This desire to be undisturbed took on greater importance because of a hostile climate towards Muslims after terror.

Pasha shares an experience that his friend had when praying in public:

But it's really hard to find that in a man, unless you see him practicing the religion in front of you. So like, let's say you see him praying, after he's done praying ... I heard of an instance he told me about himself. He was praying in the middle of the mall, outside of the mall or something, and a couple people saw him praying and they just peed right next to him. Because like, I guess they knew what kind of religion he practiced. I mean, I guess that's what he assumed, like they knew what kind of religion he practiced.

Pasha discusses the visibility that public practice creates. Even if an individual does not appear Muslim, postures that are typical to Muslim prayer times single individuals out and make them vulnerable to mistreatments. This vulnerability is both social and physical; social in the sense that men who are praying are highly visible, and physical because when positioning oneself face down to the ground for prayer means that one cannot defend oneself. Pasha states that people who saw his friend praying used this identifier to discriminate against him.

Signifiers for Muslim identity increase the visibility of Muslims. However, as discussed previously, masculine stigma symbols seem to be more transient than the hijab. Men who hold transient signifiers or do not possess signifiers in general can be pass as non-Muslim.

#### *Passing as Non-Muslim*

Several men in this study discussed holding identities that allowed them to pass as a non-Muslim. Goffman (1963) discusses passing in conjunction with the visibility of one's stigmatizing status (48). Men who pass describe themselves as holding limited markers of foreignness or Muslim identities, or as being less visibly Muslim. Red describes himself as half-Iraqi, half-American and highly passing. Here he discusses his experiences of being mistaken as a non-Muslim:

Red: The cool thing is, that a lot of people don't know that I am Muslim at first. So, let's say I'm with a stranger, and someone that is obviously, that you



can tell, that appears to be Muslim, let's say walks by or does something. Once they are out of the area, and I'm alone with that stranger, they talk to me as if, as if you know, I'm just a white American, or uh Christian like them or that I'm not Muslim. And they'll mention things, which is pretty fun.

Interviewer: And what's like the difference I guess, so what, what kinds of things might they say?

Red: They could say things like, things that I don't even feel that they actually believe, they would say things like 'oh, this guy right here, he probably wants to kill all of us.' You know, they could say, 'this guy here, he's probably planning his attack right now.'

Interviewer: And then how do you respond to situations like that?

Red: Uh normally, ... usually I'll just say 'ha, yea, sure, yea.' You know, just to sort of end the conversation there, just because, rather than replying with a similar statement to keep it going, I'll sort of just diffuse it like 'hm yeah.' On rare occasions, I might actually say, I might actually stick up for them, also by not expressing my identity. So as if they think, 'one of them is sticking up for someone that appears to be Muslim.' So, it's sort of like 'wow, why are you sticking up for that guy? Aren't you supposed to be one of us, don't you think the way I do?' So, I'll try to approach them from their own perspective, and that usually, they usually realize that they're just making a stupid statement, and it shouldn't be said.

In this exchange, Red recounts his ability not only to pass as a non-Muslim, he passes to the extent that others feel comfortable enough to make jokes at the expense of other assumed Muslims in his presence. We can also see in Red's response that he can and does combat these negative experiences without revealing his identity as a Muslim. This is relevant to his strategies for stigma management. Men who hold Muslim identities that are not as externally visible, such as Red, must make decisions about revealing their stigma identities in a variety of social settings. In some instances, it is most appealing to defend Muslim identities without revealing his identity. However, Red risks being identified as dichotomously "un-American" by aligning oneself with a Muslim other. So, he elects to keep his identity hidden.

Participants also talked about the experience of passing as a form of privilege. They understand themselves to experience stigma at reduced rates because they are less easily identified as Muslim. The ability to pass was not uniform among the men. Some men pass more than others. Aidan discusses the privilege that he enjoys as a highly-passing Muslim man in the United States:

Because if I walk down the street, I have an American accent and you don't know what the heck I am. You know, I could be Italian, I could be Asian, I could be anything, I could be Hispanic. If I for example, if I wore traditional garb or if I had a really long beard or I wore a special hat, you can tell those guys apart so people would probably look at me different. I wear regular clothes and I talk regular, so. So, it puts me at that risk, the only way that I would get in trouble is if somebody actually knew, or if somebody saw me coming in and out of the mosque, you know, if somebody had a beef and wanted to do something. But you know if I was just walking down the street or sitting in a coffee shop nobody is going to know what my background is.

Aidan believes that his western appearance deflects mistreatment that he would experience as a Muslim man. This western appearance is mostly derived from his dress and speech. Because of this appearance, Aidan's phenotype and skin tone could be attributable to other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Though some men did discuss being the recipients of mistreatment directed at Latino and other ethnic and racial groups, the ability to pass as something other than Muslim was advantageous in certain social settings. Aidan believes that the only indicators of his Muslim identity to strangers is his practice. Therefore, he observes some privilege with respect to mistreatment directed at Muslims.

Some men held other identities that were simply more prominent than their Muslim identities which allowed for them to pass as only those identities. Johnny, is a Somali immigrant, but his racial designation takes precedence in social interactions.

People are still going to be like, first, if they don't know my name they're not going to think of me as Muslim. And if they do they're just going to be like, oh he's from Africa they are going to dismiss that I would ever be in ISIS.

Johnny believes that his name is the only indicator of identity that he holds that explicitly marks him as Muslim. He believes that his African American identity is the most prominent in social interactions and therefore is the most responsible for the treatment that he receives. Racially white participants had similar experiences of passing. Discussions of passing typically centered on religious identifiers. The prominence or lack of these identifiers contribute to an individual's ability to pass and to avoid stigma related mistreatment.

The ability to pass is central to the ability of these men in to choose how they manage stigma. Individuals who are unable to pass are less able to conceal a stigmatizing identity. It appears that men are more able than women to conceal their identity without compromising religious practice. The following sections focus on stigma management strategies used by research participants.

## STIGMA MANAGEMENT AND MUSLIM MEN

Stigma management strategies in this study were consistent with categories developed in the research literature. These categories include withdrawing from relationships with others, concealing stigmatizing identities, and education aimed at minimizing the consequences of stigma (Schroeder and Mowen 2014: 459).

Interviews appear to reveal a hierarchy in the desirability and functionality of certain stigma management strategies. Most of the men seemed to point toward the educating others as the most ideal and true to their religious identities. The next sections discuss stigma management techniques that present themselves in the research data.

### *Withdrawing from Social Relationships*

The first strategy for stigma management in this study is withdrawing from social relationships. This category is discussed first because participants appeared to have the least amount of control of this strategy, while it influences the use of other stigma management techniques. When questioned about how backlash from terror and stigma shaped influenced their social relationships, participants described their social networks as a naturally filtering group. This withdrawal had more to do with the actions of others and the communities that they were involved in than conscious decisions on their part. Thus, social withdrawal often seemed to be out of the control of interviewees. Furthermore, the disintegration of social relationships with non-Muslims is counterintuitive to stigma management strategies involving the education of others. Still, men did report that their relationships were influenced by their racialized and religious identities. Pasha describes the process of changing friendships as he engaged more fully in his religion.

Like for example, it's a friend of mine, we still keep in touch every once in a while, and hoop or whatnot. But he kind of stopped messing with me after I was really active in my Mosque ... So, he's like, 'I don't mess with that crowd, it's too many Arabs in that Mosque.' Like, 'dude you're Arab.'

Pasha believes that his friend did not want to be associated with Arab Muslims so the friendship dissolved. The irony in the rationale behind this friend's disassociation with religious Muslims was that there were too many Arabs in the mosque even though his friend, himself, is Arab. This rationale could be evidence of an internalized stigma. This friend desires to disassociate with a group that has been stigmatized.

While few participants discussed explicitly ending or withdrawing from relationships in response to stigma, men discussed their closest networks as being

shaped by attributes such as awareness, understanding, and open-mindedness. Johnny describes consciously shaping his closest network. He discusses how he generally spends time with people who are well informed regarding Islam and world affairs.

And plus, generally the people that I hang out with are more, are at least a little bit smarter and can do their own research, in terms of, knowing what's going on around them. So, it's not like I have to worry about someone making a stupid comment. ... I just hang out with people that are more informed. Because then they'll, they'll have a better idea, about what's going on, rather than, just asking weird questions.

Johnny discusses qualities that he seeks out in the people that he associates with. He seeks out close relationships where people are informed and don't scrutinize his identity with questions about Islam and terror. Johnny continues to discuss how his relationships are shaped:

I believe this thing, there's this thing that says that you are the average of the five people that you hang out with. And um, I think for me, I have to hang out with someone who is more informed because, because if I were ever to have to introduce them to my family as friends, then I wouldn't want them to kind of, make any stupid remarks, or, like I want them to be more informed so they know the truth and, they're more open to learning about it rather than someone who's blinded by the media or something. Like then you can't really change that person's mind about it, because you are always going to start fighting about your core beliefs and then they won't ever believe you and it's just worse that way.

Men discuss their friendships as being a self-filtering group. They did not want to hang out with closed-minded individuals outside of religious differences, so their close networks generally were not influenced by discussions that focused on their racialized and religious identity. Johnny believes that the people that he associates with influence who he is. Thus, his social network is filled with the type of people that he wants to be. He fears being too close to individuals who he considers to be ignorant of social politics and of Islam. Engaging too closely with this ignorance

would cause him to undergo scrutiny related to his religious identity. He hopes to avoid this scrutiny by controlling his network.

Participants believed that their social networks were organically shaped by their identities. By being involved in mosques and religious institutions, many of these men's associates are likely practicing Muslims. Kareem explains how his relationships have changed with the natural progression of life.

Not really so much because of that. The people that you associate with are already a self-filtering group. Aside from places like ... Work was probably the only place. You don't really rub up against people who will have drastically different views of life than you. At work, there's a culture of, 'Well, this is a business place, we don't talk about controversial things,' so it's okay. I was 19 when I became Muslim and I'm almost 43 now, so I'd say the only friends who've faded away or whatever, I think it's just part of the natural progression of life. As you get older, you don't run with the same people you ran with as a teenager. I don't attribute that to Islam in anyway, I think it's just getting older.

Kareem states that "the people that you associate with are already a self-filtering group." This in response to being asked how friendships and relationships have changed following social backlash related to terror. He believes that as you get older, your relationships naturally change. This organic shaping of social relationships means that many men don't have close friendships with people who hold drastically different views than they do. The only place that this would occur is work and professional etiquette limits most stigma-oriented questioning that would occur.

Recall that Goffman (1963: 73) theorized that complete social withdrawal was near impossible for individuals to remain engaged socially in society. According to interview data, social withdrawal appeared to be most relevant, as it related to other stigma management strategies. When participants were socially and physically in

proximity to dominant group members and non-Muslims, they needed to manage their stigma using other strategies.

### *Concealing One's Identity*

The second method for stigma management involves the concealing of stigmatizing identities. Though this method was present in interview data, many of the references to this strategy involve people that interviewees know rather than interviewees themselves. It appears that hiding one's identity is not the stigma management strategy of choice for these Muslim men. Individuals made conscious efforts to hide their Muslim identities, others were requested by parents or loved ones to conceal these identities to protect themselves from mistreatments, but most reported the ways that those around them attempted to hide their identities as Muslims. Red discusses his desire to pass as a non-Muslim in connection to the creation of a less foreign nickname: "I am going to be honest. I do it too. Because sometimes it's just easier and quicker if people think that you are one of them." Implicit in this statement is the dichotomous relationship between the Muslim world and the western world. Life is easier in America for individuals who belong more fully to the western world and thus, sometimes it is advantageous to conceal one's Muslim identity. By hiding Muslim status individuals can avoid the negative consequences of stigma. These identity concealing stigma management strategies relate to masculine Muslim stigma symbols such as association with visibly Muslim men or women, Muslim sounding names, traditional Muslim dress, and Islamic religious practices. Strategies identified in this study aimed at hiding Muslim identities are: controlling public interactions, name changing, beard shaving, and

practicing religion carefully. The following sections will discuss these stigma-management strategies.

### *Controlling public interactions*

Muslim men discussed how men that they knew negotiated who they associated with in public settings. This identity concealing strategy seems to overlap some with the withdrawal from social relationships, however, by controlling public interactions this research focuses on how others are perceived based on who they are associated with by others. This discussion specifically focused on how Muslims limited public association with other more visible Muslim men. Hassan is a 36-year-old immigrant from India who dresses in traditional clothing, wears a thick beard, a head scarf, and self-describes himself as visibly Muslim. Here he describes an interaction with one of his congregants where requests were made to meet in a different location the next time that they decide to meet.

I'll give you an example of when I was, one of my congregation members. We were chilling. We just had to talk about certain things for the community, so we're talking. Afterwards, he was ... Like- I mean, I thought everything went fine. We got everything done and we walked out, it was actually a restaurant. So, we walked out, and he was like, 'Yo, you know, we gotta go, we just go to whatever houses next time, or go to the library, go somewhere.' We really didn't talk about why or anything, but I could tell that's what the issue was. That he felt uncomfortable because of maybe some of the looks, or the second looks, or something like that. Where those kind of things ... I don't look at it as a mistreatment, as once again, it's not a big deal. That's something ... I don't want to use the word immune, but I've been accustomed to, you know?

Hassan describes the actions of someone he knows direct towards himself. His congregation member was uncomfortable meeting in a public place and requested to meet in a more private location in the future. Hassan's visible Muslim identity is an association that his congregation member wanted to manage. Whereas Hassan was



used to the attention that his appearance brought, his congregation member was uncomfortable with the heightened surveillance, or hegemonic-gaze he received from dominant group members. By controlling this public interaction this man hopes to delimit his interactions with Muslims who have a more prominent Muslim appearance. The result, given the backlash that Muslims face, is to limit stigma.

### *Name changing*

Men in this study discussed name changing as a form of concealing one's Muslim identity. Name changing in this study refers to the selection of nicknames. One man in this study changed his name to conceal his religious identity. However, other men discussed how men that they knew changed their names to hide their identities. Still, when some participants were presented with the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for this study, they selected western or otherwise ambiguous pseudonyms: Alex, Johnny, and Red. Red discusses the process of choosing to go by a nickname as he entered middle school just after 9/11. The father of a close friend was influential in this process.

This is when I was going into middle school, and, ironically enough, right after 9/11 ... Going into middle school you are in a new school, you got new classmates, new teachers, everything is new. 'So, how are people going to look at you?' He's telling me this, he said, 'you can pretty much change your whole image now.' He said, 'Do you want to go by that?' He would explain things strategically. He would make jokes out of it. So, he would joke around about people trying to pronounce my real name. He would say, 'no you don't want that to happen. Just go in there and tell them two letters. Tell them like initials. Tell them that's what I go by.'

Red's experience involves strategic influence by a trusted adult in his life. The decision to change his name was not haphazard with unintended consequences. It involved a conscious effort at deflecting his Muslim identity. Red acknowledges that

the events following 9/11 likely influenced the direction of this interaction. Red explains that choosing a new name creates a new image for himself. Red continues to describe this experience:

And so, I was thinking about it and I said you know maybe that would be cool if I had like a nickname like that. And so, from that point on, I went to middle school the first day and the teacher was calling roll and was like, 'if anyone goes by something else just let us know.' And even though there were a few people that were there from elementary that knew me, I'm raising my hand saying, 'yeah, I go by this now,' and I'm getting a few looks like, 'what the hell, no you're not, I just saw you, last summer you were going by something else.' But a lot of people that didn't know me, they just thought that, that was the norm, they ran with it, and from that point on I was known by something else.

Red creates a new image of himself as a dominant group American adolescent, a white American. Name changings ties to identity are deep and offer considerable nuance. In what seems to be a trivial whim to some of his classmates that knew him previously, Red deflects his Muslim identity and changes how he is known to those who interact with him. Recall that earlier, Red discussed being highly passing as a non-Muslim and his only tie to the Islamic world was his name. By providing a *disidentifier* (Goffman 1963:44) in the form of a new name, Red communicates that he is a dominant group member.

Not all men in this study who were known by nicknames consciously deflected their Muslim identity. Other participants in this study who had nicknames were either assigned those nicknames at an early age by someone else or reported that they selected a nickname based on the ease of pronunciation. Participants were familiar with other individuals who changed their names as a response to stigma. Here Johnny discusses his brother's use of a nickname:

I think my brother is, he has assimilated a little too much into the American culture. He is trying to conceal his identity, in terms of his Muslim faith and stuff like that, I think he even goes by a nickname, or something. Just so he doesn't have to explain something. So, it just affects some people differently.

Johnny believes that his brother conceals his Muslim identity by going by a nickname. This is consistent with the trend that men in this study tend to discuss activities that conceal one's identity in the third person. This allows for Johnny to critically assess these moves. In Johnny's opinion, his brother has assimilated too much into the American culture. To him, being Americanized dichotomously means losing some of his Muslim identity.

Some men were critical of the decision to go by a nickname to conceal one's religious identity. Kareem, a Muslim father, expressed some disapproval at the prospect of his children concealing their Muslim identity.

Not really. If I overheard my kids doing that, I would get on them. Names are traditional, your name is what I gave you. I mean they can have nicknames, as long as it's not obviously trying to disguise their identity.... That's one thing, like I said before, I would actively resist the urge to do that. I mean that's a degree of selling out in my mind. I don't say that to bash people who do it. I know I feel comfortable with being born here. I have certain things, I can't be deported unless I do something crazy or whatever. There's a kind of privilege that comes with being a citizen, and a natural born citizen that others don't have. I don't hold it against others who do, or if someone wants to go by Mo. I would resist that for myself.

Many individuals discussed a morality of name changing to conceal one's Muslim identity. Even Red, who changed his own name, discussed this morality and religious and traditional teachings that are considered during discussion of this strategy.

Kareem's sentiment about name changing reflects a dichotomous understanding between the Muslim and western worlds. To some religiously practicing men, individuals who change their names assimilate too much or there is concern that they

might lose some of their Muslim identity. Kareem also expresses that in navigating responses to mistreatments, he has to consider privileges that he holds as an American-born Muslim. He holds moral attitudes directed at the management of stigma. However, he acknowledges that navigating prejudice and mistreatment is a complex experience that is not uniform.

Despite few of the men changing names to hide religious identity, most of the participants interviewed were familiar with discussions that center around name changing. Many of the men cited the same example to discuss name changing: Mohamad who chooses to go by Mo. Aidan provides insight into both the example of Mohammed choosing to go by Mo and actual individuals who choose Americanized nicknames:

You see it all the time, one example: people named Mohammed, they go by Mo. You know, and people that may be a more tough name to say, but the syllables and stuff they will just shorten it. They just make an American name or for example if someone's name is Hah-ress they might change it to Harris, Adam, Ah-dom. You know, they will try to make it Americanized, so. And I think that people did that all along, not because of being prejudiced, but because, you know, when you were a little kid, if somebody butchers your name, that's embarrassing. People sometimes just change their name, just to make it easier. But I think some people say it now because they don't want to be singled out.

Aidan leads with a discussion of the popular Mohammed goes by Mo example. However, the same practice extends to other names. Names that do not fit the Western dialect are often changed to avoid either mispronunciation or stigma. Aidan asserts that people have changed Muslim names "all along," but the presence of anti-Islamic stigma has given new motivation and rationale to name changing. When interviewees were further asked about the Mohammed to Mo example for name changing, some stated that they were unsure of where that example came from. It

could be that Mohammed is simply the most common name in Islam. However, other individuals discussed dialogue between religious scholars on the matter of name-changing. These scholars used this example specifically to discuss the morality of changing one's beautiful and religiously inspired name to conceal one's identity. The discussion of religious teaching in tandem with name changing is evidence of a socialization that guides individuals to proper stigma management techniques.

### *Beard shaving*

Participants discussed the shaving of one's beard as a mechanism of hiding one's stigmatized identity. None of the men interviewed reported shaving their beard to conceal their identities, though they knew people who did or were requested by loved ones to do so. Beards are not exclusive to the Islamic faith, nor is it mutually understood by all of Muslims that men should wear beards. However, many sects do view the beard as important in creating visible distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims and thus this traditional symbol becomes a masculine Muslim signifier.

Pasha discusses a relative shaving his beard in response to the 9/11 attacks.

Yeah. Kind of ... A relative did that, a relative of mine did that after 9/11. And he used to have a full beard, he kind of shaved it off. I remember it. It kind of affected Muslims in two different ways. I'll say this, a lot of them feel like they need to move more ... What's that word? They need to be more Americanized, more assimilated into the culture. And at the same time, kind of lose their Muslim identity.

Pasha discusses how some Muslims attempted to become more Americanized after terror. The idea of becoming more American is understood as existing in a dichotomy against being more Muslim. In this dichotomous relationship, Muslim is associated with foreignness and having a full beard is associated with being Muslim. Thus,

shaving one's beard becomes a method for disassociating with a racialized identity that is stereotyped as a threat to American society.

Even men who intentionally choose not to conceal identities were requested to do so by loved ones. Zain shares that every time terrorist activities occur, his parents ask him to shave off his beard.

Zain: Um, any time there is a large terror attack my parents ask me to shave my beard off.

Interviewer: Really?

Zain: Yeah, they- my parents, they're really fearful of anything going on, anything happening to their children so whenever we went into an airport or something they always want to make sure that we look decent and everything. They just try to give us, I guess, a heightened awareness of, you know, our surroundings and everything and to approach things in, I guess, in a, yeah.

Zain's parents are fearful for how a visibly recognizable association with Islam may influence their son's safety. Though Zain does not share this sentiment, his parents ask him to engage in stigma management strategies aimed at concealing his identity. These requests hope to ensure Zain's safety by making his appearance is one less associated with terror, and in part to allow him to navigate social environments affiliated with stigma, such as an airport with greater ease. This request provides confirmation that beard shaving can be explicitly aimed at managing stigma.

#### *Controlling public religious practice*

The men discussed limiting or controlling public religious practices, such as prayer, to protect identities. Participants discussed the vulnerability that public religious practice creates. Many stated that they were already conscious of where they were at certain times of the day for prayer regardless of post-terror backlash. However, men did express taking extra precautions to ensure their safety before

praying following backlash related to terror. Kareem discusses changes in his perceived safety following Islamophobic rhetoric.

When I travel on road trips, often we pray five times a day, you know. Before, I would stop at a rest area and just go over in the grass, pull out the rug, pray, get back in the car and done. Now, I'll still do that but I pause and I look around really closely to see ... I measure up who's around and figure out if I see somebody who I think might be a problem. My wife or whoever I'm traveling with, if they're in the bathroom, I'll wait for them to come out so that there's someone looking, that kind of thing. Whereas before, especially in the early days before 9/11, I wouldn't care I'd be like, 'Whatever.' You might expect some random person, at most somebody would say something rude. It's not really that big a deal. Since then, I've been aware that there's some people who might actually do something harmful.

In this case, the line between taking added precautions as measures of safety and controlling religious practice to provide a level of invisibility are blurred. Though Kareem discusses this heightened consciousness as a measure to protect himself, protective action would naturally include a limitation of visible religious practice. Other men discussed doing prayers in seated positions in vehicles, as something that they do when they are on the road. Electing to remain in a vehicle could have identity concealing purposes for some men.

Some stigma management involved a combination of identity concealing strategies. Alex, describes a reluctance to pray in public in a large group.

If I was in a group, I would advise the group, let's not do anything in public. Like, if a prayer time is almost up. So, let's say the fourth prayer- we've passed that time and it's time for the fifth prayer- you try your best to pray before that fifth prayer- before that time begins. So, if I was in a group I would try to do it in a more private setting. Personally, I- I've prayed in public, and it's more so- I joke around- it's me being southern. So, you know, f the world. If you want to give me grief, go ahead. You know, in a group I would say, 'hey, let's be careful.'

Here, a combination of controlling public practice and association with other Muslims is employed. Because of his white American identity, Alex typically is not perceived

as Muslim based on his appearance. In particular, his white racial identity means that strangers would not be able to identify him as Muslim unless he communicated or demonstrated his religious affiliation. In this instance, Alex discusses the combination of public prayer and praying in a group as a source of discomfort that he hopes to manage. He is protective of his Muslim friends and feels that praying in a large group might make them vulnerable to mistreatment. He requests that their large group prays in a more private setting.

Other men limited other religious practices to conceal identity. Ali discusses how people that he knows do not religiously greet each other in Arabic to hide their Muslim identities.

I've even met some people who they're - back to the identifier and other things that would identify you as Muslim. Speaking Arabic or saying, 'As-Salaam-Alaikum,' giving them the Islamic greeting and things in public when you see another Muslim, for example. Some Muslims will be shy to do that. If they see another Muslim they don't want to say, 'As-Salaam-Alaikum,' or they don't want to acknowledge you because they just want to shop, get it, get out. They have that shyness because of that.

Religious greetings become a stigma symbol for Muslim identity. Ali believes that some Muslims neglect to greet others in this way because they do not want to be publicly affiliated by dominant group members with the Islamic faith. By doing so, they hope to avoid social scrutiny.

Interviews from men in this study reveal a hierarchy in the negotiations of Muslim stigma. Religiously practicing men in this study appear to value the educating of others more than the withdrawal from social relationships or concealing one's Muslim identity. This hierarchy is evident in the discussions of identity concealing strategies in the third person and the first-person ownership of educational



managements of stigma. The next section will focus on educational stigma management strategies that presented themselves in research interviews.

### *Educating Others*

The third major way that participants managed stigmatizing Muslim identities was through educating non-Muslims. Though some of the men in this study attempt to hide their Muslim identity in some social settings, many of the men interviewed expressed a desire to be recognized as Muslim. Ali discusses this desire: “I want to be recognized as a Muslim. If that's what comes with it, that's fine. I'm proud to be Muslim.” A desire or willingness to be publicly associated with Islam was often accompanied by the final method for the management of stigma involves educating others. Recall that Goffman (1963) described individuals who are open with their stigmatizing identities as being in the most mature stage of their stigma identity development (102). Most of the respondents in this study personally discussed managing stigma through helping build others' awareness about their religion. Participants who unambiguously present themselves as Muslim discussed opportunities that terror presents for the education of non-Muslims and believed that exposure and relationship building between dominant group members and subordinate group members would be key to educational stigma management.

A great deal of discussion surrounding the education of non-Muslims about Islam centered on the opportunity that the aftermath of terror provides. Hassan discusses the opportunity that terror and its aftermath has created.

We hate what those people did on 9/11. It hurt us probably the most out of everyone, all the effects, or the reaction, and the effects of that tragedy that took place on 9/11. But there's no question that there was opportunity, you

know. There was people that ... Islam was put on the map when it wasn't on the map. You know, people started looking into it.

The services attended at site 3 often involved a discussion of the opportunity that current rhetoric about Muslims and stigma provided for practicing Muslims to show the true teachings of Islam. Hassan discusses a direct relationship between the events of 9/11 and opportunity to spread what they believe to be orthodox teachings of Islam. Whereas 9/11 was a travesty for the United States, he asserts that the fallout from this event issued considerable stigma to individuals who can be identified as Muslims. It is worth noting that Hassan speaks to the experience of terror related backlash from a collective stance, using “we” and “us” language. Collectively, Muslims experience stigma directly tied to acts of terror. However, out of this negativity, Islam became a popular topic of discussion and inquiry for dominant group members. As a result, more people learned about what Islam was. In the long run, Hassan believes that this bodes well for Muslims.

Several interviewees discussed how the mistreatment of Muslims and anti-Islamic rhetoric and policy making by President Donald Trump created opportunity for education about the Muslim faith. This opportunity was directly related to the response of the Islamic community to stigma. Pasha describes this opportunity when questioned about the future of Muslims in the United States.

I honestly think that it's really hopeful. This could get extremely crazy, to where you might throw an executive order that's completely worded correctly, that just puts us all in concentration camps, or whatever. But, it still brings, it still puts Islam as ... In the front page. And if you put that in the front page, then people will be more inclined to learn more about it. Especially if it's positive news. Like, people fighting for Islam. Not like, legit fighting but protesting for it, speaking out against these executive orders, or whatnot. Same thing like 9/11, it was, terrible thing that happened for everyone. Like for all the families that were there, that were involved in the horrible thing that

happened to America, in general. But, no one really knew about Islam before that. That highlighted Islam, and that made people convert to Islam. Not in a horrible way, but in a weird way, that kind of made people want to be educated more on it. Sometimes these bad events, show that Islam isn't that bad. Show that, true Islam isn't that bad. You're trying to lockdown on terrorists, why are you kind of classifying Muslims as terrorists? When their religion is not that ... When people that are like that completely take religion out of context, so on and so forth.

The success of anti-Islamic rhetoric has brought Islam and the experiences of Muslims to the forefront of media and discussions regarding civil rights. Pasha compares the experiences of Muslims in America to those of other racially oppressed groups in western history. He mentions concentration camps, which appears to be a reference to either the confinement of Jewish peoples in Nazi Germany or of Japanese peoples in World War II America. Both groups were casted as political opponents to their host countries and conventional history telling frowns on the treatments afforded to these groups. The implicit message in this comparison is that these travesties begin with stigma, and that by reflecting on these histories, we can avoid repeating them with Muslim people. Pasha believes that even though political figures target Muslims with legislation, the attention that Islam receives thus becomes positive when people united to defend Islam. Pasha presumes that dominant group members knew little about Islam prior to 21<sup>st</sup> century terror. By contrast, he asserts that many of these non-Muslims are becoming more interested and more educated about Islam and Muslims. The positive education of others about what true Islam is, is viewed as central to combatting stigma. The discussion of Islam after events of international terror and ensuing political rhetoric is an opportunity for this education to take place.

Most of the men who viewed current political dynamics as opportunistic to managing Muslim stigma believed that exposure to Muslims would rid many people

of ignorance. This contact was often talked about using personal testimonies. Hassan shares a personal interaction that he had where he could engage in education relating to his stigmatized identity.

I remember once in - it was a Rite-Aid. I was getting my passport pictures - I was getting something done, and this woman approached me, and we had a long conversation for like half an hour in the store, and we actually ended up trading information, contacts, and you know, she invited me to come to her church. And this is just out of me going shopping, you know. It's nothing. So, it also becomes an avenue of opportunity to spread the true teachings of Islam.

Hassan connects this experience directly to the presentation of himself as visibly Muslim. Recall that he wears traditional clothing, a head wrap, and a thick beard everywhere that he goes. His symbolic presentation elicited a discussion about his faith, which allowed him to not only share what Islam really was with her, but it provided him with an invitation to educate more people on a larger scale.

Some of the men believed that exposure to Muslims was such a strong deterrent of negative stigma that stigma management education did not require explicit teaching or dialogue. Samir uses the following experience to prove this logic.

Before we know each other, he used to look at me. Look at me and I'm working and he's like filming me. He's not filming me but you know what I mean like staring at me. I look at him and he is like no eye contact. For almost two months, three months, when I come in the morning, I do something and I look by back and he's like ... Then I started coming and say, 'Hey, good morning,' and then he says, 'Good morning.' Anyways, long story. In the end, he told me, 'Samir, you are the best' ... Why? Because he starts speaking with me, ask me question. No problem. If you see something strange, just go ask the person.

Samir discusses a work relationship that began as a hostile one. He experienced a hyper-surveillance in the form of staring from this coworker over a 2 to 3-month period. However, he believes that by being pleasant to this coworker, this positive experience with a Muslim caused him to have a change of heart. In other words, there

is something about knowing and being known by others that detracts stigma. Once bridges such as this are built with non-Muslims, communication about religious beliefs and myths can occur that are central to overcoming stigmatization. Samir finishes this story by stating that once people are willing to ask questions, then stereotyping and stigma can be resolved.

Participants who engaged in positive stigma management strategies discussed Muslims as holding responsibility to dispel stigma the surrounding Islam. Ali believes that this responsibility extends to just being a positive contributor to the communities that they live in.

I definitely feel like it's a big responsibility to be a Muslim in the community and to actually be part of the community so that people can see, 'Well that guy's a Muslim and he's not too bad. Maybe all Muslims aren't like that.' Big time.

Some men believed that Islamic communities were guilty of isolating themselves.

Because of this, these men made it more difficult to counter negative Muslim stigma.

Aidan discusses this responsibility and the ways that Muslims fail to adhere to this responsibility here:

Everybody has their own stereotypes and their own little issues to go over. You know, and that's a whole big discussion of itself. Inside of religion - people gravitate towards their own. So, you'll have Pakistani people eating dinner together, but they don't really have any Arab friends over there, and you'll have Arab guys eating dinner but not really inviting the Pakistani guys. You know, that's just kind of the way we are in nature. We gravitate towards people who look like ourselves and are from the same backgrounds, and have the same conversations, and so even language differences... It's not like they are prejudiced against the other person, but they are more comfortable with their own, right. But, the more you're together, the more you break it down... Yeah, it's a lot to learn. I think the Muslim people - Muslim Americans, the European Muslims - they've got a lot to do, because a lot of people have also isolated themselves. You know, they socialize with each other.

Aidan believes that the segregation of people on multiple levels occurs naturally. He begins by discussing how some ethnic Muslim groups self-segregate within the Muslim community. This example is used to discuss how the Muslim community in general has become insulated from the outside world. Furthermore, Aidan believes that this social segregation needs to be overcome for non-Muslim Americans to have contact with Americans. This contact is central to the alleviation of religious stigma. Ali and Aidan place the responsibility of bridging this gap on the Muslim community. Discussions involving the education of non-Muslims often centered on the activities of religious structures. Religious structures provided environments, opportunities, and guidance toward the management of stigma, as discussed in the next section.

## RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES

Religious structures were discussed in tandem with positive stigma management strategies that involved educating others. This section analyzes the role of education and religious institutions in managing stigma. Religious education was central to the way that participants understood their stigma and sought to alleviate said stigma. Religious education in this study refers to the teaching that men received at the mosque or related venues aimed at cultivating their personal body of religious knowledge. Religious institutions refer to mosques, religious non-profit organizations, churches, and interfaith organizations. Most of the men in this study were familiar or participated in open-house events in mosques or working with non-profit organizations aimed at teaching non-Muslims about Islam, and interfaith dialogue and partnerships between mosques and other religious organizations. Men discussed how their understanding of their religion lent itself to managing stigma

engaging with dominant group members. Interviews and participant observation revealed what appears to be a socialized process for stigma management. Participants discussed how religious teachings and analysis of the life of the prophet Muhammad guided how they came to manage stigma.

### *Religious Teachings*

Religious institutions hold a unique role with respect to religious teachings because they can be backstage spaces where religious instruction occurs. This study found that some religious education directed participants toward certain stigma management strategies. Aidan discusses the role that the religious community, which he conflates with attendants at mosques and prayer services, plays in educating others.

The community, I would say, because I'm not a scholar, and I know some stories of the Quran and the teaching, but I don't know everything - And going to the mosques, going to the services, going to the prayers, meeting other people, you hear these stories and then you get people to tell you more practical terms, you know, what happened day to day with prophets along the way: Moses, or Jesus, or Abraham, .... So, I think that those things are good, because that's not my area of expertise, you know. I am a physician. I am not a religious scholar, but when you hear other people discussing, it kind of brings it into reality a little bit...

Aidan believes that the religious community, mosques, and their functions are important for Muslims because not everyone is able to be a religious scholar. By receiving instruction from religious authorities, Aidan is able to understand his faith and the life of the prophet more fully. Religious instruction from mosques and religious centers come to carry a weight that informs how Muslim men respond to mistreatment.

Participants identify the experience of mistreatment as central to the history of Islam. Many men shared the sentiment that Muslims had experienced alienation and discrimination from the inception of the religion. Sermons incorporate experiences of mistreatment from the life of the prophet Mohammad into teachings on moral responses discrimination. Kareem, discusses these religious teachings:

They're definitely too numerous to name because, I don't know if you know this, the history of the early community of Muslims, they started out as a tiny minority surrounded by a really antagonistic majority. There were sanctions against them, there were threats on their life. You don't have to be a really deep philosopher to find direct parallels to being an oppressed minority surrounded by people who are against you. It's really easy, the sayings and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. You could almost call it central to the Islamic message. ... The Imam of the mosque here at [site 3] and then other prominent American Muslim leaders, they often quote particular examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad to explain to people what's the correct way to respond to that kind of insult.

The discussion of these religious teachings is indicative of a socializing process whereby participants are provided instruction on how to respond to stigmatization and discrimination. An interpretation of Muslims as a historically oppressed group allows for lines of relevance to be drawn between religious teachings and lived experiences. Being a subordinate group surrounded by dominant group members is not viewed as new to the Islamic faith. Furthermore, this interpretation and understanding of shared suffering may contribute to the development of a salient ingroup identity. Participants discussed how the prophet Muhammad responded to mistreatments in their analysis of how they should and do respond to mistreatments. The interpretation of how the prophet responded to mistreatment was provided by religious scholars and by leaders at religious institutions. These interpretations were evident in the stigma managing



actions of Muslim men. Red, focuses on more specific examples of mistreatment of the Islamic community.

So, we're taught things like that in those institutions, that whether it's the slandering of our prophet, or whether it's laws and regulations banning hijabs in France or something or whatever, or whether it's a situation that Muslims are being killed by the thousands in Syria. Whatever the situation is, we can find a parallel of that or an example of that and we can look in our scriptures of similar lessons on that, and we can look at the life of our prophet and see how those are dealt with, and see what we are supposed to be doing about them.

In this quote, Red discusses cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammad, public policy in France that bans the wearing of the hijab, and the mass execution of Muslims in Syria. What is important with respect to this study is that Red ties what are to be scripted responses to mistreatment and discrimination to religious teachings. He uses the collective *we* throughout the quote. Red believes that the community of Muslims should respond to mistreatment in the ways that sacred scriptures prescribe. This interpretation of what scriptures mean come from religious leaders. Ali shares Red's belief and discusses the ways that the life of the prophet Muhammad informs how he believes Muslims ought to manage stigma.

If you look at the way that he dealt with oppression, and backlash, and so on, and so forth at that time it was a very turn the other cheek mentality. I won't say full turn the other cheek but it was a patient approach and let's try to win them over with kindness, and so on, and so forth. Plenty of those teachings and in the Quran, it says be patient and combat the evil with that which is better and things like that. That's how we have to deal with ... as minority Muslims. We're not trying to take over the country, we're not trying to change the system to Sharia law or anything like that.

Ali shares his understanding that the prophet Muhammad and religious teachings prescribe responding to negative treatment with "what is better." These teachings appear to socialize a peaceful response to discrimination. Ali also discusses the

unique position that Muslims are in as a minority responding to negativity. He combats potential stigma as anti-American by stating that in seeking equity for American Muslims, they are not attempting to disrupt society. He uses the term “Sharia law” which has become a very politicized term.

Men received religious instruction from locations outside of mosques. Some of this outside religious education was described as directly relating to the management of stigma. Zain eludes to commentary on name changing by religious scholars here.

Muhammad is the most common name in Islam, and it's the name of our- of the last prophet in Islam, and um, so, like sometimes you'll hear religious scholars bring up that name and they'll talk about how you've been given such a beautiful name, why do you need to shorten it to Mo?

As previously mentioned in the *Stigma Management* section, Zain recalls discussions from religious scholars that focus directly on specific strategies for stigma management. These discussions question certain practices that conceal identity and thus direct men away from religiously compromising practices. If conversations by religious scholars occur on a large scale and influence the practices of Muslim men, then they are indicative of a highly-socialized system of guiding stigma management strategies.

It appears that ingroup religious education directs many practicing Muslim men toward educational strategies for stigma management. These strategies are viewed as mature and lend themselves to more static Muslim identities. Religious institutions are also important because they provide spaces for Muslim men to encounter dominant group members to engage in and practice stigma management

strategies. The following sections will discuss the ways that religious institutions created these spaces.

### *Mosques and Religious Centers*

Mosques and religious centers were central to the management of stigma for some men. They served as locations where interested parties could engage with Islam on their own accord. Outsiders could also be invited into the mosque to engage in interfaith dialogue about Islam. Furthermore, these locations served as hubs and rallying points for social movements aimed at educationally managing stigma outside of the mosques. In this way, mosques and religious centers functioned as “civil” places, where stigmatized identities could engage with dominant group members and “back” places, where stigmatized individuals can coordinate and discuss identities without the presence of identity threat (Goffman 1963: 81).

Participants from site 2 and site 3 reported a heightened attendance by non-Muslims to the mosque following terror and political discourse by President Donald Trump. Participant observation sessions at site 3 confirmed that non-Muslim guests do attend religious services at mosques. In addition to myself, outside guests were present at the 5 religious services observed. After executive orders were issued by Donald Trump halting travel from several Muslim majority countries, a large group of over 30 participants from a Unitarian church attended one mosque in a demonstration of solidarity. Hassan, discusses this phenomenon:

I mentioned last year was - in my eight years - we had the most visitors last year in 2016, and that's when the most rhetoric was going on. You know what I mean?... a lot of times people have this misconception that we're trying to turn everyone Muslim. It's rather just making people understand that our religion is much more than what they see on television, or that's the worst place to get their info about a faith, is from the news.

Hassan discusses how the mosque that he works at has seen a surge in guest attendance. He also stated, during a sermon, that he could not recall the last time that they did not have guests at their religious service. Hassan believes this is important because it allows for the religious Muslim community to combat stigma in a very tangible way.

Visitors at religious services is viewed as a unique opportunity to manage stigma. Site 3 has a formalized process for guests where they were requested to email the Imam. This process allowed the Imam to offer to meet with individuals or to take an Islam 101 class offered by the mosque. Certain rehearsals were present in every religious service attended at site 3. The Imam greeted guests either in the masjid or at the entrance of the mosque. Here, he generally thanked the guests personally for attending the service. Typically, greetings included commentary on the timeliness of their visit. This was typically followed by a quick layout of the service that they were attending and direction to where the bathrooms were located. During the beginning of the service, the Imam publicly thanked guests for attending and expressed gratitude on behalf of the congregation. At the end of the service, congregants were invited to thank guests personally for attending and many greeted guests with a handshake and thanked guests for attending the service. These rehearsals attest to the high regard that participants at religious institutions hold for these opportunities. Muslim men made sure to have positive interactions with visitors to the mosque.

Interview participants also discussed hosting events, such as open-houses where non-Muslims could listen to an expert discuss Islam and engage in dialogue

with Muslims on site. Hamza, who is highly involved in interfaith work at his mosque, discusses an open house that his mosque put on:

One of the example is the open-house that we conduct here. What is their perspective? What is there something that need to be shared to the other people about Islam? As you know, the media always throws always the negative things... And really don't know about what. Because continuously hearing this horrible stuffs they might have bad impression about this thing, religion, or the Muslims. Just try to ... we did that ... with the mosque having the group where we can call people and explain about Islam and know about them. Like what their question is.

The purpose of the open house is to bring outsiders into the mosque and to cultivate understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. Some participants were critical of the effectiveness of these events. The rationale behind the criticism is that attendants would already be openminded people. Hamza discusses the importance of the open-house event because it gives him an opportunity to discuss Islam with people that he otherwise might not get to. He finds the open house events to be successful. These events are central to how he combats negative images of Islam, which he attributes to the media. Regardless of the effectiveness of these events, the fact is that these events are central to how some individuals like Hamza negotiate and manage stigma.

Men shared that religious institutions and mosques served as locations where Muslims could organize demonstrations aimed at denouncing terror or educating outsiders. Mohammad, who is a religious leader in the community, discusses community efforts to denounce terror.

Many things happen in this country within the last year. I have been invited to go downtown [to site 3], where the marching area, 6th street, where the court is. I went to [town name] to two different places, and where we gather around and condemn whatever happened at that time. Whether, in our community or another. So, I think our orientation is not to retaliate when we are shown mistreatment, but to show good faith. To share with the community whatever concern they have. By this way, we do believe mistreatment will go down.

When you bring the [Islamic] community, and put them together with American society. One guy who tried to kill some people- we went- the [Religious Organization] and this Masjid and another, and we protested, ‘this is not a good act.’ That brought many Americans - they really cannot believe at all- there are Muslims against what happened, you know. So, that is the way that we respond to the mistreatment. We have to go make a point, you know.

In this quote, community action is directed at providing education aimed at condemning acts of terror. These efforts by the Islamic community are often organized around mosques. Mohammad discusses a network of mosques and religious institutions that organize protests and events in the Greensburg community. Religiously practicing Muslim men can develop a unified front with a focused approach to combatting stigma by using these back stage spaces to organize.

Not all participants believed that stigma management events organized or hosted by mosques were effective. Ali discusses how a state fair booth organized by a local mosque attempted to engage non-Muslims in dialogue with mixed results.

I guess, when we were at the fair we did encounter, we did have some good discussions with some anti-Islamic people - or people, ‘Would you like a free Quran,’ take it and throw it down on purpose, stuff like that. Those are some things, the role the institution plays.

The booth at the fair was designed be a civil space. However, due to the stigmatization of Muslims, many of the booth’s visitors were hostile to men working the booth. Ali refers to individuals who respond negatively to stigma management as “anti-Islamic” people reflecting dichotomy. Anti-Islamic people disrespected stigma management efforts by throwing the Quran on the ground.

While mosques and religious centers were central to managing stigma through education, they were not the only religious structures or even institutions involved in stigma management. Non-profit organizations were utilized to manage stigma. The

following section will focus on the role of non-profit and volunteer organizations in the ways that participants manage stigma.

### *Non-Profit Organizations*

When discussing religious involvement, some participants described the work that they do in the volunteering and non-profit sector. Some of this work was aimed specifically at educating non-Muslims about the true teaching of Islam. Zain shares how he manages stigma through his involvement with a non-profit organization.

Um, for me personally, so I volunteer full-time for that organization, [Organization Name]. So, whenever something like this happens, I think it just gives us more of a reason to do more projects that promote compassion and understanding. Our mission is compassion and understanding, so we just, you know, any sort of negativity serves as fuel for us to combat it and put more positivity into the world. So, that's, I guess that's how it affects me personally.

Many of the participants were familiar with multiple non-profit organizations and their connections with various religious institutions in the area. Zain directly ties his involvement in non-profit work to the management of stigma. He states that when the news covers terrorism attributed to Islam or when incidences of discrimination occur, it drives him and those that he works with to further involvement. This non-profit is directly aimed at combatting the negative stigma that surrounds Muslims. Zain believes that by engaging collectively with this non-profit organization, his efforts focused to create more tangible results. The non-profit is an example of organized positive educational stigma management strategies. Its very existence is evidence that Muslims are seeking out meaningful ways to combat stigma.

Participants in this study viewed volunteerism as a moral thing to do regardless of stigma. However, general opportunities to volunteer were tied to the

management of stigma by some participants. Mostafa shares how volunteering for non-Muslims provides opportunity for positive exposure to Muslims that can be useful in combatting stigma.

Our volunteer work doesn't specifically target Muslims, it's for everyone. Honestly, we do more volunteer work for non-Muslims than Muslims. That gets people exposed to us as well so it's a good chance for people to get exposed to Muslims as well.

Mostafa asserts that the volunteer work that he is involved with isn't exclusive to Muslims. They do more volunteer work for dominant group members. This volunteer work is important with respect to stigma management strategies because positive exposure, such as altruistic work is believed to have the potential to change perceptions of Muslim populations.

### *Interfaith Dialogue*

Interfaith work was important to some participants who discussed positively educating others as a form of stigma management. Formal interfaith opportunities present a civil and safe space to offer educational stigma management. Aidan discusses a prominent religious leader in the Greenburg community discussing terror in an interfaith forum and the ensuing response.

Whereas, we have an interfaith thing. We have a very prominent guy in our community and he gets up and kinda speaks. And one of the Jewish guys gets up and says, 'would you quit being an apologist? What are you apologizing for? Nobody here in this town did it. None of your friends did it. Your family members didn't do this. Your religion doesn't believe in this stuff.'

Interfaith organizations provided a safe space for Muslim men to discuss what they understand to be true Islam because individuals in those organizations were typically like-minded and shared goals with participants. When a leader in the Islamic community spoke out condemning acts of terror, the response reflected that practicing



Muslims had nothing to do with terror. This is important because it is in these situations that Muslims are able to discuss their religion and experiences without fear of the presence of stigma.

Several men reported being involved in interfaith dialogues at churches. Interactions at churches were significant to this group of men because in the assumed dichotomy between the Muslim world and the Western world the Western world was Christian. Abraham, claims that he has been asked to speak on over 200 occasions after 9/11 about Islam.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I told you- yeah, I told you 200 people- churches called me and I spoke about what Islam is and yeah, I think that we are trying to differentiate. The difference is, Islam is the same faith as Judaism and Christianity. What do we call these religions? This framework- Abrahamic religions, okay. And therefore, uh, I spoke about the importance of this commonness, and that, uh- Oh, in one case- in one case the priest wanted me to speak about our belief in Jesus.

The content of Abraham's typical church discussions focused on the similarities between Islam and other Abrahamic religions, though the focus is similarities to Christianity. Discussing similarities serves as a vehicle to communicate that Islam is a peaceful religion and close the Muslim-American dichotomy. Abraham asserts that the differences between Christianity and Islam are smaller than what dominant group members suspect in an effort to minimize stigma.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on interviews with religiously practicing Muslim men and participant observation at religious services, this study explores masculine Muslim experiences with racialization and stigma in Greensburg. The findings of this research are largely consistent with the theoretical positions and findings of other studies of the experiences of American Muslims. Men in this study hold racialized Muslim identities in addition to racial, national, and religious identities that they already hold. The process of racialization is evidenced by ambiguous racial designations that Muslim men hold. Participants had difficulty racially classifying themselves, and others. Furthermore, a historic understanding of the experiences of Muslim men reveals the fluidity of racialization where in some instances they were casted as honorary whites and in some instances, they were treated as subordinate group members. These men, in turn, relied on making meanings from Muslim identities above selecting conventional racial identities. These racialized Muslim identities take prominence in the experiences of these men contingent on the existence of identifiers that cause individuals to be associated with these racial categories. This study agrees with other research that views the experiences of Muslim American's through a racialized lens (Rana 2011: 26).

Participants' understandings of the differences in gendered Muslim experiences of stigma are consistent with suggestions from previous research literature. Men believed that they occupied a position of privilege in comparison to Muslim women. This privilege was manifested most evidently in the amount of discrimination perceived to be experienced. Discrepancies were attributed to the

hijab: a visible symbol of Muslim identity (Selod 2014: 8). However, men also discussed experiencing gendered stigma that casts them as sexist enemies of gender equity and progress (Razack 2008: 16). Stigma of sexism appears to be unique to Muslim men as opposed to Muslim women. This unique stigma of sexism is important to the continuing research of Muslim men because it relates to intersecting religious and gender identities. These experiences are worth studying because they are not adequately discussed or analyzed by studying Muslims collectively or the experiences of women. Future research and politics that seek to understand and alleviate stigma must understand the impact of stigma on these intersecting identities.

Muslim men experience stigma and discrimination at an intersection of their racialized, gendered, and religious identities. However, a variety of other factors contribute to participants' experiences. The stigma experiences of Muslim men appear to vary primarily based on the visibility of their Muslim identities. Visibility that made men susceptible to experiences of discrimination and stigma was contingent on the prominence of stigma symbols; specifically: association with Muslim women, association with Muslim men, names, dress/beards, accent, and religious practice. While participants' reports suggest that masculine identity symbols are more transient than the hijab, men vary on how recognizably Muslim they are. Men who appear or present themselves to be less visibly Muslim can pass to avoid the consequences of stigma. Not all men shared this ability or desired to do so. Men who were unable to or didn't desire to pass appeared to be most interested in educationally managing stigma. That is, they wanted to engage dominant group members in ways that changed the ways that they viewed Muslim men.

The stigmatization of Muslim men depicts them as opponents to the West and democratic values. Analysis of Muslim experiences reveals a social dichotomy where the dominant White American world and the subordinate Muslim world are positioned against each other. In this dichotomy, Muslim men are suspect. This is evident in the social interactions of Muslims. Despite most participants' status as American born citizens, interviewees were told to go back where they came from and told to act more American. Other men recounted feeling pressured to defend their faith by renouncing acts of terror. Still others reported being the subjects of heightened surveillance. Religious identities and practice are thus juxtaposed against national allegiance. The dichotomous American-Muslim relationship is also evident in the current politicization of the Islamic faith, where even in the highest of democratic elections, candidates cast Muslim Americans as suspect. Islam and its alleged ties to terror lies at the heart of Muslim stigma.

If Muslim men occupy a social position where they are stigmatized as enemies of the United States, subordinate group members are likely to engage in social interactions in ways that attempt to minimize the consequences of their ascribed stigma. Participants' responses to stigmatization fit into categories of stigma management previously developed in the research literature. These findings are important to the study of Muslim men because 1) they represent conscious efforts to control or perform identities, future studies of Muslim men should analyze experiences from a perspective of stigma management. 2) They offer transferable results and present an opportunity to expand the "race, nationality, or religion" category of Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma and stigma management, which as is

remains underdeveloped. Muslim men managed stigma by withdrawing from social relationships, concealing their religious or racial identities, and educating non-Muslims (Schroeder and Mowen 2014: 459). Participants' seem to hold an understanding of a social hierarchy of stigma management strategies. In this hierarchy, men prioritize and hold educationally managing stigma in higher regard than other forms of stigma management. Theoretically, this could be explained because men in this study self-identify as religiously practicing. Therefore, religious identity is likely more central to how they define themselves and thus must be defended to avoid identity crises. However, more research would be necessary to confirm this theory.

The withdrawal from social relationships was more subtle than other stigma management strategies in interviews. Men discussed changing relationships and social networks as a natural progression of life. However, some participants sought out specific attributes and characteristics in the people that they did associate with. By doing this, they avoided relationships with individuals who presented a threat to their Muslim identities. This is significant to this research because if educational strategies are desired by religiously practicing men, then social isolation can be detrimental to meaningful stigma management.

Men typically described instances of Muslims hiding their identities in the third person. That is, rather than discussing their own personal experiences, participants often discussed how people that they knew concealed their Muslim identities. Identity concealing stigma management strategies that participants discussed include controlling public interactions, name changing, beard shaving, and

control of religious practice. These strategies correlate directly with stigma symbols that were linked to the visibility of Muslim men: association with visibly Muslim women and men, Muslim sounding names, traditional beards, and religious practices such as greetings or prayer. Furthermore, these men provided some social critique of name changing and general identity concealing practices. Participants believed that individuals who hid their Muslim identities sold out, or assimilated too much to dominant group values and American culture. This points towards the educational management of stigma as a strategy of choice for religiously practicing Muslim men.

Religious education seems to be a strong socializing agent in stigma management among religiously practicing men. Participants provided scripted responses to questions about stigma management strategies. This was most evident in discussions about changing names to conceal stigmatizing identities where men used a shared example of Mohamad changing his name to Mo. Interviewees cited discussions from religious leaders and scholars as the basis for this example and their viewpoints, which indicates that for these men there is some socializing agent or process toward desired stigma management techniques. Men who managed stigma educationally were secure in their Muslim identities. Many proudly presented these identities and invited the discussions this presentation elicited from dominant group members about their religion. These men felt religiously and morally obligated to deflect the ways that their faith has been sullied.

Educational stigma management appears to be the strategy of choice for religiously practicing men. This is consistent with Goffman's (1963) original discussion of stigma and stigma management. Men who sought to alleviate stigma by

educational means unapologetically presented themselves as Muslim. This is like stigma resistance (Poindexter and Shippy 2010: 376), as discussed in the literature review. Stigma resistance represents “assertive, resilient choices to disclose” stigmatizing identities (Poindexter and Shippy 2010: 377). These men viewed hateful rhetoric as an opportunity to educate others. That is, the presence of hateful rhetoric and discrimination provides a platform for men to discuss Islam on a larger and deeper scale. Many participants reported an optimism that popular discussions that center on hateful rhetoric and discrimination toward Muslims provides a unique stage for positive stigma management strategies. These sentiments may not be shared across a larger population of Muslims in other locations across the United States. Men reported personal experiences of dialogues with dominant group members that began because of the presentation of their Muslim identities. Men believed that relational interactions and exposure to Muslims would be central to overcoming Muslim stigma.

This study finds that religious structures contribute to educational strategies for stigma management by some religiously practicing Muslim men. The structures discussed in this study include ingroup religious education, mosques and religious centers, religious non-profit organizations, and interfaith work and dialogues. These structures influenced stigma management by socializing toward scripted responses to discrimination and stigma and providing civil spaces as avenues for men to manage stigma. Participants reported that the interpretations of religious teaching that they received lent themselves to peaceful, but unapologetic methods for stigma management. They also reported that religious institutions provided programing and

spaces where they could engage meaningfully with dominant group members in efforts to educationally manage stigma.

## IMPLICATIONS

This research provides a glance into the experiences of Muslim men amidst racialization, stigmatization, and the generation of political fear against subordinate groups in current time. Furthermore, it provides direction for future research and insight useful for developing policies related to the human rights of Muslims. This section begins by discussing the guidance that this project prescribes for future research studies. Then it focuses on potential implications for the development of policies that influence the experiences of Muslim men.

This study demonstrates that stigma and stigma management theories are effective in unpacking the experiences of Muslim American men. Future studies of Muslim populations in the United States should work from a framework of stigma management. These studies should include studies of racialized men who marginally or do not identify as religiously Muslim, women, and studies of how Muslims navigate stigma in spaces with dominant group members such as schools or the workplace. The following questions should guide this research: do stigma management strategies differ between practicing Muslims and racialized non-religious Muslims? How do women negotiate stigmatized identities given the salience of the hijab as a stigma symbol? This research should be expanded to see if these findings which are situated in these participants in Greensburg are indicative of larger populations of Muslims in the United States.



With respect to Stigma management as a theoretical framework itself, Goffman (1963: 4) classifies stigma of race, nationality or religion as one of his three primary forms of stigma. This form of stigma is especially relevant to the experiences of Muslim men in the United States in the aftermath of terror and during the War on Terror. Stigma management theories have been used extensively to discuss medical conditions. However, research that focuses on race, nationality, and religion remains under developed. Greater research attention needs to be paid to the stigma of race, nationality, and religion and how these identities are negotiated and stigma is managed. Furthermore “race, nationality, or religion” as a singular category will need to be expanded and even dismantled to analyze the intersectional experiences of racialized groups.

Future research on Muslim populations should take an intersectional approach in analyzing experiences with discrimination and stigma. Men discussed the ways that their experiences differed from those of the women in their lives. While this study cannot project these assumptions to discuss the experiences of Muslim women, it can suggest that further comparative and intersectional research be conducted.

Intersectional analyses of experiences have been important in social movements that involve identity politics, i.e. the experiences of black women amidst the civil rights movement (Crenshaw 1991). Identity politics are important because they allow for subordinate groups to collectively fight for political voice. Continuing research must continue to seek out differences in the experiences of differing identity groups within the racialized Muslim category.

This study is limited in that it does not unpack the dangerous nature of stigma. Rather, this study focuses on how the presence and nature of stigma contributes to strategies for coping with stigmatized identities. Stigma is dangerous to subordinate groups because of its tendency to become internalized and disrupt identities. Furthermore, stigmatization and hate rhetoric can cause individuals to be victims of violence and discrimination as previous data suggests (Abu-Ras and Suarez 2009: 48). Research has found that positive individual and ethnic identities aid individuals in dealing with discrimination (Romero, Edwards, Fryberg, and Orduña 2014). Future studies should focus specifically on how positive religious identities or other identities relatable to racialized Muslim identities contribute to the experiences and negotiations of discrimination and stigma and vice versa. Muslim adolescents and students who have grown up in the United States during the past 20 years will have almost exclusively been exposed to a social-political climate that is hostile towards their identities (Sirin and Fine 2007: 152). Future research should also focus on generational differences in the experience of stigma and stigma management, as well as how extensive exposure to stigma influence ingroup relations and the identity development of subordinate group members.

This study also generates suggestions that should inform public and private policies. Constructing Islam as the conceptual opponent to the United States is advantageous to those who hold power in the United States political system. Participants agree with research literature that acts conventionally defined as terror by the American public and news media were committed by very specific demographics (Rana 2011:55). Terror is predominantly limited to Muslim populations. Acts of

violence designed to create fear by dominant group members is seldom called terror.

Rana (2011) argues that limiting definitions of terror creates avenues for politicians to gain support from the public.

*“Defining terrorism in this way made it advantageous to eliminate political and social opposition, most often in the effort to quash leftist movements. Using the language of counterinsurgency inherited from colonial military strategies, terrorism was easily interchangeable with low-intensity conflict and counter terrorism to propagate rationales for warfare and build consensual support among the U.S. public (55).”*

Discussing terror as exclusive to Islam has tangible effects on the lives of Muslims, much like participants in this study. The mistreatment that men experienced was typically rooted in the notion that Muslim men are opponents to Western-Democratic interests. As long as treating Muslims as political opponents and superficial Americans is advantageous for gaining political power, mass discrimination will continue. Though it is easier said than done, American political groups must seek out politicians and leaders that resist the use of a dichotomous understanding of America and Islam to acquire political autonomy and power. Allies to the Islamic community must find ways to use language that does not feed into a Muslim-American dichotomy.

Public and private policy aimed at addressing discrimination against Muslims should help to create and support safe spaces where educational stigma management techniques can occur. Educational institutions, such as Universities, provide a unique opportunity to socialize and educate students. College courses that focus on race should incorporate the racialization and experience of Muslims into curriculum. If exposure does contribute to tolerance and stigma, these efforts by educational institutions should incorporate mosque visits and other immersive experiences into

curriculum. Where possible, similar programs should be incorporated into schools and into other public settings, such as the work place.

Interviews occurred prior to and directly following the election of President Donald Trump, whose campaign and early presidency has been reviewed as decidedly Islamophobic. Furthermore, western and international powers continue to create legislation that polices and impacts the lives of Muslim citizens disproportionately. Sadly, it appears that conditions for many Muslims in western nations will get worse before they get better. Continuing research is necessary to unpack and understand the experiences of Muslims in a social world where they have been stigmatized as threats to freedom and democracy.

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## APPENDICES

### *APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*

#### Introduction to Study:

Hello, and thank you so much for willing to be interviewed and helping me with my research. During most of this interview I would like to invite you to do most of the talking, so that I can learn from your experiences. We can keep the tone informal and more like a conversation if you would like. My primary interest for this study is how Muslim men experience mistreatment and then how they respond to it. Before we begin, there are some important things that I want you to be aware of as we begin this interview.

First, this research asks for about 1 hour of your time to conduct an interview that will be audio-recorded and transcribed. During this study I will interview 20 individuals, asking them similar questions.

Second, the records of this study will be kept private. There will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you in any reports that are published. Individuals in this study will be given a pseudonym to protect for confidentiality and research recordings will be erased once they have been transcribed.

Finally, taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to back out of the study at any time. Please keep your copy of the consent form and contact me if any problems arise.

I would like to be very respectful of your time. Do you have any questions before we begin the study? ... Thank you again. Let's begin.

#### Demographics

A. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

B. Guiding points

1. How old are you?
2. What do you do?
3. To the best of your knowledge, what is your family's nationality of origin?
4. To the best of your knowledge, how long have you/your family lived in the United States?
5. To the best of your knowledge how long have you/ your family been practicing Muslims?
6. What role does your faith play in your life?

#### Experience of Mistreatment/Stigma

- A. Have you ever experienced mistreatment that you believe that you might have faced due to your religious identity or perceived race?

1. Can you describe this situation? / What happened?
  2. How did you respond? / How did you want to respond?
  3. Did you tell anyone? / Who did you tell? / Who didn't you tell? Why?
  4. Do you think that these experiences are common? Why?
- B. Do you know anyone who has experienced mistreatment that you/they believe that they might have faced due to their religious identity or perceived race?
1. Can you describe this situation? / What happened?
  2. How did you respond? / How did you want to respond?
  3. Did they tell you? / How did you respond? / What did you say to them?
  4. Are these experiences common? How do you know?
- C. How has your life as a Muslim in the United States changed over the past several decades?
1. How did life change for you after 9/11 in United States?
  2. How did life change for you after more recent international terrorist attacks attributed to ISIS?
- D. Do you experience mistreatment directed towards Muslims differently because you are a man? / How might your experience of mistreatment differ from the mistreatment that women might face? / Why does this difference occur?

#### Responses to Mistreatment

- A. How have you had to change your life in response to changes in the treatment of Muslims following terrorist attacks?
1. Can you give me examples of this?
  2. Are there others?
- B. How have people that you know had to change their lives in response to changes in the treatment of Muslims following terrorist attacks?
1. Can you give me an example that demonstrates this?
  2. Are there others?
- C. Do you respond differently to mistreatment because you are a man? How so? Why?

#### Religious Institutions

- A. What role do the religious institutions that you attend play in how you/those around you deal with mistreatments?
1. Can you give me an example that demonstrates this?
  2. Are there others?
  3. Are these helpful / hurtful?
- B. What role does the religious community that you are involved in play in how you/those around you deal with mistreatments?
1. Can you give me an example that demonstrates this?
  2. Are there others?
  3. Are these helpful / hurtful?

- C. Have you heard any teachings that have helped you in the midst of the backlash toward the Muslim community following terrorist attacks? What are these teachings?
1. Where did you hear them?
  2. How were these teachings helpful?

Closing of Study:

Thank you so much for your willingness to take part in this study. That is all of the questions that I had. Are there any points that you think that I might have missed out on? Or any questions that I should consider asking respondents in the future? Are there any questions that could be reworded or that you found to be particularly troubling?

Alright, as I said earlier, my contact information is on your copy of the consent form that you have. Please feel free to call me or email me if any concerns arise. Thank you so much, have a great day.

## *APPENDIX B: RESEARCH CONSENT*

### **CONSENT FORM**

**PROJECT TITLE:** American Muslim Men and Stigma: The Use of Religious Communities as Mechanisms for Stigma Management

**Investigator:** Derrick Brooms 118 Lutz Hall, Dept of Sociology Univ of Louisville /  
Louisville, KY 40292  
Jack Allen 113 Lutz Hall, Dept of Sociology Univ of Louisville /  
Louisville, KY 40292

#### **Introduction and Background Information**

You are invited to participate in a research study about American Muslim Men and their experience of stigma. Specific attention will be given to religious services and how those provide support in the midst of stigma. This study is being conducted by Derrick Brooms, PhD and Jack Allen from the Sociology department at the University of Louisville. Approximately 20 individuals will be invited to participate.

#### **Procedures**

This research asks for about 1 hour of your time to conduct an interview with you using open-ended questions. Your responses will be audio-recorded and transcribed. This study will also focus on the structure of religious services and will analyze patterns in the preaching at those services. Total, this project will seek to conduct 20 individual interviews and observe 20 religious services.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study**

The study is designed to learn about the experiences and views of people like you in general and not to benefit you personally. All individually-identifiable information will be concealed and names confidential, there are minimal risks to participation in the study. The information learned in this study may be beneficial to others.

#### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant, unless the interviewee explicitly demands such. In addition, other identifying information will also be changed in all publications and presentations to further protect confidentiality. You have the right to retract any information provided if determined necessary after the interview (for example, in the case of fear of exposure, misinformation, or misrepresentation). Research records will be erased once they have been transcribed.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

#### **Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact Primary Investigator, Derrick Brooms at 502.852.8026.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPPO staff. The IRB is an

independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

**Statement of Consent**

This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

Participant Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**List of Investigators**

Derrick Brooms, PhD (502) 852-8026

Jack Allen (502) 507-2195

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jack R Allen III  
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502.507.2195  
Lutz Hall 113, University of Louisville

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### ***Current Position***

Graduate Teaching Assistant – University of Louisville

### ***Education***

*(Anticipated) M.A., Sociology, University of Louisville, 2017*

Thesis: Muslim Men and Stigma: The Use of Religious Communities  
as Mechanisms for Stigma Management

Thesis Committee: (chair) Dr. Derrick Brooms, Dr. Ryan  
Schroeder, Dr. Siobhan Smith

*B.A., Sociology, Asbury University, 2015*

### ***Teaching***

Graduate Teaching Assistant – University of Louisville

Spring 2017: Race in the U.S. – Professor Andrea Koven

Fall 2016: Race in the U.S. – Dr. Derrick Brooms

### ***Presentations***

North Central Sociological Association 2017 (Presider) - From “*American Muslim Men and Stigma: The Use of Religious Communities as Mechanisms for the Stigma Management.*” - New Research and Innovation Round Table

University of Louisville Graduate Research Conference 2017: Engaging Scholarship - From “*American Muslim Men and Stigma: The Use of Religious Communities as Mechanisms for the Stigma Management.*”

### ***Professional Development***

- 2016 - 2017      Graduate Teaching Assistant Academy – University of Louisville
- Spring 2016      Community Engagement Academy – University of Louisville
- Fall 2015          Grant Writing Academy – University of Louisville

### ***Professional Memberships and Organizations***

- American Sociological Association Member, 2015, 2016, 2017
- North Central Sociological Association Member, 2017
- Sociology Graduate Student Council President, University of Louisville, 2017 – 2018
- Sociology Graduate Student Counsel Representative, University of Louisville, 2016 – 2017

### ***Honors***

- 2015    Highest Academic Achievement for a Senior Graduating in Sociology, Asbury University

### ***Grants***

- 2017    Graduate Student Congress Research Fund, University of Louisville
- 2016    Graduate Network in Arts and Sciences Research Fund, University of Louisville

### ***Other Work Experience***

- Customer Service Representative – Kentucky Farm Bureau Insurance – 2016, 2017
- Residence Life Coordinator – Bellarmine University – 2015
- Assistant Resident Director – Asbury University - 2014