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Brianne Goodman Carter
The Strength of Muslim
American Couples in the
Face of Heightened
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September 11th and The Iraq
War

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examined how Muslim American couples are psychologically and relationally impacted by heightened discrimination in the wake of September 11th and The Iraq War. Utilizing interviews with six Muslim American couples who have been married for at least six years (through September 11th and The Iraq War), the study identified that religious discrimination against Muslim Americans is experienced as pervasive and endemic—existing at multiple levels: attitudinal, interpersonal, structural, institutional, and systemic. The study found that in *response* to (rather than in spite of) religious discrimination, Muslim American couples exhibit increased resiliency and strength through the tenets of their faith (particularly, the primacy placed on marital union), their shared faith practice, and the resource of their religious communities.

The study concluded that the majority of couples do not view religious discrimination as having amplified due to September 11th and The Iraq War; instead, couples believed these events surfaced underlying, pre-existing anti-Muslim sentiment. As such, the study determined that, due to this surfacing, couples found a division within their relationship along gender lines—women who wear Islamic head-covering (*hijab*) are more visibly Muslim, thereby their experience of discrimination is ten-fold that of their male counterparts.

The results of this study have several implications for multicultural counseling and social work practice with Muslim Americans. This study informs social work practitioners of how to recognize and foster the strengths, coping mechanisms and faith integration of Muslim Americans as they respond to the negative affects of their present day sociopolitical environment.

THE STRENGTH OF MUSLIM AMERICAN COUPLES
IN THE FACE OF HEIGHTENED DISCRIMINATION FROM SEPTEMBER 11TH
AND THE IRAQ WAR

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2008

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary sociopolitical climate of elevated anti-Muslim rhetoric and attitude, Muslim Americans are, more than ever before, at extreme risk. In response, the social work field is obligated to have an understanding of the larger, historical, and prevailing forces of oppression against Muslims in America as well as the internal dimensions, strengths and struggles of the current Muslim American population. Therefore, this study is focused on Muslim American *couples* as a lens into how Muslim Americans are psychologically and relationally impacted by heightened discrimination in the wake of September 11th and The Iraq War. A major objective of this study is to gather and disseminate information about the particular strengths employed by Muslim American couples as they negotiate their relationship around the ill effects of endemic and escalating religious discrimination.

Contemporary research (Gushue, Greenan, & Brazaitis, 2005) on couples counseling has included a consideration of how interracial, multicultural or inter-religious dynamics in American society factor into the inner workings of a relationship. However, researchers had yet to look at how the sheer flood of inter-religious contempt and discrimination towards Muslims, resulting from September 11th and The Iraq War, deeply affects and challenges Muslim American couples. Subject to discrimination at all levels—attitudinal, interpersonal, structural, institutional, and systemic—Muslim

American couples are pressured to “act American,” prove loyalty and maintain a non-threatening, assimilated façade. Inevitably, these external pressures impact the internal psychological and relational workings of a relationship.

As such, this study was designed to assess the internal dynamics of coupleship as shaped by external sociopolitical and inter-religious dimensions. The focus is on Muslim Americans as they are subject to the unique interplay of having a long-established presence in America, maintaining a unified religious community as they increase exponentially in racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, and holding onto their spiritual, psychological and social resources as live they through an era of extreme anti-Muslim attitudes and rhetoric. In order to acknowledge the distinctive situation faced by Muslim American couples, the focus of this study is on those couples who have been married for at least six years (i.e., from September 11th through The Iraq War).

In fact, attention to the impact of religious oppression and discrimination towards Muslims in America is vital for broadening the concepts and practical experiences of multicultural counseling. Moreover, while much academic research has addressed racism in multicultural counseling, religious discrimination has been largely ignored. Due to the fact that the current trend of religious prejudice is particularly severe following September 11th and The Iraq War, it is hoped that the findings of this study contributes to filling the gap in the previous literature pertaining to religious discrimination and the Muslim American experience. This study informs social work practitioners of how to recognize and foster the strengths, coping mechanisms and faith integration of Muslim American couples as they respond to the negative affects of their present day sociopolitical environment.

Therefore, overall, the purpose of this study is to 1) assess how Muslim American couples are psychologically and relationally impacted by heightened discrimination in the wake of September 11th and The Iraq War, 2) gather information about the particular strengths employed by Muslim American couples, and 3) aid social workers in identifying the current mental health and service needs of the Muslim American population generally and of Muslim American couples specifically as they work through this formative time in America's sociopolitical and inter-religious history.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is an examination of contemporary research and writing surrounding the existence of religious discrimination in America and its impact on relationships, focusing specifically on prejudice towards Muslim Americans after September 11th and The Iraq War. Included in this review is available literature on couples work around issues of religious discrimination as well as areas in which relationships are supported and bolstered by a religious faith practice.

The first section of the literature review defines religious discrimination and covers how religious discrimination is a significant and understudied issue within the United States. The second section outlines the tenets of Islam and its heritage and evolution within the United States. Additionally, this section examines the existence of religious discrimination towards Muslim Americans prior to September 11th as well as the intensification of prejudice aimed at Muslim Americans since September 11th and The Iraq War. The final section presents the implications for social work practice, namely, the psychological and relational impact of religious discrimination on Muslim Americans, how therapists address issues of religious discrimination in working with Muslim Americans, and the dynamics of couples work specific to married Muslim American couples. Included in this final section is an examination of the scarce literature on issues of inter-religious competency facing therapists when working with Muslim American

couples as well as strengths-based approaches which consider how the psychological and relational benefits and strengths of Islam reinforce and support Muslim American couples.

Religious Discrimination

In order to trace the origins and development of religious discrimination towards Muslim Americans, this section defines religious discrimination and briefly outlines the history of religious discrimination in America. Paul Weller (2004) in the volume, *The Challenge of Religious Discrimination at the Dawn of the New Millennium*, provides a comprehensive overview of various manifestations of religious discrimination, and establishes a working definition of religious discrimination. Following Weller's definition, a number of contemporary researchers document the historical path and specific nature of religious discrimination in America and how religious discrimination exists today. The studies provide a comprehensive overview of religious discrimination, yet they neither recognize the correlating need for inter-religious competency in the social work field, or the particularly heightened forms of religious discrimination directed towards Muslim Americans in our present sociopolitical climate.

Definition and History of Religious Discrimination

Religious discrimination is defined as “those attitudes, actions, circumstances and dynamics in which, in relation to factors concerned with religion, an individual or group is treated less favorably than another individual or group either of a different religion, or of no religion” (Weller, 2004, p. 67). Paul Weller's (2004) article on “The Dimensions and Dynamics of Religious Discrimination” divides religious discrimination into the following analytic categories:

1) *religious prejudice*: the stereotyping of particular religious groups through attitudes that can wound individuals and form a basis for exclusion and unfair treatment, 2) *religious hatred*: religious prejudice that is intensified and developed in a settled attitude of mind, emotion and will, 3) *religious disadvantage*: a structural expression of unfair treatment on the basis of religion, 4) *direct religious discrimination*: deliberate exclusion of people from opportunities or services on the grounds related to their religious belief, identity or practice, 5) *indirect religious discrimination*: policies and practices of organizations which can result in patterns of exclusive recruitment policies, employment practice and service provision, and 6) *institutional religionism*: endemic and structurally embedded. (p. 67-75)

For the purposes of this study, the term “religious discrimination” encompasses all of the above forms of discrimination—attitudinal, interpersonal, structural, intentional, institutional, and endemic.

Religious discrimination in the United States has its origins in the European conquest and eradication of Native American traditions and belief systems. Although European immigrants sought out “America” for the purpose of expressing religious freedom, in both law and culture, American forbearers squelched many form of religious practice that deviated from the dominant Christian paradigm (Diouf, 1998; Negy, 2004; Dirks, 2006). While the Constitution and contemporary American law protects religious freedoms, religious discrimination continues to flourish. Various faith practices in America have each had their turn being the particular target of religious discrimination—namely, Catholicism during the mass migration of Irish following the famine, Judaism and Japanese faith practices (Buddhism, Shintoism and others) during World War II and, presently, Islam, following The Gulf War, September 11th and The Iraq War. While these religions have been specifically beleaguered due to their association with sociopolitical events, religious discrimination has always been an underlying and ever-present part of American history.

A conference organized by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (1979) shed light on the still-existent and pervasive nature of religious discrimination and determined that American religious discrimination is a highly neglected issue. However, the conference's speakers were solely comprised of male, Christian church leaders speaking on other traditions' behalf, which vastly neglected to account for the sheer diversity of voices within other religions in America. Nazila Ghanea (2004) in *The Challenge of Religious Discrimination at the Dawn of the New Millennium* described how, as American demographics experience exponential growth and incredible diversification and integration, the issue of religious discrimination has, consequently, followed suit. Despite evidence of increasing religious discrimination (Strum, & Tarantolo, 2003; Ghanea, 2004; Heft, 2006) as part and parcel of the growth in religious diversity in America, the United States Commission on Civil Rights has yet to specifically convene around this issue following the initial conference of 1979. This is despite the fact that even in the year 2007, seven of the fifty-one state advisory committees which bring community concerns to the Commission, listed "religious discrimination" as the states' top civil rights agenda.

John Esposito (2000) argued that the growing tension between the diversity in religious practices and the demands of current realities is quickly gaining a place in American politics and culture (p. 4). This tension is exacerbated by the fact that American society is predominantly informed by Judeo-Christian values. Esposito elucidated this underlying dominance of the Christian paradigm in the United States, stating that religious minorities "are confused and challenged by an America in which, despite separation of church and state, Christian values are assumed to be integral to

American identity and values” (Esposito, 2000, p. 4). Omar Khalidi (2004) described how “[a] society modeled only after Judeo-Christian values (assuming there is only one interpretation) will consign the contemporary and future populations segments with distinct values and faiths to the periphery” (p. 64). Psychologists, Charles Negy and Christopher Ferguson (2004), predicted that “just as changing racial demographics in this country have created opportunities for more critical and revolutionary voices to stand up against racial oppression, changing religious demographics likely will increase open resistance to Christian indoctrination” (p. 62). However, open resistance has yet to come about. And, for those whose faith practice is not within a Judeo-Christian paradigm, then assimilation, integration and the preservation and practice of their religious faith is part of an exhaustive daily struggle. For Muslim Americans in the current sociopolitical climate of post-September 11th and The Iraq War, this struggle is particularly onerous.

Reciprocally, social scientists and scholars of Islam (Haddad, 2002; Bukhari, Nyang, Ahmad and Esposito, 2004), have proposed that with no other religion as Islam has the United States had to examine and balance its foundation in Christianity and its principle of religious tolerance.

Islam in America

To depict the development and impact of Islam in America, this section offers a basic definition and description of the tenets and rituals of Islam and documents the history of the Muslim American presence in America. The literature presented challenges the common conception that the existence of Islam in America is relevantly recent. The scholars of Islamic studies cited below, carefully construct the passages of Muslim migration into the United States as well as the many discriminatory acts and legislature

which often prevented Muslims from entering the country. In essence, this section illustrates that Muslims have long been a part of American history despite governmental provisions and discriminatory policies, and through their long-established presence, have made significant contributions and greatly impacted the course of American history.

Definition of Islam

Forms of Islam in America are highly diversified, incorporating beliefs and practices from a multitude of immigrant groups including those from the Middle East, Latin America, South Asia, China, and Russia. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, a basic depiction of Islam will be used in order to cover the fundamental intersection between these varying forms of Muslim American faith practice. Taken from *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* (Eck, 2007), the following is a brief description of the tradition of Islam:

Islam is an Arabic word which literally means "submitting:" Islam is fundamentally an action, a way of living one's life before God... [H]uman beings are said to have been given a choice: each individual is personally responsible for choosing to follow or to reject God's will, as revealed in the Qur'an. There is no need for priest or mediator between God and humanity, but each person must decide for himself or herself to walk according to God's will... Islam begins with God the Creator, who has sent prophets and revelations to many peoples throughout history, so that they may know the way to live. According to Muslims, God's final prophet and messenger was Muhammad, and God's final word the Qur'an. (¶ 1)

These core principles inform many aspects of how Muslim Americans live, interact and make meaning. Carl Ernst (2003) in *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, explained his reasoning, as a prominent scholar in Islamic studies, for utilizing a simple, baseline definition of Islam:

I try to avoid referring to Islam as a changeless monolithic religion that somehow homogenizes hundreds of millions of people from different times and places. I use

‘Islam’ to refer to an orientation in which the primary scriptural focus is the Qur'an and the leading personal model is the Prophet Muhammad, without insisting on any particular authoritative structure beyond this simple formulation. (p. 64)

This formulation honors the basic historical and theological underpinnings of Islam without overriding the diversity of practices, beliefs and cultural variations therein.

Islam, as a “way of living one’s life before God,” is structured according to the performance of five basic acts. Thus, the core principles of Islam have a core structure known as “the five pillars”: the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) performed once in a lifetime, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (*siyam*) performed once a year, alms-giving (*zakat*) performed once a month, prayer (*salat*) performed five times a day, and the profession of faith (*shahadah*) performed at every breath. For Muslims, the five pillars of Islam organize temporal human life according to God’s will. A human life is mapped out from every breath (the *shahadah*) through a single lifetime (the *hajj*). These five acts of “submission” are the external steps that lead to internal structure of faith (*iman*), “which Muhammad explained in terms of having faith in God, the prophets, the angels, the holy books, the Day of Judgment, and God’s foreknowledge or predestination” and spiritual virtue (*ihsan*), “meaning that you pray as though you see God face-to-face, for even though you do not see God, you must know that God sees you” (Ernst, 2003, p. 64). In essence, the core structure of Islam—the five pillars—lead to and reinforce the formation of faith and spiritual virtue which, in effect, are the heart of the principles of Islam—the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad.

It is important to note that the majority of these five acts of faith are embedded in community practice; they are not performed in isolation. In fact, in Muhammad’s time,

and as it stands today, calling oneself a Muslim “always had a corporate and social significance, indicating membership in a religious community” (Ernst, 2003, p. 10). As commanded by Muhammad, Muslims’ first duty was to build a community (*ummah*) characterized by practical compassion—“the aim was *tawhid* (making one), the integration of the whole of life in a unified community, which would give Muslims intimations of the Unity which is God” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 6, 15). Muhammad strove to create a unified Muslim community against traditional seventh century A.D. tribal warfare, blood feuds, kinship solidarity and retaliation. The Muslim community fervently developed in dedicated fellowship with Muhammad’s example of ethical guidance and legal precedents (Rahman, 1989, p. 42). As it was then, Muhammad was the exemplar, “a beautiful model” Qur'an (33:21), and the ideal of how life should be lived in the world (Ernst, 2003, p. 14-15). There is a striking parallel in the United States in which the Muslim American community faces a barrage of dividing factors—differences in cultural practice, burgeoning women’s rights, targeted discrimination, biased foreign and domestic policy, and forced assimilation—in which they must continue to mirror the deeds and actions of Muhammad and to envision and build Muhammad’s unified *ummah*.

History of Islam in America

Islam has been a part of American life since the early arrival of African slaves (Diouf, 1998; Muhammad, 1998; Dirks, 2006). Some researchers have argued that “Spanish-Muslim” explorers of Arab and Berber descent pre-date the Columbian era, however, there is very little archeological evidence aside from language cross-over in Native American dialect and several Turkish (Othmanic) maps from 1513 revealing key geographic features and utilizing spherical, longitudinal lines (Dirks, 2006, p. 16-46). On

the other hand, there is substantial evidence for the inclusion of Muslims in the African slave trade. It is estimated that between 15 and 30 percent of Africans brought to North America between 1731 and 1867 were Muslims (Diouf, 1998; Muhammad, 1998). This calculation was estimated based upon the following considerations:

30 percent of all slaves imported into South Carolina between 1733 and 1807 were from Muslim-dominated West Africa; 58 percent of the slaves brought to Virginia between 1710 and 1769 were from West Africa; 67 percent of the slaves imported into Louisiana by the French were from Senegambia in West Africa; and just over 46 percent of all slaves brought to North America appear to have originated in areas of West Africa with a significant Muslim presence... It appears safe to conclude that 20-30 percent of all African slaves imported to the New World were Muslims [this includes South America, Cuba, Mexico and the Caribbean]. Given an estimate of 15-20 million African slaves brought to the Americas, this suggests that somewhere between three and six million African Muslims were enslaved in the Americas. (Dirks, 2006, p. 87)

Acknowledging such a startlingly vast presence of Islam in early American history confronts the prevalent myth that Islam in American history is a relatively recent phenomenon. In addition to geographical considerations, scholars have catalogued Arabic documents written by African slaves in America (Diouf, 1998; Muhammad, 1998; Ernst, 2003; Dirks, 2006). For example, Omar ibn Sayyid (1772-1864), a West African Muslim scholar sold into slavery in 1807, wrote his Arabic autobiography on a North Carolina plantation (Ernst, 2003, p. 19). In fact, "it has been estimated that the percentage of literacy in Arabic among African slaves in America was actually higher than the percentage of literacy in English among their owners" (Dirks, 2006, p. 89). It is unclear how many Muslim slaves were able to retain their religious practice and their Arabic language amidst forced conversion to Christianity. Interestingly, Asama Gull Hasan (2002) has postulated that the rapid growth of Islam in African-American communities may very well be *a return to* the Islamic practice of their ancestors.

While America's initial encounters with Islam took place in largely colonial contexts during the slave trade, Jerald Dirks (2006) documented several overlooked Muslim explorers, businessmen and artisans who came to America of their own volition. In addition, researcher, A.N.A. Muhammad (1998), in *Muslims in America: Seven centuries of history (1312-1998): Collections and Stories of American Muslims* meticulously traced the passage of Muslims in the United States and detailed major historical events that identified the birth and development of the Muslim community (p. vii). Otherwise, the vast majority of writings on America's initial encounters with Islam overrides early colonial contexts and focuses exclusively on the 20th century during which successive waves of mainly South Asian Muslims came to the United States.

In contrast, the five-wave immigration model of Jerald Dirks (2006) begins with the slave trade and then follows immigration patterns as they are punctuated by a series of judicial and executive legislation. After the first wave—the antebellum period—the second wave followed the end of the American Civil War and the start of World War I during which “Muslim immigrants to the United States were primarily comprised of Arabs from the Othmanic Empire who settled along the eastern seaboard and in scattered locations in interior states east of the Mississippi River” (Dirks, 2006, p. 310). This group of Muslims hailed from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, the Indian subcontinent, and southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Greece and the Ukraine) (Dirks, 2006, p. 311). Dirks listed the various settlement areas of these early immigrants:

Polish/Ukrainian immigrants, about 3,000, settled in New York and successfully created the Muhammadan Society of America in Brooklyn, New York, established a mosque in Brooklyn in 1928... Albanian Muslims established a mosque in Biddeford, Maine in 1915 and a second mosque in Connecticut in 1919. Other immigrant Muslim groups established mosques in Ross, North

Dakota, in 1912, in Highland Park, Michigan in 1912, in Bridgeford, Maine in 1915, in Waterbury, Maine in 1919, in Michigan City, Indiana in 1924, in Dearborn, Michigan in 1924, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1925, in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1930, in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1932 and in Sacramento, California in 1941. (Dirks, 2006, p. 311)

For the purposes of this study, it is essential to outline the passage of Muslim settlements in the United States as it, again, further dispels the myth that the presence of Islam in America is a recent occurrence. The series of mosques listed above bears witness to the span of settlements throughout the United States and, therefore, the impact and influence Islam had on the early development of the country's ethos and way of life.

The third wave, from the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II, was shaped by a number of government acts and provisions. The nation flip-flopped between the National Origins Quota Act of 1921 (limiting yearly immigration from other countries to 3% of the total number of people of that nationality already living in the United States) to the 1924 Immigration Exclusion Act (aka the Oriental Exclusion Act and the Johnson-Reed Act completely prohibiting immigration of anyone who was not eligible to be a naturalized citizen, i.e., anyone who was not a Caucasian) and, lastly to the 1929 Immigration Act (reinstating the quotas at 3%) (Dirks, 2006, p. 312-313). During the third wave, the 1923 case of the United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind had a significant impact on the Muslim community. The Supreme Court determined that "if the Caucasian immigrant's skin color was a shade too dark, citizenship could still be denied....even though the plaintiff was a Caucasian according to expert and scientific testimony, he was not Caucasian according to the perception of the typical Caucasian man in the street" (Dirks, 2006, p. 314). Thus, Muslims from the Indian continent were

denied immigration and “those who had previously been naturalized as U.S. citizens had their citizenship automatically revoked” (Dirks, 2006, p. 314). Those who were able to settle into the United States were poor, Muslim immigrants from Yemen many of whom worked for the Ford Motor Company or in heavy industry, establishing communities in Dearborn, Michigan, Buffalo, New York, and Brooklyn, New York (Dirks, 2006, p. 313).

The fourth wave marks a time in which Muslim immigrants were able to come to the United States in great numbers for the first time. This wave occurred during the close of World War II until the early 1960’s in which the Chinese Exclusion Repeat Act of 1943 repealed the provisions of the 1924 Immigration Exclusion Act, allowing Muslims from the Indian subcontinent once again to immigrate to the United States (Dirks, 2006, p. 316). And, “five years later, the Luce-Cellar Bill of 1946 opened the door for immigrants from the Indian subcontinent to become naturalized citizens of the United States so that Muslim immigrants from what are now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh began to arrive in America in large numbers for the first time” (Dirks, 2006, p. 315). These immigrants established the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and “were instrumental in forming the Islamic Society of North American (ISNA) as an umbrella organization over a variety of local and regional Muslim groups and organizations in the United States and Canada” (Dirks, 2006, p. 316). At the same time, “as a result of the first Arab-Israeli war and the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, thousands upon thousands of Palestinian Muslims were displaced from their ancestral homes” (Dirks, 2006, p. 316). Jerald Dirks (2006) noted that “by and large, these Palestinian Muslims comprised a professional and highly educated class of immigrants” (p. 316). By the end of the fourth wave “Muslims from sub-Saharan Africa began to immigrate to America

prompted by the African journey of Malcolm X” (Dirks, 2006, p. 316). The emergence of Islam in the African-American community is further detailed below.

The fifth wave is characterized by further foreign political turmoil which drove many Muslim immigrants to the United States as refugees, and by the entry of foreign students in American universities. The fifth wave “began in the wake of 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished national quotas system of immigration” and “was further advanced by the 1978 Immigration Act, which abolished the hemisphere quota system and allowed for a total of 290,000 immigrants each year” (Dirks, 2006, p. 316-317). The geopolitical events of the time include the 1967 Israeli military occupation of the West Bank which further displaced thousands of Palestinian Muslims, the 1979 Iranian revolution, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In addition, the 1965 Immigration Act spawned migration by those seeking economic advancement, namely Muslim immigrants from Syria, Egypt and Palestine and “the first substantial immigration of Muslims from West Africa since the days of slavery,” Muslims from Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal (Dirks, 2006, p. 317-318). Lastly, a government lobby brought hundreds of foreign graduate students into the American university system. Due to the influx of Muslim immigrants from all areas of the world, the late twentieth-century saw the beginning of a real change within the Muslim American community—the transition from ethnic enclaves to a growing and unifying Muslim diaspora, the formation of Muslim social, civic and academic organizations and the increasing presence of an African-American Muslim voice.

By the end of the fifth wave to the present, the Muslim community had established approximately 1,200 mosques, 300 ethnic associations, 200 student groups,

200 Islamic schools, 100 community media outlets, and 50 social service and world relief organizations (Nimer, 2004, p. 145). Major Islamic organizations include the aforementioned umbrella organizations: the Islamic Community of North America (ICNA), and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). The Federation of Islam Association (FIAA) was founded as a basically educational institution, fostering “spiritual, cultural and social development among Muslims, children in particular, and promoting a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in American society” (Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2006, p. 47). As a result of the inclusion of foreign students in the American university system, Muslim students, both foreign and indigenous, banded together and formed the Muslim Student Association (MSA) in which “for the first time in his or her life a given Muslim student came in close contact with Muslims of other countries—an opportunity he or she could hardly afford before coming to the United States” (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 48). Spread all over the country, these Muslim student organizations often convened to discuss issues within the developing Muslim American community. In addition, the MSA established a *waqf* or a trust (North American Islamic Trust or NAIT) to look after its assets and those of local Muslim communities, created a publishing house and book service, and developed a sister organization at a professional level—Muslim Scientists and Engineers (AMSE), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) and the Islamic Medical Association (IMA) (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 51). The twentieth century and growing discrimination against Muslims also gave birth to three civil rights watch groups: the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American Muslim Council (AMC) and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC). In his research on Muslim civil rights abuses, Mohammad Nimer (2004) described how CAIR, AMC and

MPAC “joined the coalition led by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) opposing the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act” in order to defend Muslim Americans subject to the provisions allowing the government to detain individuals based on classified information (p. 153). These organizations provided a bulwark against the increasing onslaught of discrimination against Islam in America.

The emergence of an African-American Muslim community within the United States has a deeply significant, yet often disregarded impact on the perception and development of Islam in America. The movement noticeably began in Detroit, Michigan around the 1930’s with the Nation of Islam. As explained by Sherman Jackson (2003):

The founders of the Nation of Islam, the early Blackamerican ‘Islamizers,’ Noble Drew Ali and The Honorable Elijah Mohammad, enlisted Islam not only as a strictly religious expression but as a basis for an alternative modality of American blackness. Blackamericans at large came to see in this religion not only a path to spiritual salvation but a path to a more authentic Blackamerican self. (p. 23)

A key figure in this movement, Malcolm X, was purportedly drawn to the Nation of Islam by its “vision of Islam as a universal brotherhood that crossed all racial and ethnic lines,” however, eventually his exposure to the teachings of the Qur'an moved him into a more orthodox Islam and he formed his own Islamic organization (the Muslim Mosque, Inc.) with headquarters in Harlem” (Dirks, 2006, p. 341). Another prominent figure, Warith Deen Mohammed, became the Supreme Minister of the Nation of Islam in 1975 and, according to Jerald Dirks (2006), “immediately began a process of change that would result in the largest conversion of people to Islam in the history of America” (p. 345). Like Malcolm X, Mohammed eventually “rejected the racial mythology and highly corrupted theology” of the Nation of Islam, he changed the organization’s name to the World Community of Al-Islam in the West, altered the title of supreme minister to the

more traditional Islamic title of Imam, and led his followers into the folds of orthodox Islam (Dirks, 2006, p. 345). Prior to Warith Deen Mohammed's shift in the Nation of Islam, Muhammad Ali, became the most famous and easily recognized Muslim and member of the Nation of Islam in the United States. In 1967, "during the height of the Vietnam War, Ali refused induction into the United States Army and claimed a religious exemption from the draft as a minister of the Nation of Islam" (Dirks, 2006, p. 349). States revoked his license to box, stripped him of his of heavyweight championship, and convicted and sentenced him to five years in prison. However, in 1996, "he was chosen to light the Olympic flame in Atlanta, Georgia. *Sports Illustrated* named him 'Sportsman of the Century' and the United Nations named him one of their nine 'Messengers of Peace' (Dirks, 2006, p. 352). The African-American Muslim community developed from the Nation of Islam, and the principles of racial pride, inner divinity, and orthodox adherence to the faith still resonate within the burgeoning community and have just begun to be incorporated into immigrant forms of Islam.

Muslim American Demographics

Islam is currently the fastest growing religion in the United States (Esposito, 2000; Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2006; Smith, 2007). John Esposito (2000) in *Muslims on the Americanization path?* reported that "even if Muslim immigration and the rate of conversion were not to grow, birth rate alone ensures that in the first part of the twenty-first century, Islam will replace Judaism as the second largest religion in the United States" (p. 3). Social scientists, Illya Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone (2006) estimated a growth rate of 3% per year, a rate in which "the population will double itself in less than twenty-five years so that after 2020, the American Muslim population would be

substantially in excess of 11.5 million or more than 3 percent of the projected national population about that time” (p. 41). However, Omar Khalidi (2004) pointed out that, in terms of predicting population growth, “next to nothing is available in the literature about the extent of perpetuation of Islam in second-generation Muslims”—there is no attention to the number of ‘lapsed’ Muslims, the rate of conversion to the another religion, or how many self-identified Muslims are not incorporated into the population count because they do not attend a local Islamic institution (p. 65). These are significant barriers to obtaining an accurate population count as well as predicting population growth. In fact, calculating the Muslim American population is further challenged by the following reasons: 1) The U.S. Bureau of Census does not inventory religious affiliation, and 2) In response to antiterrorism legislation, forced registration with the INS, and The Patriot Act of 2001, individuals in the Islamic community are disinclined to offer their name and details of their membership to the American public.

Nonetheless, a number of demographic studies have attempted to estimate the Muslim American population. According to the *World Almanac* (2004) there were between 5-6 million Muslim Americans, showing an increase from *The North American Muslim Resource Guide* (Nimer, 2002) estimate of 2,560,000 to 4,390,000 million. These numbers are based on sample surveys. In contrast, a more accurate estimation stems from the findings of the Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) research project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, and based for three years at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the School of Foreign Service of Georgetown University. Project MAPS procured two social scientists, Illya Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone (2004), to obtain an estimate of the Muslim American population by following the survey

technique of the U.S. Bureau of Census in attaining 100 percent coverage. The researchers took sixteen different listings of Islamic institutions of worship¹ maintained by hundreds of local, metropolitan, regional, and national Muslim organizations and using 1,315 informants to verify these listings (Esposito, 2004, p. xxxvii). Data collected in their study showed that about 5,745,100 Muslim men and women of all ages live in the United States (Esposito, 2004, p. xxxvii). Their research further showed that of this 5.7 million only 3,953,651 or about 69 percent were born as naturalized citizens; of the rest, a total of 1,321,011 or 23 percent were legal immigrants; and, of the rest, there were foreign students as well as those on professional and business visas (Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2004, p. 314).

Zahid H. Bukhari (2003) compared the results of Project MAPS with a national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (February-March 2002) in order to analyze divisions of race and ethnicity in Muslim American demography. Bukhari (2003) determined that roughly 6 million or 68 percent of Muslim Americans are born outside the United States in over 80 countries. Bukhari averaged the numbers derived from the two survey-studies and determined that the largest segment of the population (over 30 percent of total) are South Asians, and the next largest (17 percent) are African-Americans (Bukhari, 2003, p. 9). However, when the data collected in Project MAPS stands alone, the largest single group (close to 32

¹ Islamic institutions of worship included: neighborhood mosques (*masjid*), facilities (*musallahs*) established for the express purpose of a place for prayer (*salat*), full time Islamic schools, and Muslim Student Associations (MSA). A total number of 1, 751 Islamic institutions Islamic institutions were located and covered by Project MAPS (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 37).

percent) consists of people of Arab origin which translates to 1.8 million Arab American Muslims. Carl Ernst (2003) counters this estimation by pointing out that “the vast majority of Arab Americans (about 90 percent) are Christians” (Ernst, 2003, p. 61). Overall, the majority of Islamic studies scholars and researchers concurred with the percentages proposed by Ba-Yunus and Kone (2004) in that the largest group of Muslims in America (32 percent) is of Arab origin, followed by African Americans (29 percent). A close third are Muslims of South Asian origin (28.9 percent)—Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Ceylon, Afghanistan and Maldives, followed by smaller ethnic groups (5 percent)—Turks, Iranians, Bosnians, Kosovars, Malays, and Indonesians (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 38). However the percentages break down, it is irrefutable that no other country in the world has such a rich diversity of Muslims living together in one place.

The Muslim American population, however, is not as multivariate in other categories, such as sectarian differences, household size and structure, educational background, political affiliation, and community activism. Carl Ernst (2003) determined “that from 10-15 percent of Muslims are Shi’is (Shi’ites), while the remaining majority are loosely classified as Sunni” (Ernst, 2003, p. 59). This division mirrors sectarian divides in the majority of Muslim-led countries, with the exception of Iran. As a whole, the data collected by Ba-Yunus and Kone (2006) indicated that “the Muslim American population is younger, more educated and well-off financially than the general public of the United States” (Strum, 2003, p. 1). Bukhari (2003), in averaging the data in Project MAPS with a national survey in 2002, determined that the percentage of Muslim college graduates is more than double the national percentage (58 percent versus 25 percent) (p. 10). In addition, half of Muslim Americans (50 percent) have an annual family income of

more than \$50,000 and 44 percent describe their occupation as professional/technical, medical or managerial” (Bukhari, 2003, p. 10). More specifically, Ba-Yunus and Kone (2006) recorded that 86 percent (54 percent of the men, 46 percent of the women) concentrated in the professions: engineering and electronics, computer science and data processing, and medical doctors and various related professions and 7 percent concentrated in business and finance (p. 41). Looking at the numbers, Ba-Yunus and Kone’s statement rings true—taken together, Muslim Americans have a higher income-level and a higher level of education than the overall American public.

In terms of age range, the vast majority, three-fourths (74 percent) of adult Muslim Americans are less than 50 years old (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 41). Being generally comprised of young members, the Islamic community is remarkably active—

Over three-quarters (77 percent) reported that they had been involved with organizations to help the poor, sick, homeless, or elderly. Seventy-one percent had been involved with a religious organization or a mosque, and over two-thirds (69 percent) had been involved with school or youth programs. A little over half (51 percent) stated that they had called or written to the media or to a politician on a given issue or had signed a petition. (Bukhari, 2003, p. 10)

Neither liberal nor conservative, Muslims “tend to favor government programs in the areas of health, poverty and the environment but are largely conservative on social issues” (Strum, 2003, p. 2). Interestingly, “more American Muslims consider religion to be very important in their daily lives than do members of the general American public (70 percent versus 63 percent). Similarly, more American Muslims (55 percent) attend religious services (go to the mosque for prayers) than do members of the general public (40 percent)” (Bukhari, 2003, p. 12). Taking this data into account, it is clear that the Muslim American population not only deeply values the practice of Islam in their daily

lives, but also extends that practice to the American public through the Islamic value of social service. The reportedly high levels of activism, commitment to social services, and participation in community life inside and outside of Muslim communities speaks to the growing contributions of Muslim Americans and the desire to gain a voice in American politics and society.

Religious Discrimination towards Muslim Americans

Ample evidence supports the historical and present-day existence of religious discrimination towards Muslim Americans. The following researchers map out the origins and development of religious discrimination towards Muslims as well as contemporary foreign political events, domestic and foreign policies, and the nature of media coverage which continue to fuel such discrimination. This includes an extensive discussion on the effect of September 11th, 2001 in contributing to startlingly high levels of religious discrimination, as they still exist today. Most importantly, the final section documents how Muslim Americans are psychologically and relationally impacted by both racial and religious prejudice. This section demonstrates how much of the Muslim American population has adapted to religious discrimination by banding together and forming stronger relational bonds around Islam in order protect their identities as Muslims as well as the psychological strengths afforded them through the practice of Islam.

History of Religious Discrimination Towards Muslims

Overt anti-Muslim attitudes in the United States have their origins in the systematic, forced conversion of Muslims to Christianity during the antebellum period. As a result, thousands, possibly millions of African Americans lost their connection with

their Islamic heritage. Over the following two centuries, the United States has had to constantly renegotiate its relationship with an increasing array of religions and spiritual practices and yet, its dealings with Islam have remained particularly contentious. As described by Edward Said (2002) in *Covering Islam*, “Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West” (Hasan, 2002, p. 103). Islamic studies scholar, Yvonne Haddad (2000), observed that “what seems to be an anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Islam wave sweeping across the United States accelerated beginning in 1980... since then American leaders have increasingly described Muslims as outside the ‘national character’ or the ‘shared American culture’ with the insinuation that their values are not mainstream” (Haddad, 2000, p. 25). Scholars (Haddad et. al., 2000; Ernst, 2003; Sheridan, 2006), have compared the current trend of anti-Islamicism to anti-semitism, stating that *Islamophobia*² has succeeded anti-Semitism as a form of acceptable racial and religious prejudice. Carl Ernst (2003) pointed out that, as compared to the world population of Jews (frequently estimated at about 17 million people), the world population of Muslims is well over 1 billion and, as such, “it would be ridiculous to assume that such a large number of people would all have the characteristics assumed by stereotypes” (Ernst, 2003, p. 12). Nonetheless, the use of stereotypes and intolerance of Islam is seen as a *justifiable*, acceptable form of religious discrimination.

² The term *Islamophobia* has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary since 1997, and is defined as a dread or hatred of Islam and fear or dislike of Muslims (Runnymede Trust, 1997 cited in Sheridan, 2006).

This marginalization of the Muslim population, even prior to September 11th, is often attributed to the images of Islam perpetuated by the media and as a result of political events abroad as well as U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Brigitte Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna (2007) in *Fueling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans* conducted “a systematic content analysis of many hundreds of print and television news items related to Muslims in the New York metropolitan area, in the United States, and abroad during the months before and after 9/11” (p. xi). The quantitative and qualitative examination of written and spoken words resulted in the finding that “by framing the news along the lines of traditional attitudes and prejudices of society’s predominant groups, the news media convey stereotypes that affect a broad range of public perceptions, among them how people think about race, ethnicity and religion” (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, “the constant demonization of Islam as a violence-prone religion and the ceaseless stereotyping of Muslims virtually as a bunch of blood-thirsty terrorists have developed in some Americans an almost irrational hatred and contempt for Islam and Muslims” (Ansari, 2004, p. 262). Greg Noakes (2000), in “Muslims and the American Press” analyzed the quality of media coverage and the reasons for the tendency to misunderstand and distort the nature and function of Islam. Noakes maintained that “the media’s propensity for the ‘sensational,’ the explosive headline events, acts of violence and religious extremism capture the headlines at the expense of the faith and practice of the vast majority of Muslims” (Esposito, 2000, p. 12). Standard media fare includes “coverage of political upheavals, acts of violence carried out by extremist groups claiming to act in the name of Islam, perceived threats to American national interests, poor treatment of women, and

outrageous human-rights abuses” (Noakes, 2000, p. 286). Neither Noakes or Nacos and Torres-Reyna, in their analysis of the news media, documented how the consequential rise in religious discrimination impacts the psyche or relationships within the Muslim American community.

Mass-mediated depictions of Muslims as violent were compounded by political upheaval. Nacos and Torres-Reyna described how “a long series of spectacular anti-American acts of terror that extended from the long-lasting Iranian hostage crisis (1979-81) to the suicide attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000” solidified the image of Muslims as prone to irrational acts of terror and destruction (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 6). Zafar Ishaq Ansari (2004) listed a further series of United States military protocol and global events which spawned outrage in both the Muslim diaspora in America and around the world.

The Western military intervention in the Persian Gulf and the Western posture on a host of problems, from the Rushdie affair to the Bosnian tragedy to the brutality of Chechnya, let alone the unreserved support of Israel, “right or wrong,” have been perceived by a large number of American Muslims as indicators of deep rooted Western feelings of antagonism toward Islam and Muslims. (Ansari, 2004, p. 262)

Often, the Muslim community’s voice of outrage had to be squelched in service of having their loyalty to America preserved. In fact, Greg Noakes (2000) argued that “Muslims are seldom allowed to speak for themselves on issues that concern them” despite a number of articulate thinkers and analysts in both the Muslim world and the American-Muslim community (p. 290). The tragedy of religious discrimination against Muslims is that it strips them of their voice in which they might use to defend themselves and speak their

mind. Consequently, the absence of their voice is filled with images, scenes and stereotypes which fuels further discrimination against them.

Heightened Religious Discrimination from 9/11 and The Iraq War

September 11th and The Iraq War vastly heightened religious prejudice and discrimination towards Muslim Americans. In a study of *Islamophobia* pre- and post-September 11th, Lorraine Sheridan (2006) investigated self-reported racial and religious discrimination in a sample of 222 British Muslims. According to Sheridan, “respondents indicated that following September 11th, 2001, levels of implicit or indirect discrimination rose by 82.6 percent and experiences of overt discrimination by 76.3 percent” (Sheridan, 2006, p. 317). Results from Sheridan’s study suggested that *religious affiliation*, namely Muslim religious identity, was a more meaningful predictor of prejudice than race or ethnicity. Although there is no directly comparable study conducted in the United States, American researchers (Bukhari, 2003; Nimer, 2004; Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007) depicted even drastically higher numbers of increased hate crime and evidence of bias in all levels of society. Purportedly, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were followed by the worst wave of anti-Muslim violence in the United States (Nimer, 2004, p. 147). In November of 2001, CAIR documented more than 1,700 complaints of harassment and hate crimes, including two dozen murders, in the two months after the attacks. Gross violence against Muslim Americans was accompanied by a number of legislatively supported violations of civil rights.

Therefore, after September 11th, the major issue within the Muslim American community shifted from responding to political events involving Islamic leadership abroad to civil rights abuses by American leadership at home (Saeed, 2003, p. 43).

Immediately following September 11th, President Bush, during a visit to the Islamic Center in Washington DC, denounced violence against Muslim and Arab Americans, saying, “Those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don’t represent the best of America, they represent the worst of humankind, and they should be ashamed of that kind of behavior” (Lewin & Neibuhr, 2001, as cited in Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). Indeed, the United States was trying to avoid its past mistake of interning Japanese Americans in World War II, a measure that was taken because when “Americans are faced with grave national crises, racial and ethnic prejudices tend to sweep away support for the constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties of whole groups whose loyalties are questioned” (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 19). The Muslim community and organizations such as CAIR responded to the upsurge in violence by encouraging “Muslim communities to hold open houses in mosques and Islamic centers, so as to bring people of other faiths into their neighborhoods” (Moore, 2003, p. 71). In fact, opinion surveys immediately following September 11th revealed that due to mass-mediated discourse for protecting civil liberties and rights and the widely dispensed information about Islam, more Americans significantly favored Islam (Nacos et. al., 2007).

However, the media and the American government provided no answers as to why September 11th may have occurred nor had they captured the perpetrator ultimately responsible, Osama bin Laden. The consequence of unanswered questions “was a picture that was painted in black and white, with one side considering itself as the embodiment of pure goodness and viewing the other side as pure evil... because the other side, the one which was considered to be pure evil, was misusing Islam for its own ends, the religion

was opened to attack” (Nasr, 2003, p. 149). Moreover, as these questions remained unanswered—of “why was the United States a target” and “would the country be attacked again”—the media played upon inculcated fears of Islam and promoted suspicion of Muslims in America. In the media analysis of Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007) it was determined that “unsympathetic or negative depictions of Arabs and Muslims in the United States, who were often alleged to be terrorists, supporters of terrorists, or simply critical of governmental reactions to the attacks of 9/11 outnumbered images of those who mourned the victims of 9/11, helped in the recovery efforts, or were shown as victims of hate crimes or unjust counterterrorist measures” (p. 49). Visuals of Muslims as killers and would-be killers of innocents and of Islam as a religion of fanatics fueled negative public opinion toward Islam and garnered support of the Bush administration to override Muslim civil rights and begin a systematic surveillance of the Muslim American community.

Therefore, despite initial efforts not to repeat errors in the past, the United States government enacted a series of antiterrorism laws which stripped Muslim Americans of civil rights. Nimer (2004) detailed how “hundreds of Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrants were detained and deported on charges of visa violations after the 9/11 attacks... [m]any others, including some American citizens, were questioned in connection with the investigation, also under a shroud of secrecy” (Nimer, 2004, p. 151). The Bush administration received considerable criticism for the Patriot Act of 2001. Local and state level response to the measures of the Patriot Act, gathered by Nimer (2004), indicated that the majority of the country believed that the Act erodes civil rights. The Patriot Act gave the executive branch the power to:

detain immigrant suspects for lengthy periods of time, sometimes indefinitely... circumvent the Fourth Amendment's requirement of probable cause when conducting wiretaps and searches... [search] persons and organizations who are not suspected of any wrongdoing... [seize] personal or business records for an investigation without prior evidence of connection to terrorism or criminal activity. (Nimer, 2004, p. 152)

While local and state groups agreed that the act compromised Muslim American civil liberties, the American public opinion, on the whole, remained staunchly supportive. A National Public Radio/Henry Kaiser Foundation, Harvard University Kennedy School of Government survey conducted in August 7-11, 2002 asked whether an Arab or Muslim of foreign nationality should be granted the same legal rights as U.S. citizens when arrested as a suspected terrorist. One in five respondents (a solid majority) thought that such a person should have fewer rights. Even three years after September 11th, a comprehensive national omnibus survey through the Media and Research Group at Cornell University revealed that "a sizable minority of Americans favored restricting the civil liberties of all Muslim Americans"³ (Nisbet & Shanahan, 2004, p. 1).

The restriction of civil liberties is the product of deeply engrained bias against and fear of Islam. While Muslim "organizations and individuals are suing individuals, organizations, and government agencies for discrimination, unlawful arrest, unlawful seizure of property, invasion of privacy, and harassments," the public space has become

³ Between 22 to 29 percent responded positively to the questions posed by the survey: 1) Should Muslim Americans be required to register their whereabouts with the federal government? 2) Should mosques be closely monitored and surveyed by the U.S. enforcement agencies? 3) Should law enforcement agencies profile citizens as potential threats based on being Muslim or having Middle Eastern heritage? 4) Should Muslim civic and volunteer organizations be infiltrated by undercover law enforcement agents to keep watch on their activities and fundraising? (Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 62-63).

hostile, unwelcoming and dangerous (McCloud, 2004, p. 79). In other words, taking legal action to fight violations of civil rights has little impact on the pervasive, underlying anti-Muslim attitudes in America. In a survey conducted by Opinion Dynamics for Fox News on June 18-19, 2002, the question, “Overall, do you think Americans are more likely to feel sympathy for Muslims, or are Americans more likely to be fearful of Muslims?” received a response that nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the public thought that Americans were more fearful of Muslims (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007, p. 56). In March 20, 2002, a Pew Research Center study entitled, “American Struggle with Religion’s Role at Home and Abroad,” determined that one in five non-Muslim Americans think that at least half of the Muslims living in the United States are anti-American (¶ 67). John Esposito (2000) describes how the media has embraced the idea that, in this post-cold war period, “Islam has supplanted the Soviet Union as the threat to its survival” which, in essence, means that Muslims have a fundamentally incompatible value system with Americans (Esposito, 2000, p. 4-5). Aptly stated by Beverly Amina McCloud (2004), “American Muslims have been inundated with questions about violence and terror in Islam, while they themselves are experiencing ongoing terror and violence from the government” (p. 79). Of all the evidence suggesting that Muslims are being harmfully and unfairly targeted by the media, the government and the public following September 11th, little attention has been paid to devastating consequences this discrimination has on the psychological or relational dynamics of Muslim Americans.

Psychological and Relational Impact of Religious Discrimination on Muslim Americans

The ways in which religious discrimination (both implicit and overt) affects the mental health and relational dynamics of Muslim Americans has not been significantly

covered or included in social work or social science literature. The field of Islamic studies, however, has extensively documented the impact of religious discrimination on the Muslim American community as well as the community's response. Scholars (Khan, 1998; Moore, 2003) have observed that the American attitude that Islam is a major threat to the West and that fellow Muslim citizens do not hold American values devastatingly discourages and undermines assimilation. Muslim American's are barricaded from being fully accepted as Americans or as Muslims. At the same time, they have learned to be hypervigilant about their public behaviors and presence in order to *appear* assimilated and, thereby non-threatening. Moore (2003) wrote, "To the extent that non-Muslims citizens continue to exert power over the life-course of Muslim Americans, Muslim Americans regardless of origin (e.g., immigrant or American-born convert) are robbed of political agency, indicating a permanent state of non-integration" (p. 66). Khan (1998) supported Moore's statement in declaring that "America will continue to alienate its Muslim population as long as it continues to demonize Islam" (Khan, 1998, p. 117). As such, religious discrimination not only affects all aspects of the daily lives Muslim Americans, but devastates the passage of assimilation and identity formation of the Muslim American population as a whole.

Zahid Bukhari, Sulayman Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad and John L. Esposito (2004), editors of *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square* documented the impact on the Muslim American population of being automatically suspect and perpetually denigrated. In this volume, Muqtedar Khan's (2004) chapter, "Living on Borderlines: Islam Beyond Clash and Dialogue" stated that "the demonization of Islam in the media and the prejudice, hatred, and intolerance it bred, made practicing Islam in the public arena a

dangerous prospect” (p. 100). Asma Gull Hasan (2002) described the consequences and impact of such religious discrimination on daily living:

We pay the price for these stereotypes everyday; when attendants refuse to serve us because we wear the headcover, or *hijab*; when we're taken aside at airports for questioning, followed around stores and our every move watched by clerks; when our places of worship are vandalized; when we are turned away from jobs because of a 'foreign look'; when we receive threatening unsigned letters; when other Muslims we know are physically assaulted; and when the children of our community are called 'camel jockey' and 'desert rat' at school. (p. 104)

Similarly, in effort for self-protection, Muslim Americans often conform to “the pressure to ‘become normal,’ to consume alcohol at parties, to eat non-*halal* food, or to participate freely in mixed environments,” otherwise “careers could be jeopardized because Islamic etiquette and dietary laws socially marginalized them” (Khan, 2004, p. 101). Therefore, in the public arena, Muslim Americans hide their practices, beliefs and identities. The necessity to hide one’s identity in public can deeply affect one’s psychology or relational connectedness.

Research on Muslim identity politics and formation in America speaks to some of the ways in which religious discrimination affects internal psychology and relational dynamics. Muqtedar Khan’s (1998) chapter, “Muslims and Identity Politics in America,” discusses the difficulty for Muslims in establishing a cohesive identity as they are compelled to “concentrate on defending their faith from a perceived American assault rather than on their role as American residents seeking liberty, equality, and prosperity” (p. 117). In *Counseling Muslim Americans*, psychologist A.N. Kobeisy (2004) further states that “in addition to dealing with patterns of racism, they struggle to strike a balance between maintaining cultural integrity and experiencing forces of oppression and assimilation” (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 2). Therefore, Muslim American identity politics is

paradoxically wedged between struggling to represent the ideal, liberated, loyal, prosperous American while adapting to policies and attitudes which alienate them from fully embracing such an ideal.

Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith (2002) conducted a study assessing the manner in which young Muslims cope with and combat religious discrimination. The study provided information on how Muslim Americans turn to Islam and the Muslim community for strength, cohesiveness and the creation of a solid identity not as much in spite of religious discrimination, but *in response* to it. In other words, because the formation of a Muslim American identity is precariously dependent upon the perceptions and opinion of the non-Muslim American public, the Muslim community has banded together, creating a phenomenon, which Haddad and Smith (2002) entitled, the “ethnification” of Islam. The ethnification of Islam is defined as “a core structure of ideas which motivates apparently unlinked groups of young Muslims in the West to carry out certain collective and societal actions and formulations of identity” (Haddad & Smith, 2002, p. 4-5). The study indicated that Muslims in diaspora band together according to religious affiliation rather than ethnic identification. The findings from the study show how ethnic membership is secondary to religious membership in that “ethnic belongings could be temporarily and strategically adapted in order to present and defend Muslimness” (Haddad et. al., 2002, p. 34).

This phenomenon is supported by researcher Ihsan Bagby (2006) who analyzed focus groups of second-generation Muslim immigrants in Detroit mosques in order to assess the second generation’s search for their place and identity in the American mosque. Bagby (2006) documented that “overwhelmingly, participants in the focus

groups prioritized their identities as being first and foremost Muslim” (Bagby, 2006, p. 230). However, responses were divided on whether ethnic identity or American identity was more important:

Some women placed their gender identity next in importance to their religious identity, viewing themselves primarily as Muslim and then as female... Those who favored their ethnic identity over their American identity had two arguments: one was a response to the perceived prejudice in American society, and the other was based on a perceived need for an alternative culture as an antidote to the harmful aspects of American culture... In giving primacy to American identity over their ethnic identity, [other] youth were willing to look beyond the prejudice of certain white Americans and stake their claim to an American identity that did not require white acceptance. (Bagby, 2006, p. 230-236)

Overall, in response to societal alienation and discrimination, young Muslims use a united religious identity to transcend ethnic lines and create the sense of a new homeland amongst one another.

Jane Smith (2007) described how, “in the attempt to dissociate Islam from cultural accretions and interpretations, they postulate a national *ummah*, or community in which all Muslims, African American and those of immigrant origins, can function as a kind of great extended family unit” (p. 214). In fact for “African Americans, who themselves or whose parents decided to adopt Islam as a way of life, may suffer from a rupture in relationship with their non-Muslim family members, who often do not understand or appreciate the conversion and interpret it as criticism or rejection of themselves and their religion or culture” (Smith, 2007, p. 213). Kobeisy (2004) explained how Muslims today, both African-American and immigrant families, are adding to the multicultural identity of America.

Strengthened by a sense of survival of faith and culture, Muslims tend to overcome their differences, [leading] Muslims of various sectarian backgrounds (e.g. Sunnis, Shiites and Sufis) to go to the same mosque, send their children to

the same weekend or full-time Islamic school, celebrate together and bury their loved ones in the same cemetery. Furthermore, while not accepted by the mainstream as true Muslims because of ideological differences, groups that affiliate themselves with Islam (e.g. Qadianis, and Nation of Islam members) may overcome their differences and unite with Muslims. (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 62)

Sectarian differences, the chasm between immigrant Muslim and African American populations, and ethnic divides have not inhibited the growing phenomenon in which Muslim Americans are coming together through a unified religious identity to defend against religious discrimination.

The manner in which Muslim Americans have banded together in response to religious discrimination points to a how the community, as a whole, has reacted to discrimination through adaptive and positive coping strategies. However, on the negative side, the experience of religious discrimination in and of itself can be described as *religion-based traumatic stress*. As evidenced by the above examples of how the Muslim community has been psychologically and relationally affected (i.e., subject to threatened identity loss, harassment indirectly through media and the government and directly in the public arena), religious discrimination towards Muslim Americans can be viewed as chronically, endemically traumatic. Many scholars have looked at the ways in which racially-based discrimination is associated with trauma (Carter, 2007; Bryant-Davis, 2007; Butts, 2002; Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 2001; Johnson, 1993; Loo et. al., 2001; Scurfield & Mackey, 2001), however, there has been little if no literature on the trauma of religious discrimination, particularly against Muslim Americans in our current era of Islamophobia. Studies on racially-based trauma are highly relevant as the majority of Muslim Americans (Arabs, South Asians, Middle Easterners, African-Americans) are subject to dual discrimination, or intersecting identities, by both their racial identity as

Black or Arab (by implication) as well as their religious identity as Muslim. The above studies, including the most recently study by Robert Carter (2007) entitled, "Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury: Recognizing and Assessing Race-Based Traumatic Stress," have effectively concluded that race-based traumatic stress can build over time or occur through any event of racial discrimination or harassment and is experienced as negative (emotionally painful), sudden, and uncontrollable (Carter, 2007, p. 91).

Reactions to such chronic encounters of stress may be "manifested physiologically, cognitively, behaviorally, and through emotional expression. They can also be manifested as anxiety, anger, rage, depression, compromised self-esteem, shame, and guilt (Carter, 2007, p. 91). The literature also describes the internalization of race-based trauma as well reactions such as "intrusion (re-experiencing), avoidance (numbing) of stimuli associated with the trauma, and increased arousal or vigilance" (Carter, 2007, p. 85). While Islamic studies literature has demonstrated that the majority of Muslim Americans have developed positive coping strategies to combat religious discrimination, it is vital to be aware of religion-based trauma symptoms of avoidance, numbing, and hypervigilance and the ways in which these underlying symptoms impact their relationships and their sense of self.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This final section examines the need for social work practice to recognize and take into account the manner in which Muslims are deeply affected by religious discrimination and even religion-based trauma, as well as the growing phenomenon in which Muslim Americans are disintegrating ethnic and cultural divides to band together

in response to religious prejudice. The literature gathered for this final section closely follows the research and work of psychologists, Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy (2004) in *Counseling American Muslims: Understanding the Faith and Helping the People* and Marwan Adeeb Dwairy (2006) in *Counseling and Psychotherapy with Arabs and Muslims*. Following the work of Kobeisy and Dwairy, and bolstered other researchers, this section provides a model of cultural competency when working with Muslim Americans, with a specific focus on how the historical relationship between Islam and the United States as well as the event of September 11th, 2001 has shaped issues of transference and countertransference in a therapeutic relationship (the impact of The Iraq War has not yet been included in research and literature). Lastly, this section covers issues relevant when counseling Muslim American couples. It continues to follow Kobeisy and Dwairy's work on cultural competency by presenting the various facets and strengths of marriage in Islam. In honoring the growing phenomenon in which Muslim Americans are disintegrating ethnic and cultural divides to band together in response to religious prejudice, this section presents the strengths utilized by Muslim couples which have aided them in coping with heightened levels of religious discrimination.

Counseling Muslim Americans: Addressing the Impact of Religious Discrimination

Social work and social science literature predominantly approached the issue of religious discrimination by addressing the therapist's countertransference and bias⁴. A study conducted by Charles Negy and Christopher Ferguson (2004) entitled *Religious*

⁴ Therapist's countertransference and bias refers to internalized oppressions, stereotypes and messages inclusive to the overall worldview of therapists of any religious, racial or ethnic background. Note that this does not assume to be referring solely to the countertransference and bias of Caucasian, middle-class, Christian therapists.

Bigotry: The Neglected 'ism' in Multicultural Psychology and Therapy showed that multicultural psychology has failed to address the potentially biased manifestations of religion by therapists whose clinical work with dissimilar or similar clients can be compromised by clinicians' personal faith-based convictions. Their study pleaded with therapists “to recognize that many of the values espoused by the mainstream middle-class United States have clear links to Judeo-Christian ideology that been the religious cornerstone of this country” (Negy et. al., 2004, p. 69). While religious discrimination is embedded in American history and, thus in present-day society, Gargi Roysircar’s (2003) article, “Religious differences: Psychological and sociopolitical aspects of counseling,” addressed the enhanced complications of therapist bias in light of sociopolitical turmoil between the United States and the Middle East. Roysircar described how non-Muslim American therapists' potential biases against Muslims mirrors the sociopolitical paradigm of the liberated, civilized, Christian West imposing its superior value systems on the oppressed, archaic Muslim East.

Dwairy (2006) offered a nuanced view of the dynamics of transference and countertransference between Muslim clients and non-Muslim therapists. Dwairy took into account Roysircar’s argument that countertransference may dangerously parallel present-day sociopolitical conflict between the West and the East (i.e., the therapist representing the idea of the dominant, superior West civilizing the client, or the weaker, disordered East). Dwairy, moreover, proposed that this dynamic goes back in history during the centuries of Western imperialism which precluded social development and nation-state independence in the East (including Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East). Thus, both countertransference and transference are significantly influenced by the historical

relationship between the United States and the East as well as the current sociopolitical climate of post-9/11 and The Iraq War. Dwairy detailed how this historical relationship potentially affects transference:

The long exposure to the Western occupiers left its impact on Arab/Muslim culture. Their imperialism fostered submission and helplessness among the people. Conversely, the exposure to a superior oppressor gave rise to inferiority feelings and brought about a process of identification with that oppressor. Therefore, the attitude toward the West is mixed with rage and antagonism, on the one hand, and identification and glorification, on the other. (Dwairy, 2006, p. 21)

Dwairy reiterated how “expressions of anger and rage, on the one hand, and inferiority feelings, shame, or fear of punishment, on the other, are expected components of an Arab/Muslims’s transference toward a Western counselor” (Dwairy, 2006, p. 22). Similar issues of transference and countertransference are, in fact, exacerbated for African-American Muslim clients as issues of historical imperialism between the United States and Africa are coupled with issues of extreme racial oppression.

While racial oppression is likewise a factor for immigrant Muslim populations working with counselors, it is particularly assaulting for African-American Muslim clients given their distinct history of political and social oppression. It should be noted that recognition of the presence of African-American Muslims has been obliterated in light of September 11th, painting the picture that Muslims have an Arab face. Thus, there is a dearth of literature on counseling African-American Muslim clients. As 29 percent of the Muslim American population, the second largest group after Arab-Americans, there should be significant attention to African-American Muslim sociopolitical circumstances, contributions and needs. Thus far, Vanessa Mahmoud (1996) in *Ethnicity and Family*

Therapy (2nd ed.) provided the most extensive discussion on African American Muslim families:

There is a great deal of suspiciousness of Euro American therapists among the African American Muslims communities, both cultural nationalists and Sunni. It is rare for members to go outside of their community for advice or guidance. This suspiciousness I believe had grown out of an acute awareness of oppression brought about by intense study of African American history by many members, this historical reality of how Islam became associated with cultural nationalists, and the individual experiences of the members with racism which may have contributed to their conversion. The presence of prejudicial articles, media attentions, and books that foster fear and dislike of Muslims and do little to educate the public about the religion as it is practiced by different groups is a main factor of such suspiciousness. (p. 124)

Here, Mahmoud confirmed the amplified levels of transference and countertransference between African-American Muslim clients and therapists due to historical relationships as well as present-day experiences of both racial and religious discrimination. It can also be argued that for Arab-Americans and those who appear Middle Eastern, the association between their racial identity and terrorism has, of late, lent them similar experiences of dual discrimination.

Bonnie Moradi and Nadia Hasan (2004) conducted a survey on Arab American persons' reported experiences of discrimination and mental health. The study concluded that a mediated relation between psychological distress and discrimination experiences exists. They found that 53 percent of respondents reported being treated in a discriminatory manner for being of Arab descent, 47 percent experienced racism against them, and 46 percent experienced being called racist names. The researchers concluded that "it is important for therapists who work with Arab clients to be aware of the effect of discrimination on psychological well-being and to find ways to ease the situation, either in the clinic or via the proper organizations" (Dwairy, 2006, p. 41). Lorraine Sheridan

(2006) in “Islamaphobia pre- and post-September 11th, 2001” explained that the line between racism and religious discrimination is often blurred “with the result that measures of the former can serve to highlight the existence of the latter” (p. 318). In Sheridan’s study, 35 percent of participants reported mental health problems as a result of being subject to both racial and religious discrimination. Nuha Abudabbah (2005) in “Arab American families: Assessment and treatment” explained that, just as African-American families have come to suspect the Euro-American therapists, the net effect of dual discrimination is to be similarly apprehensive of seeking help from social institutions including the legal system, health care services, and social service organizations. Marwan Adeeb Dwairy (2006) in *Counseling and Psychotherapy with Arabs and Muslims* focused specifically on the impact of this dual discrimination and how to conscientiously address this in psychotherapy.

Taken together, the work of Dwairy (2006) and Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy (2004) in his book *Counseling American Muslims: Understanding the Faith and Helping the People* effectively addressed the issues of dual discrimination as well as countertransference and transference in formulating an effective cultural competency model when working with Muslim American clients. While Dwairy concentrated on working with Arabs and Muslims in both American and Muslim-led contexts, Kobeisy purposefully interviewed Muslim Americans with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. His criteria were Muslim Americans who had undergone professional counseling before coming to the author, thereby “gathering experiences in counseling, particularly perceptions of counseling, barriers to seeking counseling the issues for which they would and would not seek counseling, and proper counseling settings, approaches,

techniques and strategies” (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 4). Utilizing Dwairy’s Arab-specific framework and Kobeisy’s multi-cultural (albeit not including African-American Muslims) framework together provides a comprehensive, culturally competent approach to working with Muslim Americans that takes into account therapist bias, inter-religious competency and the psychological and relational impact of religious discrimination as exacerbated by September 11th.

Their working model was based on multicultural counseling literature, namely that of Paul Pedersen (1998) from *A handbook for developing multicultural awareness*. Pedersen defined multicultural counseling as “a situation in which two or more persons with different ways of perceiving their social environment are brought together in a helping relationship” (p. viii). Dwairy expanded this definition by specifying the role of the therapist, stating that “[t]he role of the therapist here is the anthrotherapist: a person who is very well acquainted with the social structure and uses that knowledge to mediate between the social and mental health context” (Dwairy, 2006, p. 121). Therefore, Dwairy proposed, “both therapist and client have to discuss the reasons, processes and dynamics behind adopting social values and norms” (Dwairy, 2006, p. 121). In carefully understanding and monitoring one’s own and the client’s worldview (the lens through which people interpret the world) and acculturation (the psychological changes that occur in individuals as a result of their interaction with other cultures), the aforementioned challenges in transference and countertransference can be effectively addressed (Dwairy, 2006, p. 74). Supporting Dwairy’s model, Belkeis Altares (1996) suggested that in order to work effectively with Muslim Americans the therapist must take into account the following: 1) immigration and indigenous forms of religious practice and beliefs, 2)

varying perspectives on individuality and communality, 3) interest in using religious values or perspectives in problem-solving, and 4) the therapist's internalized stereotypes that reflect biases in larger society. In order to acquaint practitioners with Muslim social structures, worldviews, and the impact of religious and racial discrimination, Dwairy and Kobeisy further outline the specific dimensions of working with Muslim American clients.

In interviewing Muslim Americans, Kobeisy revealed a number of distinct barriers to seeking counseling. The reasons participants gave for originally not wanting to enter into therapy include the following: the stigma (i.e., negative perception) attached to seeing a counselor, therapy as being seen as a sign of failure, fear of stereotypes linked to treatment, fears associated with past experiences of mental health services, fears of negative judgment, fears of confidentiality, fear of counselor bias toward individualistic and materialistic values, and fears that going outside the extended family or immediate community to have their needs met is shameful (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 75). And, for some, mental health deficiency “may be seen as beyond another person's ability to help, and therefore a person seeks to resolve this issue by becoming closer to God or through traditional methods” (Lee, Oh, & Mountcastle, 1992 as cited in Kobeisy, 2004). In fact, for Muslims, the word *majnun* in Arabic denotes a person with mental illness due to possession by a devil—the resolution of which is through God's intervention not through individual or medical efforts. In Islamic cultures, “the soul, mind, and body are interconnected and, therefore, influence one another in health as well as in illness” (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 31). Therefore, Kobeisy and Dwairy agreed that it is of utmost

importance to assess the client's view of the nature of the problem, and how the client perceives the nature of the resolution to that problem.

In addition, the tendency towards Western psychological theory and practice to promote individualism, equal rights (as defined by Western standards), and democratic relations among family members, "threatens the willingness of many authority figures among American Muslim families to seek counseling" and furthermore, diminishes "the effectiveness of such services when and if they are sought" (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 78).

Kobeisy described how "[t]his has serious implications with Muslim populations in which the family system has a clear hierarchy and members are not considered equal and respect is unidirectional toward the authority figure in the family" (Kobeisy, 2004, p. 80).

Dwairy explained how present-day deference to family authority mirrors "life within a tribal system [which] is characterized by the fanatic identification of its members with the tribe (*'asabiya*), and full submission and obedience to the tribal leadership" (Dwairy, 2006, p. 12). Overall, then, American culture's strong inclination towards individualism is in direct conflict with Muslim culture's inclination towards collectivism. Dwairy described how the counseling process must be reframed to fit the needs of a collectivist society:

Counselors should give special attention to understanding relationships within the family (conflicts, coalitions, and force balances) and the status of the client in the family. Counselors who deny the family and instead focus on the personal issues may miss the point and make the client, who is totally enmeshed in the family, feel misunderstood. (Dwairy, 2006, p. 15)

Today, "young couples rely on their collective tribe or family rather than on the state for child care and education, labor, housing, and protection" (Dwairy, 2006, p. 13). . It is essential, therefore, for practitioners to be aware of the importance placed on collectivism

at the expense of individualism, to utilize supportive resources within the Muslim community, and to carefully consider the manner in which the collective community is affected by its sociopolitical and cultural context. Even more so, it is necessary to uphold the centrality of the family and respect Muslim family culture and law.

This interconnectedness within family and between families in Muslim communities is reflected in a collective system of values when dealing with family issues within the home and within the mosque. In fact, Dwairy argued that for Muslims, the collective social net is the metafactor which ultimately influences and shapes one's inner structure, personality development, and worldview. Taking into account cross-cultural literature on personality, Dwairy formulated four key aspects to how collectivism shapes Muslim inner, psychological structure and personality development:

- 1) The self is not autonomous, but is connected to an extended family or tribe. It directs its energy toward achieving group, rather than personal goals;
- 2) The behavior of an individual is more situational and contextual than dispositional. It is controlled by external factors such as roles and norms rather than internal factors such as personal attribution of behavior;
- 3) Priority is given to interpersonal responsibilities rather than to justice and individual rights; and
- 4) More other-focused emotions (e.g. sympathy and shame) are experienced than ego-focused ones. (Dwairy, 2006, p. 61)

In sum, the coherence of the collective identity is always at the expense of the expression of individual feelings, attitudes and needs. Again, Kobeisy and Dwairy warned that practitioners should be highly sensitive to the tension between the Islamic value of collectivism and the American value, social norm and expectation of individualism. In fact, sharing a collective identity has serious implications for Muslim Americans in a post-September 11th sociopolitical context. As Muslim Americans are increasingly threatened by religious discrimination, their collective identity—the core of their sense of

self—is vitally impacted. Neither Kobeisy nor Dwairy made the connection between the importance placed on collective identity and, therefore, the particularly devastating impact religious discrimination has on Muslim American’s psychological and relational well-being. Given that family culture and Muslim family law both play such a crucial role and are so deeply effected by their sociopolitical surround, the absence of literature on the strengths employed by Muslim American families and couples in coping with religious discrimination is an area worthy of research.

Counseling Muslim Americans: A Strengths-based Approach

In counseling Muslim Americans in a post-September 11th and Iraq War era, the importance of marriage and family cannot be underestimated. In response to increased religious discrimination since September 11th and The Iraq War, Muslim families are banding together and are holding to Islam ever more tightly (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006). Certainly, family and the *ummah* (community of Muslim families) have always been the locus of individual identity and ritual practice in Islam (Kobeisy, 2004; Smith, 2007). Now, “perceived hostility against Islam makes them take steps to further strengthen the Islamic fiber of future generations” (Ba-Yunus et al., 2006, p. 60). Jane Smith (2007), in “Islam and the Family in North America” illustrated how “Muslims in America look on the family as the bulwark of their existence in this Western (secular) society, the unit through which they filter, accept, or reject various elements of American society that they see as compatible or incompatible with their understanding of what it means to be Muslim” (Smith, 2007, p. 211). Following September 11th and The Iraq War, Muslim families are challenged “to paint as positive a picture as possible of the advantages of living Islamically, particularly in light in what is obviously a rising tide of anti-Islamic

feeling in the West” (Smith, 2007, p. 218). In essence, then, counseling Muslim American couples in a post-September 11th and Iraq War era necessitates a family-centered focus and a close examination of how Muslim couples are effected by and defend against the current sociopolitical climate.

Most Islamic studies literature (al-Hibri, 2005; Ernst, 2003; Kobeisy, 2004; Dwairy, 2006; Smith, 2007) which address the impact of September 11th on Muslims, highlight Muslim family life and, in particular, the inner workings of Islamic marriage, as the ultimate safeguard against the ills of “secular” society (which could be extended to include the most vile amongst them—religious discrimination). Kobeisy (2004) argued that Muslim individuals, regardless of religiosity, insist on adhering to Islamic family law. Following their principle of collective identity, Muslim marriage is generally based “on family consensus” in matching religious devotion and educational levels and, once children are involved, the marriage often focuses “on the children’s issues, whether they are still small or adults, rather than on their own romantic needs” (Simon, 1996). Here, psychologist James Simon referred specifically to Muslim Lebanese families, however the emphasis on family as part and parcel of overall community functioning in the present (as a married couple) and future (the continuation through children) has been largely true of other Muslim ethnicities (Kobeisy, 2004). Not only is Islamic marriage an obligation for the maintenance of the *ummah* (community), marriage is a religious obligation and, some scholars argue, a religious right.

Marriage is the basic building block of the *ummah*, which is the right of God, as well as the basic unit through which God operates. The marriage contract in Islam represents the meeting of “the right of the human being” (*haqq al-‘abd*) and the right of

God (*haqq Allah*) (al-Hibri, 2005, p. 189). Fazlur Rahman (1989) referenced verse 58:7 of the Qur'an in explaining how “whenever there is more than one human being, God enters directly into that relationship between them and constitutes a third dimension which can be ignored by the two humans only at their own risk”(Rahman, 1989, p. 37). The Qur'an makes explicit that marriage is a duty and a religious right: “O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them both has spread abroad a multitude of men and women” (4:1) and “Of his signs is this: He created for you mates from yourselves that you might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy” (30:21). In Islam, Marriage constitutes the basic relational unit through which God operates. Reciprocally, Muslim couples consider Islam the basic, principle strength of their marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). In fact, a number of researchers (Sherkat and Ellison, 1999; Mahoney, 2001; Lambert and Dollahite, 2006) affirmed that different aspects of religion in general “are positively correlated with greater marital happiness, adjustment, commitment, lower divorce rates, lower risk of conflict, and higher fertility” (Goodman and Dollahite, 2006, p. 142). The qualitative research of David Dollahite and Nathaniel Lambert. (2007) outlined the strengths of a “sanctified marriage” (a marriage ordained and guided by God: 1) sacred time together, including mosque attendance/involvement, Qur'anic study, prayer, and observation of holy holidays especially the *hajj*; 2) shared holy vision and purpose; 3) shared moral values; 4) divine relational assistance, meaning divine blessing and guidance; 5) relational commitment through religious vows. These qualitative studies empirically demonstrate how Islam is a core strength in the relational dynamics of Muslim American couples.

At the same time, some researchers “warn of possible negative linkages between religion and married life, such as support for more hierarchal gender roles and destructive coping strategies” (Mahoney, 2001; Sherkat and Ellison, 1999 as cited in Goodman and Dollahite, 2006). The issue of gender equity within Muslim American marriages is highly contentious and inevitably arises in pre-marital and marital counseling of Muslim American couples (al-Hibri, 2005; Smith, 2007). Feminist Muslim scholar, Azizah al-Hibri (2005) stated that in the case of gender relations within and outside the family, both the Qur'an and the Prophet were quite clear, “men and women were created of the same *nafs* (soul) (Qur'an 4:1; 7:189) and they are measured not by their gender but by their individual righteousness (49:13) (al-Hibri, 2005, p. 184). According to al-Hibri, verse 3:195, “Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, bit [it] male or female; ye are from one another” referred “to the fact that not only are the two genders interdependent in reproductive life, they are also constituted of the same basic elements, a sign of true equality” (al-Hibri, 2005, p. 184). Men and women in Islam have absolute religious parity.

However, a Muslim feminist sociologist, Fatima Mernissi (1993) pointed out that years of patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an has stripped the essence of religious equality between genders, particularly in issues of marital law. It is essential that therapists understand that Muslim American women are caught between living in the context of Western ideas of gender equity, receiving centuries of patriarchal interpretation, and developing their own form of feminism. Jane Smith (2007) stated that “virtually all traditional Muslim cultures support male authority” as “the Qur'an itself has generally been interpreted to give firm support to the dominance of the male in the

marriage unit, most directly in chapter 4, verse 34, which usually has been translated to mean that men are in charge of women because they provide for them (financially)” (Smith, 2007, p. 216). Qur'anic verse 4:34 states, “Men are the managers of the affairs of women, for that God has preferred in bounty, one of them over another, and for that, they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God’s guarding.” Azizah al-Hibri (1997) contended that “the Arabic term often translated to suggest male authority over women in fact should be understood to mean that men are the advisers of women, those who provide them with guidance” (al-Hibri, 1997 as cited in Smith, 2007). New translations of this Qur'anic verse indicate that, unlike the majority of Muslim women, Muslim American women have the benefit of direct access to the Qur'an, allowing them to form constructive feminist analyses of the Qur'anic verses dealing with women. However, Muslim feminist scholars have “run up against the general climate of American understandings of equality and justice between the sexes, and the feminist-initiated but now more generally accepted notion that the family unit is one in which both males and females have an equal share in responsibilities and decision-making” (Smith, 2007, p. 216). Therefore, it is important to note that “Muslim women may not be comfortable with or be seeking the kind of gender equity that most westernized therapists are familiar with and are proponents of” (Carolan, Bagherinia, Juhari, Himelright and Mouton-Sanders, 2000, p. 78).

Jane Smith (2007) explained the difference between Western models of feminism, designed to create *equality* of the sexes in marriage, with those of ascribed by Muslim feminists designed to create equal *respect* of the sexes in marriage. In brief, Smith wrote:

Much of contemporary discourse, joined by both men and women, portrays the Western model of 'equality' between the sexes as unrealistic, unnatural, and leading ultimately to the reality of many Western women: trying to raise children alone while living below the poverty level. The Islamic system, they affirm, will never allow such degradation because it is based on the understanding that male authority over females is always tied to male's responsibility to provide financial support for the women of their families. (Smith, 2007, p. 216)

Ingrid Mattson (2005) supported Muslim feminist views by confirming the assumption "that the paternalistic protection of male relatives is necessary because women are more vulnerable to poverty, harm and exploitation than men" (Mattson, 2005 as cited in Smith, 2007). In an American context in which the majority of families are not comprised of traditional husband-wife units, and in which divorce and single motherhood is common, the emphasis on marriage in Islam, and the duty of men to remain financial providers for women is, in fact, uniquely protective of the equality of women. The challenge for therapists working with Muslim American couples, then, is to negotiate relational dynamics around the couples' religious and cultural boundaries and views without imposing ethnocentric values of gender equality.

Therapists can address the couple's religious and cultural boundaries and views by examining the specifics of the Muslim marriage contract⁵. The marriage contract is

⁵ The marriage contract in Islam is derived from the teachings of Muhammad. The stipulations of the contract—including the rights of inheritance and divorce—were afforded to women in Muhammad's time, centuries before Western women were accorded such status. Muhammad is said to have viewed the marriage contract as the contract most worthy of fulfillment (al-Hibri, 2005, p. 199). In fact, Karen Armstrong (2002) wrote that "the emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet's heart" as Muhammad is said to have told his followers, "The best of you are those who are best to their families," and in his last sermon to his community he said, "O you people, your wives have a certain right over you and you have certain rights over them. Treat them well and be kind to them for they are you committed partners and helpers" (p. 16). For a detailed analysis of how the prophet Muhammad is a model for Muslim husbands, see Kecia Ali's (2004) article, "A Beautiful Example," *Islamic Studies* 43(2), pp. 273-291.

designed prior to the marriage and, in fact, ensures both the protection of woman's rights as well as allows both spouses to negotiate the dimensions of their marriage. Jane Smith detailed how:

Islamic tradition has long insisted on the right of the woman to formulate her own marriage contract and to receive *mahr* (a marriage gift) from her husband, which is remain her property even if they were to divorce...the contract may include such details as the amount and nature of the *mahr*, prohibiting the husband from taking a second wife, or specifying when and what kinds of divorce may be legally acceptable; it can also include agreements relative to the specific circumstances of the couple in question. (Smith, 2007, p. 217-218)

Azizah al-Hibri (2005) explained that Islamic law allows spouses to define their relationship through the use of stipulations in the marriage contract (p. 213). The marriage contract enables Muslim couples to develop, together, their idea of what type of relationship they would like in their own marriage. Consequently, al-Hibri advocated for pre-marital counseling with Muslim couples as, she argued, "counseling would provide spouses with the opportunity to disclose information and assess responsibilities of marriage life, given the circumstances and abilities of each spouse and the common goals they may share" (Al-Hibri, 2005, p. 213). Although al-Hibri did not mention religious discrimination specifically, she noted that pre-marital counseling might also prepare Muslim American couples for the stress of present-day sociopolitical climate—"American society places many pressures on the family unit, including economic and moral ones. As a result of these, and other factors, divorces have been rising in the Muslim [American] community, and divorce actions have multiplied in courts" (Al-Hibri, 2005, p. 212). It can be argued that a return to or review of the marriage contract in marital counseling will aid those couples who are relationally affected by the onslaught of external pressures and stressors, namely that of pervasive religious discrimination.

The rise in divorce rates amongst Muslim American couples gives evidence to the fact that married couples are relationally and psychologically impacted by the current climate of Islamophobia. The impact of religious discrimination is further evidenced by the high incidence of psychosocial problems within the Muslim American community as documented by the NAIM clinic in Brooklyn, NY (years of operation 1987-1999) and ACCESS in Detroit, MI, the two major mental health centers for Muslim Americans. In analyzing the number of intake calls to the NAIM clinic, Nuha Abudabbah (2005) discovered that “37 percent of the calls were to complain and/or receive guidance in dealing with domestic issues”—marital issues and parenting issues (p. 232). Abudabbah further concluded that, consequently, couples therapy would be of great value to the Muslim American population. She theorized that because the institution of marriage is so important in Islam, Muslim Americans would strive to achieve new solutions for maintaining their marriage. Moreover, it can be argued that couples would benefit from psycho-education on how other Muslim American couples are relationally and psychologically impacted by the pressures of American society and how they have utilized Islam in coping with such issues. The work of Wahida Valiante (2003) in “Family Therapy and Muslim Families: A Solution Focused Approach,” points to “striking links between certain Qur'anic concepts and Solution Focused Therapy, which suggest that the latter may be especially applicable to treating post traumatic stress disorder in members of this particular cultural and religious minority” (p. 1). Inadvertently, Valiante addressed how, in working with Muslim American couples who have experienced trauma, counselors can shift from pathology- and deficit-based foci to developing the strengths, competence, capabilities, and resources of Islam” (Valiente,

2003, p. 2). In a strengths-based approach to counseling Muslim American married couples, therapists must utilize the principle relational strengths afforded by Islam as a way of repairing the devastating impact of discrimination and prejudice on Muslim American families.

Although no studies to date have documented the specific strengths employed by Muslim American couples, it is clear that reliance on and fostering of family relations and connection with the *ummah* are primary strengths of Islam and, thereby, of Muslim couples. In addition, there is an absence of any literature focusing specifically on the effects of religious discrimination on intimate relationships. While studies have been conducted focusing on the challenges of multicultural differences (centering on Muslim and non-Muslim pairs) (Congress and Gonzalez, 2005; Ferguson and Negy, 2004) as well as the impact of trauma on couples (generally physical, sexual or verbal abuse) (Nelson, Yorgason, Wangsgaard, and Kessler, 2002; Goff et. al., 2006) there has been no consideration of how the trauma of religious discrimination impacts married couples. Moreover, no social science or psychology studies have provided information on the ways in which couples utilize the strengths of Islam in dealing with environmental stressors or trauma, the combination of which is equivalent to the religious discrimination experienced by Muslim Americans. This includes an application of raced-based trauma literature to religion-based trauma as a means of training the social work practitioner to conduct assessment and interventions with Muslim American individuals and couples who have inevitably been affected by chronic, pervasive religion-and-race-based traumas. Lastly, given that marriage, family and the *ummah* are the core strengths of Islam, and, conversely, that Islam is a principle strength for married Muslim couples, it is vital for

social workers or those in the counseling field to foster such powerful psychological and relational structures as Muslim Americans struggle through this time of heightened religious discrimination.

Summary

This literature review focused on a sector of research surrounding issues of religious discrimination and how it psychologically and relationally impacts Muslim Americans, with a closer look at Muslim American couples. Likewise, the review noted the lack of research on strengths-based approaches to counseling Muslim American couples who face increased religious discrimination. Literature which documented prejudice against Muslims in the wake of September 11th was almost entirely comprised of authors and researchers of Islamic studies rather than in the field of social work or psychology. To date, no studies have been located that address the manner in which Muslim Americans are affected by The Iraq War. This thesis draws on the work of current models of cultural competency when working with Muslim Americans, and opens further avenues of research for looking specifically at Muslim American couples struggling against religious discrimination. Moreover, this thesis incorporates the strengths-based approach which considers the psychological structures and supports engendered by Islam, and broadens this approach by applying it to the strengths employed by Muslim couples as they contest the contemporary anti-Islamic sociopolitical climate.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative exploratory study was an investigation of how Muslim American couples are psychologically and relationally impacted by heightened discrimination in the wake of September 11th and The Iraq War. It was necessary to use a qualitative, flexible methods research design in order to account for the “open, interactive, [and] potentially fluid” nature of such a phenomenon as the psychological and relational impact of religious discrimination (Anastas, 1999, p. 60). Flexible method research examines participants in context and in detail, enabling observations and findings to “flow directly from this inclusion of context, of everyday social and psychological complexities” (Anastas, 1999, p. 61). Therefore, the use of flexible methods enabled the study to document the experience of Muslim American couples in their present-day sociopolitical reality. Lastly, the gap in literature surrounding the issue of discrimination towards Muslim Americans and its psychological and relational impact justifies the use of a qualitative research design which investigates topics which have been understudied and poorly understood (Anastas, 1999).

This study utilized semi-structured, open ended questions to gather thick, narrative data from participants. Discrimination against Muslim Americans is a topic of emotional sensitivity and depth that is best captured through personal narrative—through direct expression of experience and how meaning is made of that experience. In addition,

flexible interviewing allowed for *prolonged engagement* with participants which, in turn, allowed for hearing detailed descriptions, eliciting multiple perspectives, understanding internal, interpersonal or social processes, learning how events are interpreted and developing a mutual understanding of who or what is being named (Weiss, 1994 as cited in Anastas, 1999; Anastas, 1999, p. 368). As a qualitative study, it was preferable to interview the couples together “as it allows them to co-create meaning” (Dollahite and Lambert, 2007, p. 293). Spouses were able to respond to interview questions as well as add to or counter one another’s responses, adding richness to the data. Seymour, Dix and Eardley (1995) suggested that interviewing couples together “can reveal different kinds of knowledge held by each person and can produce more complete data as interviewees fill in each other’s gaps and memory lapses” (as cited in Dollahite and Lambert, 2007). In addition, with respect to Islamic religious and cultural beliefs, married persons should not be alone with members of the opposite sex; thus, interviewing spouses separately would be problematic. One downside to interviewing spouses together is that if spousal views regarding the influence of God, the impact of discrimination on their relational dynamics, etc. differ, answers which are less relationally desirable may not be expressed (Goodman and Dollahite, 2006, p. 144). Nonetheless, Babbie (2004) argued that joint interviewing “frequently brings out aspects of the topic that would not have been anticipated by the researcher and would not have emerged from interviews with individuals” (as cited in Dollahite and Lambert, 2007). Overall, joint interviewing allowed spouses to discuss their relationship together while being sensitive to Islamic cultural and religious beliefs and practices regarding gender.

Sample

The sampling plan for this study followed flexible research method design—the sample size was small (six married couples) due to the volume of data that was generated. The sample for this study consisted of six Muslim American heterosexual, married couples. Selection criteria included couples who are American citizens, who self-identify as Muslim American, and who have been married for at least six years (i.e., from September 11th through The Iraq War). Exclusion criteria included non-Muslim American participants, non-heterosexual couples, non-married couples, inter-religious couples, and couples who have been married for less than six years. The maximum number for the sample was seven couples as each member of the couple was interviewed together, eliciting a large volume of rich, in-depth narrative responses.

In effort to obtain a representative sample that comes from a diverse population within the Muslim community, participants were recruited through several networks within New England, San Francisco, Chicago and Washington DC communities. Those who opted to participate in the study inevitably represented a multicultural slice of the Muslim population as the Muslim American community is in and of itself incredibly diversified. However, it was necessary to restrict the sample to heterosexual, married couples (rather than limiting the sample according to race, class or immigration status) for the following reasons: 1) the sample size was small and, therefore, there had to be some uniformity or one constant variable in order to glean transferable data, 2) the inclusion of gay and lesbian couples or non-married long-term partners would dramatically shift the study's primary focus (as Muslim American couples in nontraditional relationships struggle to hold on to a Muslim identity while not being fully

accepted by either society or by Islamic communities), and 3) compounding factors such as race, class or immigration status were more easily assessed.

Specifically, participants were recruited through personal contacts within Harvard Divinity School, The Pluralism Project at Harvard University and the Islamic Society of Boston. These are pre-established networks resulting from my theology degree at Harvard. Contacts within these networks were sent a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) that included pertinent information, such as a statement of purpose, my role as researcher, and the nature of the study. These key contacts informed their colleagues and friends about my research and distributed the recruitment letter to listserves and by email as a basis for providing information to potential participants. Therefore, the sample stemmed from multiple regions of the United States including Boston, San Francisco, Chicago, Minnesota, New York, and Washington DC.

Data Collection

Narrative data from open-ended questions conducted through individual telephone interviews were obtained from a sample of six couples who met the selection criteria. Procedures to protect the rights and privacy of participants were presented to the Human Subject Review Board at Smith College School for Social Work before data collection began. Approval of the project (Appendix D) assured that the study was in concordance with the NASW Code of Ethics and the Federal regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects. An interview guide (Appendix C) as well as a consent form (Appendix A) detailing the risks and benefits of the study were sent to the participants prior to the telephone interview. The participants and researcher each kept a signed copy of the informed consent document for their records. The initial contact, as well as the

beginning of the interview, offered the participants an opportunity to inquire about the researcher, the study, their expectations as to how the data might be used, and answer additional questions. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant was asked if they could be contacted again should further questions regarding the data emerge.

The interview narratives, ranging in actual length from 60 minutes to 90 minutes, took place between January 1st and February 30th, 2008. Interviews were recorded directly by plugging in an Olympus Digital Wave Player into a Radio Shack Telephone Recording Control. The recording was uploaded into iTunes which converted the files into WAV file format. The WAV files were assigned the participant's coded data number, then transcribed. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety in order to extrapolate the maximum amount of detail given. At the end of the study, all data were removed from the computer, transferred to discs, and stored in a locked area with confidential participant data.

Interviews as the data collection method allowed for flexibility. The use of self-developed, open-ended questions elicited information on a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth (i.e., the complex issue of psychological and relational impact of religious discrimination). Interviews examined "the meanings that experience holds for those in the situation studied;" in other words, interviews provided a lens into participants-in-context, which is of particular significance to the study of the experience of Muslim Americans in their present-day sociopolitical reality (Anastas, 1999, p. 62). Lastly, due to the gap in literature on the psychological and relational impact of Muslim Americans post 9/11 and following The Iraq War, interviewing enabled me to use 'the self as an instrument,' in that I could identify the important issues in the setting or in the

data that was missing from previous studies on this subject (Anastas, 1999, p. 62). The interview was semi-structured so that I could ask certain questions to elicit information around themes, while keeping the questions open-ended enough so that respondents could discuss their own individual experiences, reactions, and responses to whatever extent they choose. Many questions had follow-up questions to further clarify and add depth to the information gathered. Every effort was made to avoid asking leading questions that would elicit specific answers (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

My interview guide began with a few questions to collect demographic data, specifically: age, race, ethnicity, area born and raised, religious identification, year married, occupation, and number of children. My questions could be broken down into the following themes:

- Definitions
 - Muslim identity
 - religious discrimination
- Strengths as a Muslim couple
 - Families of origin
 - Story of the coupleship
 - Shared Islamic values, faith practice, Muslim community
- Experiences of discrimination in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War
 - Where you experience discrimination (public, governmental initiatives, interpersonally)
 - How experience discrimination (others' actions, looks, words)
 - Response to experiences of discrimination
 - Compounding discrimination (racial, ethnic, class)
 - Change in experience since 9/11 and The Iraq War
- The impact of religious discrimination on relational and psychological dynamics of the coupleship
 - Strengths, coping mechanisms

- Use of Islamic faith
- Negative impact on relationship dynamics
- Difference between public and private selves
- Impact of religious discrimination on their children
- Access to mental health services, support services, community resources

For the complete Interview Guide, please see Appendix C. In order to enhance the study's validity, my thesis advisor, a licensed social worker whose field of interest is spirituality, and the Muslim chaplain at Smith College reviewed my interview guide and provided feedback on the clarity and relevance of the questions. Reliability was strengthened by *piloting* the interview guide with a couple who was not a part of the sample. Pilot testing gave me a sense of logical flow, clarity of questions and interview time frame.

In order to establish the study's trustworthiness, I countered three main issues: reactivity, respondent bias, and researcher bias (Anastas, 1999, p. 318). In the use of *prolonged engagement* I eased into the interview with participants in a relaxed and supportive way, decreasing the chances of reactivity and respondent bias (Padgett, 1998). I employed the technique of *member checking* to decrease researcher bias whereby I invited study participants to comment on whether my reiterations corresponded with what they intended to convey (Anastas, 1999, p. 422). I also examined data that disconfirmed my hypothesis (*negative case analysis*) to develop a thorough understanding of my thesis topic.

Researching a sample of Muslim Americans involved a number of ethical issues and risks of participation. The Muslim American community has been subject to an indefinite number of governmental, academic and journalistic investigations and research

studies, the majority of which were either conducted on an involuntary basis or sought to determine patriotic loyalty. As a result, some Muslim communities have, understandably, become highly insular and self-protective. Therefore, at the outset of every interview, participants were versed on the locus of the research and how it was chosen—the history of my interest in Islamic studies, my dedication to addressing issues of social injustice towards Muslims, and my desire to inform the social work field of the unmet mental health needs and the missing voice of the Muslim American community.

In understanding that participants may fear exposure of their identity and experience to the public, strict confidentiality was maintained. To address how participants may have been concerned about how I would utilize the information following the interview, issues of confidentiality were addressed with each participant at the beginning of the interview. Names were not recorded anywhere during data collection, in documentation materials, or at any other time. Likewise, demographic information, researcher notes, transcripts, and audio tapes were kept separate from informed consent documents and were identified by number codes rather than names or other identifiable information. Any names or other identifiable information from participants that could potentially be recorded during the interviews were removed or disguised during transcription and for use in writing of this study. Interviews were digitally recorded and listened to in private, with the researcher as the sole transcriber. Participants received and signed a consent form (Appendix A) which informed that all data, audiotapes, notes and consent forms would be kept secure in the researcher's office for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guidelines, after which time they would be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely.

The potential risks of participating in this study were the possibility that the participants might feel strong or uncomfortable emotions while talking about their experiences of religious prejudice and discrimination. When differences of opinions arose between spouses, I recorded the varying perspectives of the participants without expressing my own opinion. If an individual found anything unsettling about participation, I requested that he/she bring this to my immediate attention. I also provided the participants with a list of referral sources, namely mental health services that specialize in areas of religious discrimination and Muslim therapists in their local area (general referral sources in Appendix D).

The benefits of participating in the study were the opportunity for Muslim American couples to voice their strengths, concerns and perspectives. The participants may have additionally benefited from knowing that they contributed to identifying the mental health and service needs of the Muslim American population generally and particularly of Muslim Americans whose relationships are internally impacted by the external pressure of discrimination. Likewise, participants were given the knowledge that this study will help social workers have a better understanding of those affected by discrimination in light of 9/11 and the war in Iraq.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. As noted on my consent form (Appendix A), participants were free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time during or after the study until the date of March 1, 2008. In addition, if they decided to withdraw, I ensured that all of their descriptive data will be immediately destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the demographic questions was analyzed manually, while theme-related data was analyzed and coded using the *grounded theory model* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Anastas, 1999). The grounded theory approach allowed the analysis to be grounded in the data, not the data grounded in the preconceived points of view of the researcher. Thus, conclusions were always supported by sufficient data. According to grounded theory, the researcher “opens up” the data by assigning provisional codes to all the indicators discernable in the data (Anastas, 1999, p. 61). Again, *open-coding* means that the categories are developed from the data rather than from theory. In analyzing each answer to the questions asked, one or more categories were created inductively. In other words, the categories “were derived from inductive reference to the patterns that emerged from the data” (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Gilgun 2001 cited in Goodman and Dollahite, 2006).

The second step was *axial coding*, or identifying concepts in the data and relationships among the concepts. In other words, axial-coding makes connections between the emergent categories found in the open coding process (Goodman and Dollahite, 2006, p. 144-145). As the open-coding progressed, relationships between categories became apparent and the categories were organized accordingly. Finally, through axial coding, a number of categories were integrated and assimilated until a core concept or central explanatory concept emerged. Specifically, this was done by placing all responses to questions in alignment, reading through the collective responses, and highlighting themes, keywords, and unusual responses. These responses were also coded

in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, inputting the data according to the keywords and themes that became apparent, with each question having a dedicated column.

Limitations and Biases

The transferability and generalizability of the data gathered from this study had certain limits, namely that the sample size which, although diverse, was small (six couples) and the focus of the study was on the current sociopolitical climate which is subject to change. In addition, as participants were self-selected respondents to listserv postings, the sample was not random. A random sample has a greater probability of representing those couples who may not have experienced religious discrimination or who do not feel that religious discrimination has psychologically or relationally affected them. In contrast, those who opted to participate might have done so in response to the recruitment letter which details the nature of the study.

The use of telephone interviews and joint interviewing likewise had its limitations. Participants were potentially affected by the researcher based on voice, intonation, inflection, and manner over the phone. The interview questions themselves may have been subject to researcher bias and assumptions. Although the interview guide was reviewed by appropriate and relevant members of the social work and religious studies fields, the guide was nevertheless self-developed and therefore subject to researcher bias. In analyzing the data, however, every effort was made to “follow the data where they lead and minimize the intrusion of the researcher’s own preconceptions into the study results” (Anastas, 1999, p. 58). Lastly, as mentioned above, the use of joint interviewing runs the risk of obtaining inhibited or tailored responses when spouses disagree or are influenced by one another.

As noted above, methodological and researcher bias, assumptions and perceptions may have been an influential factor. This study assumed that Muslim American individuals are psychologically and relationally affected by discrimination. In addition, this study assumed that the experience of pervasive, systemic discrimination is a chief factor in the development of difficulties, coping mechanisms, and the use of faith practice in the relational dynamics of Muslim American couples. Lastly, the study assumed that Islam is a principle feature in the daily functioning and relational interactions of Muslim couples. However, divergent data indicating that 1) Muslim Americans are not affected by religious prejudice in the United States, 2) Muslim couples do not sense a change in their coping mechanisms or relational dynamics from religious prejudice, and 3) Muslim American couples do not consider Islam a fundamental aspect of their daily functioning and coupleship were not found. Issues of diversity—differences in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and immigration status—may have been compounding factors when assessing the data on Muslim American couples' experience of discrimination. These issues were addressed in the interview guideline, allowing for couples to determine themselves how and if compounding factors increased, decreased or altered the affect of religious discrimination.

It was essential to keep these biases and limitations in mind when interpreting the findings as, clearly, unwarranted interpretations of causality could be made between relational dynamics and the sociopolitical environment. To prevent this bias from skewing the interpretation of the data, discussion of the findings remained focused on the couple's perspective and consideration of the causes and factors influencing their relational dynamics.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter contains the findings from interviews conducted with six Muslim American couples who met the selection criteria for the study. The interview was fifteen questions in length and covered the following main categories: 1) definitions of “Muslim identity” and “religious discrimination,” 2) strengths as a couple, 3) experiences of discrimination in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War, and 4) the impact of religious discrimination on relational and psychological dynamics of coupleship.

In the first question set, participants provided definitions of what it means to them to be a Muslim or their Muslim identity, and how they would define religious discrimination based on their experience and the experience of others. With these working definitions, couples were then asked a series of questions which looked at the development of their coupleship, how they came together and whether or how their relationship has been supported—through family, the community, and Islam. These questions were designed to learn how couples derived strengths from their religious and relational connection.

The next category, experiences of discrimination in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War, gathered information on where and how couples have experienced discrimination (in the public sector, in interpersonal exchanges, in government initiatives, media) and how they have responded to those experiences (“go into hiding,” re-educate the public,

take refuge in the Muslim community, etc.). In addition, participants were asked to consider compounding factors to their experience of discrimination such as racial, ethnic, gender, class and/or discrimination inside Islam. Lastly, couples reflected on whether or not discrimination has increased following 9/11 and The Iraq War.

In the final question set, participants described the impact of religious discrimination on the relational and psychological dynamics of their coupleship. This included details of the strengths of their coupleship and their use of those strengths in coping with religious discrimination as well as a consideration of any negative effects discrimination has had on their relationship. Couples were asked to reflect on whether there is a difference in their relationship with how they are in public and private with one another. This question was asked in order to further assess how discrimination alters or enters their relationship based on whether they are in the critical public eye or in the safety of their homes. In order to gather information on how their experience of discrimination has impacted their fears and concerns regarding parenting, participants were asked what the affect of discrimination has been on their children and, thereby, on their relationship. Lastly, participants documented what other sources of support they utilize aside from one another.

Demographic Data

Demographic data was collected on participants in terms of: age, area born, area raised, area currently live, ethnicity, race, religious identification (Sunni, Shi'i, Ishmaeli, etc.), occupation, and number of children.

Participant Demographics

The study was comprised of six heterosexual Muslim American couples who have been married for at least six years. The age range for participants in the study was from 26 to 58. The majority of the couples, four out of six, were in their late twenties and early thirties. Geographic locations, for where couples presently reside, included: California, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington D.C., and Massachusetts. However, couples were born and raised in geographic locations that spanned the west coast, mid-west, and east coast. Two of the husbands interviewed were born abroad in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the former was raised in upstate New York having immigrated at age 3, and the latter was raised in Kuwait and immigrated to the U.S. for college. Ethnicities and races included Pakistani, Caucasian, Dominican Republican, Panamanian, African-American, Bangladeshi, and Norwegian. Half of the couples interviewed were mixed-ethnicity or mixed-race marriages. All of the couples identified as Sunni. A staggering eight out of twelve members of the couple were converts to Islam, all of whom converted during or within fifteen years after college.

Each member of the couples worked at a professional level occupation. Five of the twelve participants worked within an Islamic-oriented organization or service, such as, Muslim social services, education in Islamic school system, and religious education in academic settings. The year married ranged from 1991-2002, and the number of children ranged from one to four, although one couple's children were each from former marriages. The majority of the children (seven) were under the age of 13. Reciprocally, those with young children, four out of six of the wives, included in their occupation description, Stay-at-home Mom.

Demographic Data

Age	Born	Raised	Live	Ethnicity	Race	Sect	Occupation	Year married	# of children
31	South Asia	Northeast	Northeast	Pakistani	South Asian	Sunni	Religious Education	2000	1
31	US	Northeast	Northeast	Caucasian	Caucasian	Sunni	Business and Freelance, Stay-at-home Mom	2000	1
36	US	Northeast	Northeast	Dominican Republican	Black	Sunni	Business	1995	2
36	US	Northeast	Northeast	Panamanian	Black	Sunni	Research, Stay-at-home Mom	1995	2
43	US	Northeast	MD	African American	African American	Sunni	Business	1991	3
44	US	Northeast	MD	African American	African American	Sunni	Social Services	1991	3
33	South Asia	Middle East	CA	Bangladeshi	South Asian	Sunni	Engineering	2002	2
28	US	Midwest	CA	Bangladeshi	South Asian	Sunni	Engineering, Stay-at- home Mom	2002	2
57	US	Midwest	DC	African American	African American	Sunni	Business	1998	1 (not together)
58	US	Midwest	DC	Norwegian/ European	Caucasian	Sunni	Social Services	1998	4 (not together)
27	US	New England	New England	Caucasian	Caucasian	Sunni	Education	2002	1
26	US	New England	New England	Caucasian	Caucasian	Sunni	Education, Stay-at-home Mom	2002	1

Table 1

Definitions

This section provides working definitions for 1) how participants describe their Muslim identity and what it means to them to be a Muslim, and 2) the term religious discrimination or how they classify their experience of being discriminated against as a Muslim.

Muslim Identity

Participants were asked the following questions: “What does it mean to you to be a Muslim?” and “How do you define your Muslim identity?”

All six of the couples interviewed responded together in identifying a foundational belief in monotheism, and, thus, accepting that everything is within the power of God. In addition, part and parcel of this understanding of omnipotent monotheism follows the second half of the Islamic creed, *the shahada*, which states, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his message.” Therefore, all couples included in their response, that to follow one God means to follow the Qur'an as revelation given to Muhammad by God. The following responses exemplify couples' common descriptions of monotheism and revelation as core aspects of their Muslim identity:

I just think being Muslim means that you are putting yourself in the hands of God and you are worshipping him and he is the one that is the most important part of your life and every aspect of your life.

Accepting Allah as your creator and accepting that there is only one God and Allah should be worshipped and should be worshipped through following the prophets and following in particular the clear message from the prophet Muhammad.

For me what it means to be a Muslim, believing in theology. Islam is a monotheistic religion. For me, ascribing to Islam as the most coherent, most

comprehensible monotheistic tradition. And as to how I define my Muslim identity, I would have to say, one is belief and the second is practice. Believing that there is one God and that Muhammad is his messenger and that Islam is the perfect system to working out human life. Practice is the five prayers, and the fasting, the alms-giving, just trying to live a more God-conscious life.

The latter quote elucidates a second aspect of Muslim identity, an aspect given by all of the participants—the practice of Islam as “the perfect system to working out human life,” or as providing a guidebook of how to live a good life and how to raise a family. As stated by one participant, “it’s about the experience of worshipping one God and using that sense of what Islam is about to discipline yourself in life and to have a disciplined family.”

For the majority of participants, eleven out of twelve, Islam is their primary identity. As such, participants stated that all other social, political, ethnic, or racial categories are secondary to their Islamic identity. Even elements of their selfhood—individual opinions, desires, etc.—are subsumed by the will of God. The following statements represent these general sentiments of the participants:

For me, it’s understanding that Allah is everything to me—Islam is the foundation on which we operate and in which everything is under. For me it’s being a woman who covers, who is a professional in terms of helping my colleagues and people around me. My religion comes first and everything else is secondary.

To me, being a Muslim really means that I subordinate my wishes and desires and opinions and values to those that I believe to be revelation. I take revelation first over things that contradict revelation. So if there is something in the Qur'an, I take it to be true over other truths that other people might claim. And if there is something that the Prophet is said to have authentically done in the Hadith then I take that to be a superior truth. To me, being Muslim means to have a source of such a truth and to put that above other truths that people tell me or that I might come up with on my own.

According to participants, it is this relinquishing of individual desires and the primacy of Islam in their lives that brings them “inner peace and inner strength.” Other descriptions

of how the faith and practice of Islam affects participants' interior world included: "providing balance," "peaceful disposition," and "clarity of purpose."

Religious Discrimination

In response to being asked, "How do you define religious discrimination?" participants provided basic definitions based on both their direct experience and their knowledge of others' being discriminated against as Muslims.

One participant described how religious discrimination exists on "a scale of people treating you differently—it could just be a look or a point, all the way to having your rights really affected." The majority of participants did not identify a scale, but rather described discrimination in general terms as "being treated differently, good or bad" and "lacking opportunity." The following participants provided these basic definitions:

Lacking opportunity based on the way I worship. Lacking opportunity and not getting fair treatment by the law based on the way I choose to worship.

I would say religious discrimination, based on someone knowing that we are Muslim or based on someone knowing anything, like someone's a Jew, that you automatically put attributes to them without knowing that person and just assuming that people of that religion are that way, good or bad.

I guess religious discrimination to me is when a person or a group of people are excluded from something or criticized for something based solely on religion, not based on other aspects of their life.

Two participants defined religious discrimination, not in general terms, but as specific to being discriminated against as a Muslim. For these participants, religious discrimination towards Muslims strips them of their humanity.

When religious discrimination comes into play you suspect your neighbors, classmates or colleagues for not being like you and not being good, and it makes you unfair towards them. To me it means not just stereotyping, but not seeing the

person as human first, but being religious first. Any kind of discrimination has this, but with this type of discrimination, someone seeing me as a Muslim first and a human being second and they would discriminate against me.

What is worse, people hear you are Muslim and they assume you are a terrorist. It is just blatant.

Also specific to religious discrimination against Muslims is discrimination due to appearance as a Muslim. For male participants who had a beard and female participants who wore the Islamic head covering or *hijab*, they stated that discrimination is mostly “a physical thing,” meaning that they are easily identified as Muslim by their appearance and, thereby, are “treated differently.” The following quotes illustrate one male and one female Muslims’ experience of being discriminated against by how their appearance indicated their Muslim identity:

For me, having a beard in the workplace, a lot of people treated me differently. When I didn't have a beard I came into contact with more people, after our conversations about Islam and when they found out I was Muslim, they changed their tone.

I think that I get a different treatment when I do have my *hijab* versus when I don't have my *hijab*. So I actually think that there is a difference when I wear *hijab* because people realize, "Oh, she must be Muslim because she wears her head covering." I get treated differently.

Strengths as a Couple

This section describes couples’ individual and shared religious and relational history. The questions solicited information about how couples were raised religiously, how they came to self-identify as Muslims, how couples came together and how they were (or were not) supported by family and community, and how Islam supports their relationship. These set of questions aimed to learn how couples developed and identified their religious and relational connection and strengths.

Religious Background and Muslim Identity

Participants were asked, “What are the stories of your families of origin—how do they self-identify religiously and how were you raised as a Muslim (if you were raised as a Muslim)?” The majority of participants, eight out of twelve, were not raised as Muslims and converted during or after college. Yet, whether participants were converts or were raised as Muslims, all distinguished Islam as their primary identity, regardless of their original cultural, religious or racial background.

Moreover, all participants differentiated from their religious up-bringing either deliberately (conversion) or philosophically (Islam is bigger than parents’ values or cultural values). For those participants who were raised Muslim, they described the significance of differentiating Islam from cultural or parental value-systems. One couple responded to one another’s experience of such differentiation:

My parents immigrated to this country from Bangladesh. I would say their identities are more cultural—they are South Asian... as they began to live here, they realized that teaching us about Islam is one of the few things that might help us discern all of the things we have to choose from. They are like any other parents that have their fears of drugs, drinking, premarital relations, and everything else. They did come to the conclusion that teaching us about Islam would help us, more than teaching us about anything else, more than teaching us about the culture of Bangladesh or South Asians.

Those were formative [years] in my life to see Islam as bigger than what my parents taught me... What was very important to us was to see Islam as some level of guidance, as [my wife] said, in this country.

Another participant, who was raised Muslim, further elucidated how those parental values which are not culturally-based, but that mirror Islamic principles are incorporated into one’s identity:

I was raised by my father especially to see that being a Muslim was helping to contribute to society, whether your time, your efforts, your money. That ethical

component of Islam was much more emphasized than the ritualistic. My parents pray and people in my family pray but they weren't obsessive about the rituals, the outward forms, it was much more about being this compassionate, ethically-minded person. That is how I was raised.

Echoing the statements above, all eight converts to Islam reported that, unlike the religions of their families of origin, Islam “was clear and simple,” “resonated with me,” “answered my questions and just felt correct,” and provided “a way of making moral, ethical choices in this country.” Likewise, these participants stated that Islam was distinctly different from the religions within which they were raised. Two participants described their conversion to Islam:

I was the first Muslim in my family. I converted in college. I was raised as a Catholic. Religion generally wasn't that strong in my upbringing. The reason why I converted, what happened was, I was joining a fraternity and part of the teaching was speaking on different types of religions—Buddhism, Judaism, everything—and when they spoke on Islam it just seemed simple, uncomplicated. And you know, growing up around Catholicism, you have priests, you have saints, you have this, you have that and it seems confusing. When I learned about Islam it was very simple. One day I went to the mosque and felt an instant connection. The next week I converted.

I ended up studying religions at an academic level and just realizing that the tenants of Catholicism and Christianity didn't add up for me. Some contradictions and issues with the integrity of the Bible as it is today. It led me to want something that was more preserved, something that was more accurate. I wanted to follow the prophets and I wanted the best way to follow them. Islam is the easiest choice out of all the religions. It was the clearest choice. Me wanting to change my lifestyle was a different story, but intellectually Islam was an easy choice.

One African-American couple described their emergence into Islam as a potential “return” to the faith of their ancestors:

In 1997, when Roots came on and Kunta Kinte was on a slave ship and worshipping Allah The Merciful, it just opened my eyes to the fact some of our ancestors that were brought here may have been Muslim and had that situation not occurred, would we still be Muslim versus being Christian.

Religiously I was raised in the Baptist church, my family came here. My great grandparents were slaves who were freed after the civil war, on my mother's side. On my father's side, my grandmother's from St. Croy, my grandfather's Virginian as far as I know were slaves. I was raised in the Baptist church and started studying Islam in high school and college.

Therefore, for both converts and those raised as Muslims, there is no set theme regarding their religious upbringing—some of their parents were very religious, some parents just “[went] through motions of religion”—however, each couple arrived at Islam or into Islam through an individual spiritual search and through their partnership.

I was born into Islam in the early 70's. My parents came, they are from another country, they are from Panama. So they adopted Islam. I ended up growing up in the religion. For me, we went through the motions. Now, being married I have had to process it myself.

Seeing that I was raised Muslim I had a lot of spiritual balance. When we got married we helped each other. He gained more of an understanding of Islam and we are raising our children to be Muslim. We both came together more as a family.

I think what's helped me cope is that [my husband] is the sun that rises for me in the fact that he is just so inspirational. [He] has a way of helping me break things down and understanding it from several different perspectives because he gives great analogies. He is the pillar of this family. My world is not complete without him. What I gage and garner from him is his strength. My strength comes from his strength.

Relationship Formation and Support

In order to obtain the narrative and the context of couples' relationships, participants were asked, “What is the story of you as a couple—how did you meet, how was your relationship supported by the community or by family, and how did you choose one another?”

All couples stated their specific desire to marry another Muslim. While four of the couples stated that having a Muslim partner was a specific requirement for marriage, for

these couples, their spouses had converted prior to the partnership. In other words, none of the participants mandated conversion of their partner. For the remaining two couples, the non-Muslim partners eventually converted to Islam at their own pace and through their own volition. Regardless, all couples explored and deepened their faith and practice through their partnership and in marriage. One participant stated, “He helped me work through Islam to where it got to the point where I wanted to convert.” Another participant explained:

We came to Islam together, but each of our journeys had different turning points separately. I guess you can't fake it. It's the kind of religion where either you submit or not. Each of us came to a point where we were resolved with our issues and decided to submit or not. My turning point was in November. I guess [she] didn't feel ready. I didn't want her to become Muslim because I was Muslim. I thought that would be a very shallow reason for picking a religion.

It is in the Qur'an that marriage is half of religion. I think that definitely is true for me being raised in Islam and just going through the motions, "Okay, we gotta go to the mosque and we have to do this and that," then actually being tested when I got married and going through all the things you go through in life, September 11th and everything. I had to actually put it in action. And put everything to its test. Take everything I was taught and once I got married, that is when I got tested with everything.

In other words, marriage is part and parcel of being a member of the faith; it is “half of religion.” Therefore marriage enhanced couples’ understanding and experience of Islam and, reciprocally, Islam brought couples together more as a family.

Moreover, couples described how choosing a Muslim partner helps them to be confident in the other person’s moral and ethical character, and to have a foundation on which to raise a family. Having a Muslim identity as the primary requirement in the relationship, as noted by mixed-race and mixed-ethnicity couples, allows Muslim

marriages to easily break down cultural or racial barriers. One participant described this aspect of Muslim marriage:

There is a joke now when I go to my family back in Pakistan they're like, "Oh, wow, you are spreading Islam. You are marrying a white person, and an American, they need to know more about Islam." It's a joke but I think there is a truth to that. Islam promotes this multi-culturalism and breaking down racial barriers.

In the following statements, participants explain how a Muslim marriage not only allows you to be confident in the core moral and ethical character of a person, but also allows you to be confident in the marriage itself because it is willed and ordained by God.

A lot of people ask me how that works, you know, how do you get engaged so easily and I would say a lot of Muslims do get engaged like that, very quickly after meeting someone. I think, first of all, we ask the important things to each other that makes us more comfortable with each other—the core of a person. [Husband interjects] we get the red flags out up front before any emotion is involved so that if any decision has to be made its not made just based on emotion. [Wife continues] Right, if we know the core of a person, we are not going to get annoyed at the little things, like he left the toothpaste cap off or whatever, it's like we know that we are very comfortable with the core of the person. Another thing is that we do pray about it. There is a prayer to make any decision, not just a decision for marriage, when you are deciding something.

God put her in my life to help balance me out and keep me level-headed.

He went through this whole Islamic procedure with marriage. As I understand it there are four areas that you rate someone in: wealth, beauty, piety and family heritage... I was impressed because on one hand he was very romantic and on the other he was very conscious of choice.

A clearly identified strength in the couples interviewed was their ability to come together despite family or community condemnation or lack of support due to Muslim conversion, or mixed-race or mixed-ethnic marriages. Four out of six couples described “opposition” from the Muslim community or Muslim families of origin (due to marrying a convert), from non-Muslim families (due to becoming and marrying a Muslim), and

from families of origin (due to mixed-race or mixed-ethnicity marriages). One Caucasian-convert couple described an experience had by all eight of the converts interviewed:

We didn't care about the state marriage. It was meaningless to us. The spiritual part was what mattered to us. The real opposition was our parents. They are happy that we are married now. But at that time, it was the opposite.

Two couples, who were mixed-ethnicity and mixed convert and immigrant or born-Muslim couples, explained:

My parents weren't too thrilled because I guess they were skeptical because he was new to Islam and I was raised Muslim and my principles were very strong.

And they're [community gatherings] supposedly for my honor after we got married. But nobody would talk to me and they would all speak in Urdu and so I didn't necessarily feel like the community really supported me.

All couples explained that their ability to come together and remain an intact, stable couple despite community disapproval is due to, 1) the eventual respect and admiration afforded them by family and community and 2) the positive support from the Muslim community. The following participants conveyed the respect given to their marriage as family members observed and witnessed their shared practice of Islam, particularly in raising their own families:

[My spouse's] family is not Muslim. They really respect us even though they think that a lot of things we do are strange. She basically kind of appreciates us. Those family members that don't understand it, they are kind of like, we don't see them a lot or they won't say much to us, but they do have a respect for us.

I think there are a number of family members who identify with Islam, some who have given *shahada* and many who respect where I am at. Clearly supportive. My mother and a few of my aunts now, my grandmother who during this time has passed, but I think they appreciated my behavior because they were involved to varying degrees and the children, etc., etc. they saw something that was positive even though they grew up as Catholics.

It wasn't an easy journey for me, [my husband] can tell you. One time it was trying to make everyone happy, trying to accept Islam and then keeping one other

foot, partially, part of my body in some form of Christianity to make my family happy. Eventually, when the kids came, you can't do both, everybody's going to have to accept it and you are just going to have to get on board. It wasn't that they were difficult, it was that fear that I wouldn't be this jovial person that I had been for forty some-odd years. And what I have had to, at least initially, had to explain to them is that this enhances me as a person, I am not changing, I am being a better person, this is bettering me, this is beneficial to who I am. And, you know, it's a beautiful thing, they're on board.

All six couples described, at length, the support given by Muslim communities they sought following their marriage. One participant openly and proudly stated, “I think that the Islamic community was a family.” Other participants mirrored his sentiment:

There is nothing like having that sisterhood and brotherhood. In my job I tend to travel and I tell you, wherever I go, I have run into a brother or sister where you just get that love automatically.

There is camaraderie, there is a connection that I felt ever since I've taken my *shahada*. That sense of oneness, that sense of we are all moving in a direction together. You know, when you have another Muslim brother or sister on the job, there is a higher standard. There is a higher standard that we bring to it that is expected.

One couple commented that community support serves a dual function—the cohesion of the community supports them, and in being role models to younger couples they support the community.

A lot of the young folk see us as role models. Young couples, young professionals and still holding onto their beliefs... It keeps things in perspective for me. Like [my wife] said, we are not perfect, we go through our ups and downs and even at our toughest moments, I still look at the whole broad picture and say to myself, you never know the impact you have on people. The best thing you can do is be an example to someone else. Exactly, that is my point. Who is supporting who? They are supporting us and us staying together supports them. It goes hand in hand.

Islamic Foundation in Marriage

Couples provided lengthy responses to the question, “How do you feel Islam—your faith practice, the Muslim community and your shared values—supports your

relationship in general?” One participant’s response represented the general feeling amongst all the couples interviewed that “Islam is very visible and tangible and I can taste it all the time in our relationship, in work, all over the place, yes, it’s a big part of our relationship.” In other words, for all six couples interviewed, Islam is the centerpiece of their relationship. Participants avidly reiterated that having an Islamic foundation in marriage allows them to “know the person's basic character to be good and moral because their spirit is guided by Islamic principles.” The following testimonials are included at length to fully account for the importance given to this aspect of Islamic marriage by participants.

[My wife] is just a very good, morally centered person and I personally know fully well how you can get lost in the details, and get overly obsessed with certain superficial aspects and lose sort of the core meaning of it. In terms of the moral, ethical injunctions of the faith... I felt that's really what Islam calls people towards which is that it says there are guidelines to live your life by, and there is a spirit that animates those guidelines. And I think she has that spirit. In terms of Islam, that to me, that is the core of our relationship, having shared values of being compassionate, helpful, charitable, wanting to have a family that in every way tries to do good.

I think it is important to mention that as much as our convictions feel solid or come across as solid, we are still human beings and marriage is a very human institution albeit something that is also has deep spiritual meaning for us. Everything that couples agree or disagree over happens to us, whether it's about children or food or finances or fashion or decision-making. That is normal. I think Islam is not so ever-present in those discussions that we avoid those disagreements. So that's, I don't want to paint that picture either. I would second what [my wife] said, that I don't doubt in my heart that I know this person's basic character. I know that we share the same beliefs. If we were not both Muslim or came from different levels of Islam we would have very strong disagreements when it comes to how we view religion and how to raise our children. I think we have avoided a lot of that because we have taken those issues off the table by having a common understanding. I mean that Islam as a shared religion helps.

We have normal marriage issues. I think what maybe the difference is that deep down, we are very sure of each other. I will say for myself when you are very sure of the person's character, no matter what issue you are fighting about at that point,

you can't really ignore a person's character and his real goodness. A lot of that goodness is defined by Islamic goodness and also general goodness. So I think because a good moral character is really important to us, we try not to get caught up in other flaws because the main thing that what we want in a person and in life is really good, strong character. When I see some people get married for different things, like for passion or something, a lot of those things are fleeting. You are not always going to have those things in marriage if you had it in the beginning. Marriage is different. You see that person everyday and you don't feel like that everyday. My opinion and my view of the world, it doesn't mean that we don't have love anymore or passion anymore because that is not what drew me to this marriage, that is not why I am invested in this marriage, its more what we can, how we can build a life together based on shared values.

I feel like our relationship is a lot stronger because a lot of the beliefs of Islam foster positiveness, honesty, truthfulness, kindness, charity, all those things help to foster positive relationships with your parents, your relationships whatever they may be. Those traits help any relationship if you adhere to them.

Another clearly stated aspect of an Islamic foundation in marriage is that the Prophet Muhammad set down practical guidelines for daily individual living, and shared living in a marital partnership in the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Sunnah. These are considered to be “inherited, God-given, and time tested” guidelines. Five out of the six couples stated that they always turn to Islamic text and principles to solve problems, namely for arguments and reconciliation. Paraphrasing many of the participants' statements, their responses explained, “Rules are just very practical, simple, designed not to restrict your life but to free your life from petty complaints, to orient life to do what pleases God not what pleases the self.” Two of the participant responses which describe the benefit of having an “inherited text” to guide your marriage stated,

One thing that is different about Islam than other religions is that there are rules about everything. And they are not rules that restrict you, they are rules that decide the criterion for what is right and wrong. Everything is inherited—how to raise your children, every aspect of life is in the holy Qur'an, every aspect. It kind of helps in an argument. If say well, you know, let's take it to the book, what does the book say. If this is what we believe, then this is what we should adhere to.

One of things that we first set up [when we got married] was he said, "Everything inside these walls is Qur'an and Sunnah. They can do anything they want out there, but in here we have Qur'an and Sunnah"... I often tell young people that there is an answer to everything is in the Qur'an and Sunnah, whether its about your relationship or work or with children, you can get some guidance and the good thing about it, say [my husband] and I have a disagreement about something, we look in the books and see what we can find. It really takes the problem and depersonalizes it. It's almost like having a counselor living with you in your house.

A particular aspect of Islamic principles and guidelines is that of clear gender division in terms of roles and responsibilities. Couples uniformly stated that Islam provides balance in gender relations and *guidelines of due respect* between genders. One female participant stated:

In the working society, especially in America, where a man and a wife are together, usually the man takes care of the household and the women work too. In Islam, it's a nice balance where the women can work and whatever she makes is hers. If she decides to contribute the household, take care of the children with it. It's not to say that what the man makes is actually, you know, he is taking care of everything, but the woman can use her money that she is making to add to taking care of the kids, herself or whatever. And the man should not be demanding: "Your salary should be included in the household." There is no pressure on her to do that because he is the provider and maintainer. Its weird in American in society where typically the man takes care of everything. There are some marriages, some people who actually fight over money and its comes to that and a lot of marriages break up because of "who is not contributing or who is doing this or who is doing that." Whereas if there is a set standard... no one gets taken advantage of and everyone has their guidelines of due respect.

Two male participants explained how Islamically guided roles and responsibilities provide gender equality as well as harmony in the relationship because these guidelines are "the right thing to do and best thing to do according to God." In other words, couples' transcend petty individual differences by adhering to and being unified through rules ordained by God.

In Islam it's very clear different roles and responsibilities—a mother, a wife, a husband, a daughter, a friend, a leader—all different roles are very clearly defined

by the example of the Prophet. Through the Prophet Muhammad we have a very clear example of how he lived and he lived according to how Allah told us to live. When we operate under a similar way of thinking a similar structure, there is a lot of harmony. That is what we got back to—not to what we individually think or feel or what our desires tell us to do, but what is the right thing to do and the best thing to do according to God. What does God want us to, what is the best way to please God? Not to follow my desire versus [my wife's] desire and vice versa and in that way there is a lot of harmony. We should always correct each other by going back to that source and the other will be quiet and say, "yep, you got me" There is no arguing that. It makes life simple. It makes life a lot easier I think.

At the end of the day we know our roles and responsibilities as parents, as husband, as son, as daughter. And so we always make sure that we are fulfilling our roles. The nice thing in Islam is that everyone is equal, but everyone doesn't have the same responsibilities. So everyone has, depending on who you are and your relationship to others, you have a certain checklist, "You do this, you take care of this." Do your responsibilities. And that is what we measure ourselves against... we can disagree on something and that's fine, but if we do our responsibilities for each other, which we each have towards each other, then it works out just fine.

Lastly, all six the couples again identified that another essential benefit to having an Islamic foundation in marriage is the strength of shared community involvement. One couple described the Muslim community value of being group-oriented as an antidote to the American value of autonomy and independence. Two participants provided descriptions of how, as a Muslim, you have the ability to find a like-minded, welcoming community anywhere in the country:

As a community, we are able to plug into any Muslim community in America, not just Bangladeshi or South Asian or Middle Eastern, any Muslim community so that we can make instant connections for our children, for ourselves. Muslims who will come to the mosque to pray can easily be thought of as sharing almost 90% of your values. How easy and homogenous those values are. And so this is in communities which are small and also in big places so the service may vary, but just sharing that religion itself has done a lot for us. The community adds to what we have.

Both the community in Maryland where we were living originally and the community here have been extremely supportive. Married couples who ask us to get together for dinner or activities are very active in the youth community both

helping Muslims that are college age and Muslims who are our own age, having meetings and study circles. It's a great way to meet the community and participate in events and still have positive relationships and friendships as we had in Maryland.

Experiences of Discrimination in Light of 9/11 and The Iraq War

This portion of the interview was designed to determine participants' general experience of being discriminated against as Muslims, and to gather information about whether 9/11 and The Iraq War have heightened the level of discrimination experienced by Muslims. Included in this portion are questions asking where and how participants experience discrimination, how they responded to discrimination, what other forms of discrimination they concurrently experience, and whether their experience has changed following 9/11 and The Iraq War. These questions allowed participants to map out both their experience of discrimination through the changes in our current sociopolitical climate and how they have been individually affected by it.

Experiences of Discrimination

The following interview question determined *where* participants experience discrimination (in the public sector, through government initiatives, in interpersonal exchanges) and *how* they experience discrimination (through others' looks, behavior, statements). The majority of participant responses included how their experience of discrimination changed following 9/11.

All participants unanimously echoed one another in stating that their experience of discrimination is largely due to unbalanced media reporting and government initiatives. Vilification of Muslims by the media was mentioned twelve times in participant responses. Biased targeting of Muslims in government initiatives was

mentioned ten times in participant responses. One participant explained her experience of government-sanctioned and media-driven discrimination, stating that as far as “the government's attitude and the media, I would go so far to say that it’s not even religious discrimination. Quite honestly, I feel vilified completely. So it’s much more extreme.”

Two participants described how such discrimination by the government and such misinformation propagated by the media affect their experience of being a Muslim woman and a Muslim man, respectively:

For me, a lot of it is not necessarily personal. A lot of it is in the media and government actions. There is strong religious discrimination in the media quite honestly and actually it’s to just a point that, for me, that because I do wear a *hijab*, that it’s to such a point that they are limiting my religious freedom and my choices. Most people look at me and could not ever fathom that I choose it or that I should choose it. If I claim that I choose Islam, they are like, "Why would you choose that?" So I really think that is a lot of misinformation out there. There is a lot of just hate in the media, the way Muslims are described, the way Muslim women are described.

I do share a deep sense of disappointment and frustration with media outlets and how they portray Muslims and Islam and Islamic issues and analyze them. The news reporting has gotten better but the analysis is still very, very poor. And just lacks the balance of many, many discussions. And that does frustrate me and I feel like being Muslim in America is such difficult thing. I do not discuss this with my colleagues because they would immediately assume that what they are hearing is the truth and somehow I am very, very different or that I am like them, like the people that they see in the media.

As evidenced in the above quotes, the majority of participants attributed their direct experience of prejudice to media-driven misinformation about Islam, as well as the government-based initiatives creating a climate of fear of Muslim Americans.

Most notably, participants explained that their direct experience of discrimination is in the public sector. Participants described the public sector as the most difficult arena in which they negotiate their experience of discrimination. As one participant put it, the

“extra special attention” he and his wife receive in public is largely “a result from what is going on politically, there are obviously different feelings: suspicion and curiosity, all these things mixed up into one.” This is especially the case for Muslim women who wear *hijab* because, as one participant explained, “it’s a lot easier for Muslim men since we don’t outwardly project being Muslim as loudly as a devotee Muslim woman would by wearing *hijab*.” A female participant described her struggle with being a Muslim woman in the public sector:

I am white, but just by wearing a piece of cloth over my head, people get really confused. For me it’s hard because I am much more introverted than [my husband] is and I felt like I always had to be "on" because I was representing Muslims. I just felt this huge burden that anything I did would reflect Muslims everywhere. I know for [the public] there is a certain fear they have, and I don’t want to produce that kind of anxiety and fear in anybody.

The above quote elucidates other participants’ responses in which being visibly Muslim means that you are always “on” in the public sector—whether you are the object of curiosity or suspicion. One couple detailed how the aggregation or build up of discriminatory experiences in the public sector can build a defensiveness or, in other words, of not just being “on,” but of being “on guard” all of the time.

We were just walking around the store not really shopping for anything in particular, just wandering and this man got up behind us and said, "When are you going to drop it? I know you are going to drop a bomb. I know that is what you are here for." We just kind of looked at each other and kept walking and just ignored him basically, but he followed us all around the store... The worst part is that no one around us did anything. It would be one thing if it happened and there is an idiot out there (because there will always be an idiot out there) but for no one to do anything about it was the most disappointing thing, not really caring, just watching and seeing it happen. One of the mosques we were at in Maryland had a cross burned on it. People write "sand niggers" on our mosque. For us, we are not even Arab. People don't even know what they are upset at sometimes. But I guess if you don't know what you are scared of to begin with, your attacks on other people are not going to be too smart either. One time we were at the airport and this lady was just staring at us. It was nothing new, but I had had it, I was so

sick of this so I said to her, "Can I help you?" She said, "That hair scarf that your wife is wearing, can I touch it? I just want to see what it feels like." She was genuinely interested. For me, I thought she was hating us, but she talked about how it reminded her of Mother Mary and how it looks like what she wore and how she really respected it. Sometimes there is a defense about it that we have to keep in check as well.

Participants highlighted the airport as a highly contentious public arena. Instances of discriminatory experience at the airport were mentioned, in detail, by seven participants. The following participant response reiterates the above quote in explaining the sheer difficulty of negotiating one's response to public attention, especially in the airport, when over time there is the build-up of discriminatory experiences.

And always, when possible, I prefer to drive than to fly. Because the minute I walk into the airport, I am just hyper self-conscious, just thinking like, "How often am I going to use the restroom, where am I sitting in the lounge, are people looking at me because I do look quote unquote "suspicious"... and it just wears you down. The minute you walk onto the plane, down the aisle people are looking at you. When you get up to get something from your luggage, maybe I am being paranoid, but you feel like everyone's eyes are on you. You have to be much more calculating in your public behavior. And it can get frustrating and wear you down over time. And then you sort of just have to tell yourself, well, it's really sad, but people are just freaked out and you kind of do what you can to alleviate their fears and whatnot.

It should be noted that as far as experiences of interpersonal discrimination, the majority of participants stated that they have not had personal exchanges that have been discriminating and, in fact, most of the time, once interaction reaches a level of interpersonal engagement, most people are interested in learning about Islam, and are "relieved" and "more comfortable that I am some natural, normal guy." In fact, as will be documented in following sections, participants unanimously found that the re-educational opportunity afforded by interpersonal exchanges greatly counteracted discriminatory views of Islam propagated by the media and government.

Another area of discrimination identified by participants is discrimination within Muslim groups based on race, ethnicity or indigenous forms of Islam versus immigrant forms. As described by one self-identified Black Muslim couple,

There is a very large population of Black Muslims because of that transitioning [from the Nation of Islam]. So it's weird because we have the twist where we have the Arab cultures and a lot of Muslims from overseas. They look at us like, "How do you know Islam? You think you are Muslim?" And sometimes, "There goes a Black Muslim thinking they are practicing Islam." They have their own political and cultural issues from over there where we have our issues over here.

Four out of six couples stated that due to the differences between indigenous and immigrant forms of Islam, there are a number of divergences in the practice and theology of Islam as well as targeted political and social issues within Muslim communities. Logically, these couples stated that these divergences have caused a great deal of tension within Muslim communities in determining inclusion in the community or in community issues.

Response to Discrimination

Participants were asked about how they have responded to discrimination in order to assess not only how they have been affected, but also how they have coped.

Four participants remarked that some of their response is a deep sense of powerlessness and despondency. At the behest of the discrimination of larger systems against Muslims—the media and government—these participants have been unable to combat unwanted public attention or to defend their civil rights for fear of being labeled “combative” and being “seen in the media as a terrorist.” In the following excerpts, participants described this aspect to their response of discrimination:

Basically, you feel sort of humiliated, right, getting this "extra special attention" is what we call it. There is a sense of powerlessness. You know you can't do

anything about it. You are dealing with the government in this case and you are completely disempowered. So, the response is nothing, we didn't do anything.

I will walk by and a kid will hide behind his mom where he didn't hide behind her when anyone else walked by. It's the kind of thing that just makes me so sad. I don't want to produce this kind of fear in anybody. I will walk by and smile at the kid, maybe wave just to show them that I am not horrible or anything. Like [my husband] said, it's this sense of powerlessness because if you argue with anybody, especially somebody in an authority position, then they would say, "She was combative."

The feeling I get from following all of [the media] is just complete powerlessness like there is nothing you can do at the end of the day and the story is going to get spun to make you look like the bad guy. And the audience is going to be more understanding and sympathetic to the government than it is towards you, you know, you've got suck it up and take it.

Collectively, all of the participants stated that in order to combat negative media exposure and government initiatives, their response to discrimination has been to proactively educate others about Islam. Participants reportedly utilize interpersonal exchanges as well as media and venues to disseminate information about Muslim Americans and Islam. For many participants, they are naturally drawn to be educators, but for others, including the following participant, they have to contradict or challenge their personalities in order to proactively counteract negative messages about Islam.

My response has come through mass education. I have written some columns in newspapers about it and have given talks at different venues about Islam. I know that is not going change the overall, general opinion. I feel like if someone knows just one Muslim then they can't think like that. Because I do wear *hijab* it's even on like a day-to-day basis. I am actually not that outgoing of a person. I am pretty introverted. But I have forced myself after 9/11 to be really friendly and talk it up with the cashier lady. For some people it comes to them naturally, but it doesn't for me. I do force myself because I feel like I may be the only Muslim they set eyes on besides what's on TV. That's really my response. With personal exchanges I just try to be extra nice.

While the above participant described her individual effort at mass re-education, other participants portrayed the collective community effort following 9/11 and the effort that they carry on today.

We had a platform of us coming together as a community and re-evaluating what we know, what we believe, standing strong, standing tall and saying, “That is not Islam,” speaking against what has taken place. The true mentality that is out there is not Islam, it is radicals. There are radicals in all religion. Unfortunately, again, peace does not sell papers. Of course, [media] is going to focus on the negative, just the ratings.

I know that right now [my husband] and several other brothers and sisters, are trying to do a political action committee amongst Muslims here so that we have that political voice, so that we are interfacing and being heard on a national, local and regional level.

In fact, a key element to mass re-education is activism, according to participants. Over half of the participants were involved in a Muslim Student Association in college or presently and “engaged the Muslim community and invited Muslim speakers to come and present information.” All twelve participants reported being involved in Muslim communities that are active in spreading a more positive view of Islam.

Four participants wanted to make it clear that re-education does not involve explaining politics or the actions of other Muslims, but, on the contrary, works to *distinguish* these elements from the Islamic faith practice. In the following response, three participants explicitly affirmed,

We try fairly hard to separate Islam as a religion, a way of life, a revelation and an example of the Prophet from the current events. Many people miss that and we try to emphasize the difference.

I have also been involved in making sure that Islam and Islamic principles are what people know about. I don't try to explain the actions of Muslims. I don't think it's my responsibility or that I am accountable to people around me for what Muslims do somewhere just as Christians shouldn't have to be accountable for what other Christians do. When people say, "You are a Muslim, you must support

that because they are also Muslim." No. I mean I can tell you what I believe what Islam says and you can judge for yourselves whether these people are following Islam or not. I want to focus on the Islamic principles of fairness, equality, justice, compassion, spirituality and so forth. In those terms I can talk to people about politics in the Muslim world, that there might be strife that people don't understand.

The response entails—it never a political response for me—it's like "What does Islam have to say? What does Islam have to say about women, what does Islam have to say about terrorism?" Not really like what is going on in Palestine or something like that, I prefer not to get into those things with people.

As described in a few examples above, another response to the experience of discrimination has been to combat discrimination and to re-educate others by being a positive living representation of Islam. However, participants have explained that being a positive representative of Islam is not for the purpose of “alleviating fear of Islam in others” or “helping others’ see Islam as non-threatening and good” *as much as* for the purpose of living according to the will of God. A number of participant responses are documented below in order to account for the emphasis given to living to please God rather than living in fear of or in response to discrimination.

Anytime things are difficult with discrimination, with people, things are going wrong, I remember Allah. Everything is within Allah's will. Everything is within his plan... There is a Hadith that says, something to this effect, “Those who put their faith in Allah's hands, Allah will save them from men, but those who put their faith in men, Allah will leave them in men's hands.”

Allah is my creator, my sustainer, my judge. He has commanded me to pray five times a day. Now I have a choice, I can worry about what Allah wants or I can worry about people whom I don't know, who can't do anything for me, and who, for the most part, could care less about what I am doing, I can work on trying to please them. Those are my choices.

I think we are getting to point where we don't care about that anymore. Because I feel like that, in that way, like I said before, we are trying to please Allah only. In that way, we are never going to make everyone happy. We are never going to satisfy them. I take this as a learning process. We work so hard to dispel negative information about Islam and we work to counteract it, maybe overly work to

counteract it. We kind of reached this level now where, you know, I want to live my life and be where I am. I will be conscious of how I act in public in general, but maybe not to that level anymore.

I said, "If we look to kind of cower away because we might make people nervous, then people will never see that, 'Oh, Muslims, they go about everything as Muslims, they are not a problem.'" For instance, I travel a lot between Washington and New York or overseas so I am in airports a lot. So I need to find a place to do *salat*. I need a quiet place, and if the airport doesn't have a chapel, if it has a chapel I use that. If it doesn't, I find a quiet gate or corner somewhere and pray. I find that most people don't do anything. They look at you and go about their business. They have other things on their mind. Then they see that there are Muslims who come and pray and get on the plane and the plane does not blow up. If you try to hide it all the time, it's always going to seem like those Muslims who practice are the ones to look out for.

Compounding Factors to Discrimination

A key part of the interview included the question of "What other types of discrimination (ex. racial, ethnic, gender or class discrimination) do you experience or do you think exacerbates your experience of religious discrimination?"

Participants reported that gender discrimination, in particular, has compounded their experience of religious discrimination. Only one participant described "chauvinism" inside Islam as existing in immigrant Muslim cultures. All of the female and male participants, however, located gender discrimination in the assumption that Islam condones male domination and oppression. Yet, contrary to stereotypes of Muslim men being oppressive, female participants found their right as "free-thinking and independent" women to be oppressed by *American* cultural pressure. Likewise, male Muslims reported their frustration with being perceived as oppressive and not being honored as women's rights advocates. The following female and male participants explain how gender discrimination impacts their experience of religious discrimination:

Right, to tell you the truth I don't feel limited or oppressed by anyone in my religion. When I am in my religious circle like at the mosque or with my friends I feel free and independent and free-thinking. The only time I feel constricted is the *idea* that the general public has of me and I feel I have to fight that idea. That is the only pressure I feel as a Muslim woman, that I have to prove myself to the rest of the world, that who I am, that I can speak. All Muslims, they are not surprised by any of my stances or activism or anything or education or anything, but I am constantly trying to prove myself to everybody else. Really that is where I feel somewhat...I don't know if oppressed is the right word. Society as a whole can't accept me, they can't accept me for making this choice, and for being educated and for being free-thinking and for being active. They just don't want to accept me for the way I am. I will shed some light on this for you: a lot of strong Muslim women in this country have taken the *hijab* off not because they don't believe in it anymore, and not because they have decided it's a form of oppression, only because this society is more accepting of them if they take it off! So that is pointing to where this oppression is coming from. One of my friends who took it off said—I don't know if this is the right word to use or not—but she said, “It felt liberating.” It didn't feel liberating because of Muslims, because she could finally let go of Islamic rule, it felt liberating because she is like, “Now I can go to a meeting and people don't have preconceived notions of what I am saying.” And she is a lawyer. And she is like, “Now I can represent a client and people aren't like, ‘Oh, she has another agenda.’” Even for me I tried to get a job as a writer, I tried to get a job as an editorial writer, and I really wondered, “What will they say when they see the *hijab*?” like, “Oh, she has an agenda. She is not really a part of our society. How is she going to write commentary about our society?” I think a lot of girls have given into that pressure.

I always get angry. Before Islam and even now I consider myself a women's rights and women's liberation advocate... I get upset most when people think I am oppressing [my wife]. If ever told her to take off the *hijab* I think she would beat me to a pulp. Sometimes I think the misunderstanding makes me feel horrible to have others think that I am treating someone that way, when it couldn't be farther from the truth.

Regarding racial or ethnic discrimination, three participants described the dual discrimination of racial and religious discrimination in that their “being brown-skinned” often mistakenly identified them as Arab. In addition, these participants, as well as two others, highlighted the growing intensity of discrimination towards Arabs.

People have assumed, average people in the grocery store if they see you are Muslim they assume you are Arab because you have brown skin. They presume that I am Arab or that I look like someone they saw on TV.

I am Dominican so that last thing somebody is going to think is that I am Muslim. I don't get treated like somebody who looks Muslim. I remember like when I grew my beard, everybody thought I was an Arab descendent. I got distant treatment. People shied away from you and didn't want to get into conversations with you.

After 9/11 it was an interesting and trying time to be Muslim because you experienced a lot of people, a lot people went into hiding. I don't know if you remember, they had a Speak Out, all the religious communities got to speak out. The only Muslim presence was an African-American Muslim. He took a stand and said, "This is wrong, this is not Islam, this is just people. [inaudible] Now the black man is not the target anymore, it is now the Arab, the Arab Muslim." That is huge.

Regarding the presence of racial and ethnic discrimination *within* Islamic groups, participant responses revealed that, typical to all religious groups, there is an equal amount of variability within groups as between groups. In other words, there exists an equally complex interplay of inclusion/exclusion and discrimination/pluralism within Islam as between Muslims and non-Muslims. Most notably, this occurs between the African-American Muslim community and immigrant Muslim communities.

In one way, African-American Muslims have been a bridge between immigrant Muslim communities and indigenous forms of Islamic practice. In fact, the following quote demonstrates how the African-American history of racial denigration in America connects to that of the original Muslim community as well as present-day anti-Muslim initiatives.

[In] a meeting of different leadership... one of the Imams who had been hurt recently was approached by a younger fellow. And he got in the face of this older Imam (who was frail from my perspective) and he was saying, "We have to do something about the FBI. We need to get the money," all in his face, his arms in his way. And I said, "You need to back off. We have been dealing with this already, for the last 40 years"—and I was thinking of the civil rights time where the FBI came and all the things that happened in the 50's and 60's with burnings and bombings. And I could see in his face that he was like, "What's that got to do with me?" So I said, "Oh, I am sorry. It's been 400 years"—referring to the time

of slavery and all that happened then. And I could still see a kind of look in his face like "What are you talking about?" And I said, "Oh, I am sorry brother. It's been 1400 years"—the Muslim community in Mecca and wherever and how they were discriminated against and persecuted, etc., etc. and he finally understood.

The transition of the 60's and 70's with the FBI, CIA, the government etc. dealt with us and not so much Muslims, but the African American community or White people who were part of the times. People were observed. After 2001, immigrant Muslims, they had to start watching out for this and we had dealt with that already... Many of us had good training and were educated to say, "Hey, here is how you deal with the rules and regulations and laws of the country, of the city. You want to be on the straight and narrow when you are in the spotlight." Many of us who had made the transition from the Nation of Islam understood what this was about and knew. But maybe the immigrant community began to appreciate us more as the indigenous community, probably, in following our lead as to how to act and react.

However, other participants pointed out that for African-American Muslims, they have discrimination on all levels—dual discrimination (racial and religious) in being Black and Muslim as well as discrimination within the Islamic community in rejecting African-American Islam as “not real.” The following quotes elucidate the multi-faceted aspects of being an African-American Muslim:

There is a very large population of Black Muslims because of that transitioning [from the Nation of Islam]. So it's weird because we have the twist where we have the Arab cultures and lot of Muslims from overseas. They look at us like, "How do you know Islam? You think you are Muslim?" And sometimes, "There goes a black Muslim thinking they are practicing Islam." They have their own political and cultural issues from over there where we have our issues over here.

A lot of average American white Caucasians are uncomfortable because of the public image of the Taliban, and Al Qaeda, and all this kind of stuff of Arab and Pakistani. But I think that African-American Muslims have a much tougher time as well, a kind of double hit I think they're taking. One is because racism is so prevalent in our society so there is already revulsion, sadly, and then the fact that they identify as Muslim. There is this impression of African-American Muslims as being militant and being aggressive and whatnot so they have it twice as bad in that case.

For me being Black, a woman and being Muslim is pretty high up there. Those are the ones that most interestingly... I work with an organization that is male

oriented and male driven, there are these thoughts that, "Oh, she's Muslim, she must not be that bright or intelligent. Oh my goodness, she must walk ten steps behind her husband."

There were times when my being African Muslim and part of organizations of some type have created maybe some difficult situations at the job, between me and my boss.

My issue is, and I have told people this before, is look, I have been Black my whole life. I couldn't change my skin color, at least now I have Allah on my side.

Three of the Caucasian converts interviewed elucidated their experience with a complex interplay of discrimination—denigration by family members and media for being Muslim, exclusion from the immigrant Muslim community for being converts, and then, following 9/11, elevation in status as a White, Muslim convert. One participant who converted shortly after 9/11, stated, “[S]omeone who was born Muslim is not treated as highly because they were born Muslim and they are typical. We are exceptions. I don't like having that special treatment.” Another participant described her transition in status from being “not a real Muslim” to gaining respect after 9/11. She explained that 9/11 forced immigrant Muslims to turn to her, “a White revert,” for aid:

Before 9/11, people didn't take me seriously... When I would ask someone who was born out of the country like an Egyptian or Somali, they would kind of pooh-pooh me and say, "You are not worth giving the answer to because you are not a real Muslim. You weren't born Muslim. You're not really...you're kind of an actor. You are just playing along to get along." Then after 9/11... there's been an acknowledgment that those who really came to Islam as adults came to it by choice. We didn't inherit it or were born with it. We looked around and decided this was the best one and picked it. And there is a respect that people have for us after 9/11.

A Caucasian couple explained how their racial and ethnic identity has enabled them to escape a great deal of the religious and racial discrimination experienced by others:

We haven't experienced it through the government because of our names. We have American names. I think for a lot of our friends it does exist. It's really sad

and really scary. There have been people we know who are doing prison time for what other people would get probation for. And that's scary but people are targeted when they fly and by their names. They've got so much data on other people. At the same time, I wouldn't want to live anywhere other than in this country. It still has so much more potential than any other country because it's such a heterogeneous society. When we travel to France or Germany, it's a very homogenous society. There is a clear German identification or French identification or Chinese identification, but with America it's just you be who you want to be. There is not really a clear defined American. The definition of American is not a definition and that is what is so beautiful about it. We follow core values together and get to live your own life. I think that's the ideal. We've been fortunate enough to experience that. But we are both White, American native, American-named Muslims.

For other participants, varying community responses to 9/11 highlighted aspects of the existence of discrimination between and within Muslim communities. Most importantly, it is clear to these participants that discrimination between ethnicities or political agendas indicate that the community's values and ethics have departed from Islam.

Although our community didn't have an issue, our communal talks, we have *jummah*, spiritual talks, which are more about improving our neighborhoods and getting ourselves together. There were other communities who give talks on what goes on in the Middle East and even supporting their efforts.

The day of September 11th, I came out of work early to pick up the kids because I was so worried, I hadn't heard from my husband and I wanted all of us to be together. The reaction of the teachers, how they were almost celebrated. I had a big problem with that. I told them that they are not using their Islamic sense to think about these things. You are celebrating someone that did something wrong. Just because you feel that this does justice for Muslims, there is no favor to you to come out of your spiritual self. The whole thing that is going on over there, it is a political, it is a political battle that has been going on for years that has nothing to do with religion so I have to kind of like watch which communities I get involved in because some communities have hidden agendas. Even some of the mosques. Here in America, we have to be very careful as Muslims of which community we going to be a part of because some have their own agendas. Most of the time its immigrant Muslims.

Even African-American Muslims engage with immigrant Muslims and get on those same agendas and that happens because there is just so much here in America with African-American Muslims with racial issues that they are like, you know what, the Arabs got our back because the Arabs go through this too. We will be fighting together for this cause or this agenda. That is where we see that it is coming away from Islam.

Just because we're all Muslims we are not all together, in that sense. Sometimes I face more discrimination from people who might be Indian or Pakistani or Arab or whatever the case may be because people focus more on tribalism than on Islam.

Nonetheless, all six couples reported that the majority of Muslim communities are open and welcoming to all races and ethnicities, that Islam is specifically designed to be multicultural and pluralistic and to counteract discrimination.

Even with the “Minnesota Nice” [a term for the attitude of politeness in the region] there are family members or groups that said, "Oh, you married a White girl." My objective was to marry a Muslim. I think that happens across the board that in the Muslim community that irregardless of skin color, if a Muslim man married a non-Muslim woman there would be that question again. So everything from national, ethnic, racial... how there is discrimination, classicism and interracial issues—light skinned, dark skinned in Islam there is no White better than Black, no Black better than White, no Arab better than non-Arab.

Through the years, we have experienced cross-cultural or cross-racial, etc., in being Muslim. I think where there has not been as much cross-cultural or ethnic mixing [in other religions].

Another thing about Islam that is also misunderstood: people believe Islam is just Arabs. Really and truly, it's all over the world and all over the country. It's the fastest growing religion. It's not a race thing, not a color thing. Certain principles and certain virtues that we try to mold lives by and try to live up, be examples of our Prophet. And a lot of people misunderstand. If anybody actually studied the doctrine of the religion of Muhammad, he was not on this earth just for Muslims, he was in service to all of mankind. You would never know if you didn't research.

Discrimination in Light of 9/11 and The Iraq War

In looking at whether participants have experienced an increase in religious discrimination since 9/11 and The Iraq War, responses were split with eight participants agreeing that there was an increase following 9/11 and four participants explicitly stating

that there was not an increase following 9/11. The majority of participants agreed that immediately following 9/11 there was a significant increase in “paranoia,” “fear,” “hatred” and “suspicion” towards Muslims.

The following statements describe the immediate after-effects of 9/11 on the Muslim community:

After 9/11 it was an interesting and trying time to be Muslim because you experienced a lot of people, a lot of people went into hiding.

For me it's been probably a little different because I cover. You clearly know who I am. After 9/11, I remember sisters talking about it and everyone being so fearful. And we are from New York and we have family that worked in the twin towers, so it hit home even doubly. I remember some of the sisters telling me that their husbands were telling them not to cover because they were just fearful, people were getting smashed, people were screaming and yelling at them. The one thing that I didn't want to do was to fall into that level of fear. Maybe I was too cocky. I remember being fearful, not for myself but for my kids... I remember being in the supermarket right after 9/11, I remember someone staring at me... I was just waiting in preparation. There were times when I was driving home after 9/11, and someone would pull up next to my car and say something to me.

All participants agreed that even if 9/11 did not increase discrimination, it surfaced underlying discrimination towards Muslims that was already a part of American culture, namely the discriminatory practice of trying to preserve the United States as a Judeo-Christian country. One participant aptly responded:

I think there was a cluster of events that year and the following year and there are those who just continued the hatred that was in people's minds. That hatred is being stoked by those same people still today whether it is radio hosts, commentators, that kind of establishment who really make it their agenda to vilify Muslims and to keep that hatred stoking, and to make sure that this country is always a Judeo-Christian country. Even though there are more Muslims than Jews here, never could they accept that that might be a possibility. So that has extended from the past. That has been the source of some of the discrimination going on today.

Reiterating the above statement, another participant explained how discrimination against Muslims follows in a long line of historical discrimination against one targeted group over another, and that 9/11 thrust Muslims into the primary target group.

It was Super Tuesday I think. I said, "I am not crazy about Hillary. I am going to vote for Obama." This guy just blurts out, "If Obama gets elected we are going to have *shariah* [Islamic law and rule] in this country." These things happen frequently in the political realm that I interact with. In that way, it hasn't significantly changed. I taught history for a while, starting with the communists, and then the Japanese...my grandfather tells me about the Irish and the Italians when they came over...now it's the Muslims.

In addition, participants noted that 9/11 brought a heightened level of awareness of Islam. To paraphrase how two participants put it, 9/11 "put the light on Islam itself, for better or for worse."

All of the sudden after 9/11 it was "Islamists, terrorists, Al Qaeda, Islam is the enemy. We need to look at the mosque and the *masjid*." Even on the liberal side which has been nice actually, the media has been talking about how Muslims are oppressed and need to be protected. So certainly for better or for worse, it came to this incredible awareness.

Another participant elucidated that 9/11 surfaced pre-existing discriminatory government initiatives and practices, in stating, "Not that that didn't happen years ago everything from the FBI, CIA, wiretapping, etc., etc. The general population of the United States is just more aware of Muslims." Therefore, it is because of 9/11 that the general population became privy to the existence of these government practices. Furthermore, following 9/11, these pre-existing government practices have significantly expanded and further eroded Muslim civil rights due to sustained "paranoia" and "fear of Muslims."

Participants further stated,

There is a bill right now to increase worker surveillance which will probably target Muslims more. The multi-national system has been harder on Muslim charities and it's only gotten worse, but I have heard a lot of Muslim community

groups who have tried to expand their worship or get permits who are really fighting an uphill battle. Organizationally, I think it is certainly increasing, but all this wondering about Iran, Pakistan, Lebanon and Palestine it is just tinged with, not outright racism, but just fear of Muslims, "We don't know what they are up to. Behind closed doors they say one thing and in public they say another." All this paranoia.

Similarly, one participant described how discrimination towards Muslims invoked by 9/11 (or that surfaced because of it) became embedded in and part of peoples' anger or reaction to the event and all events following it.

There really is no way to say whether it increased or decreased. I mean after 9/11 pretty much everyone was angry and it's been stagnate since then. People are angry for different reasons, just kind of comes off [on Muslims].

Regarding The Iraq War, participants had a range of responses. For one couple, the focus on The Iraq War and the growing public opinion against the war in the United States has created a unified political stance that no longer centers on anti-Muslim rhetoric (of the "good" U.S. versus the "evil" Muslim world) but rather anti-war rhetoric. The couple stated,

The backlash against The Iraq War has kind of taken the focus a little bit off of the Muslims. They are not the hugest enemy in the world that are going take over. I think the American public and the media and the politicians have come to realize that this war, based on imaginary grounds, was not worth it, it doesn't mean anything for our cause. I think it helps that we agree on that, that we should not have invaded Iraq. I think it takes the pressure off Muslims because most of the American public is more worried about this war more than anything else.

Moreover, the couple further stated that Muslim self-advocacy has grown and strengthened in response to the civil rights abuses following 9/11. Thus, Muslims have not felt an increase in discrimination since The Iraq War because they have set up systems of protection and advocacy.

But [my wife] is absolutely right, there is just this tremendous focus on The Iraq War and that even what's happening in Afghanistan... So I would say there hasn't been an increase, there has been a lot of Muslim advocacy going on and civil

rights groups like the Council of American-Islamic Relations and lawyer groups who have actually pursued cases of discrimination. Just because the foundation of American law is to be fair, to be just, equal opportunity, most of these law suits have held up in courts and proved to Muslims that there is law, there is order. The hatred that people have in their hearts isn't something that can be controlled, but there is due process.

On the other side of the argument, three participants reported an inability to express their opinion regarding The Iraq War for fear of appearing to favor Islamic rule or seeming to be disloyal or unpatriotic to overall American culture.

Because I am wearing the scarf I am the enemy. That goes through my head all the time. It hasn't happened at all, I am wary of it. It has to do with some early stuff, where the President said, "If you are not for the war, you are against America."

I have really strong feelings about the Iraq war, and outside of my circle of friends or people I feel comfortable with, I am very careful about who I share my opinions with. I am just assuming that I look Arab and I look Muslim and if I am against the Iraq War they are automatically going to think that I am unpatriotic or treasonous or something like that. You end up being more self-censored unless you can gauge that this person is ready to hear what you have to say.

The Impact of Religious Discrimination on Dynamics of Coupleship

This final section documents participants' responses to questions of how religious discrimination has impacted their relationship. Most importantly, this section covers the strengths Muslim couples utilize in coping with religious discrimination.

Strengths as a Couple in Coping with Religious Discrimination

Couples were asked, "As a couple, what do you think are your strengths? Have you used these strengths to cope with experiences of religious discrimination or other forms of discrimination?" The general response from participants included strengths such as resilience, compatibility, shared family ritual and prayer, and supporting and strengthening each other in order to be able to cope with discrimination.

Regarding compatibility, couples admitted that “one of our strengths as a couple is that we like each other,” “we are matched intellectually,” or “we are very understanding of one another.” All six couples specifically recognized their ability to communicate with one another as a clear, over-arching strength. The following quotes expound on this strength of communication:

I guess our strengths are that we are very open with one another. We can talk to each another about anything no matter what it is. We are very understanding of each other. We have been together for a while now so we can almost anticipate what the other is going to say, do, think, that sort of thing. So we can work with each other in that way.

It is also a big bonus to have to the same beliefs. We don't have to have discussions or decisions about how to raise our daughter or how to do this or how to do that. We are on the same page in that sense. We have the same beliefs and same basic tenants of how we want to raise our daughter. And how we want to live our lives. To be in that state of mind where we agree on things makes things ten times easier.

The strength of couples' communication is built on the foundation of their shared faith and practice of Islam. Couples described, at length, the strength afforded to their relationship by Islam. One participant described how Islam not only fostered communication between them as a couple, it aided them in coping with experiences of religious discrimination.

Common understanding, you know, we haven't had to confront difficult situations. I know that [my wife] faces a lot more of that and speaks to me about it and I listen and provide support. It's the shared understanding that she doesn't have to defend her actions or her beliefs or I don't have to explain why something offends me, we just know that it is wrong when we watch something on TV. We can identify what is discrimination and talk about it. So I think being able to talk about Islam on common ground and not have intellectual disagreements regarding, say, terrorism or Sunni/Shia or very, very conservative or very liberal versions of Islam. We have avoided entirely those agreements. So that is one strength of ours.

In a simple statement, one couple captured how having a general compatibility, and a shared basis in Islam has given them a significant capacity for resilience despite such weighted experiences of religious discrimination:

As a couple, I think our strength is resilience. We are very resilient. We have been through hard times. We hang in there.

Four couples remarked that an identified strength is that they provide balance for one another, either balance in personalities, perspectives or when “one will fall weak, for some reason at that time, the other will be stronger.” The following participant detailed how her husband provides balance to her personality as well as balance to the way in which she incorporates Islam into her response to religious discrimination.

I think [my husband] is a lot more tolerant than I am in that I am a little more of a "hothead" than you are, would you agree? [husband laughs] When I am talking to you, I am thinking to myself, "We have really had safety with each other, with this topic anyway." Even though I had a lot to learn and learned a great deal from him about my own religion, I think that I am at a spot now where I don't need the coaching for the basics but I still want to discuss which way to go when we get to a juncture. It has helped to calm me down a little bit with how I respond to people. The Islamic way of responding to conflict is really a calm, listening attitude which is certainly not my way of doing things. I like hollering and cussing and carrying on about things. I only do that rarely now. And I have to say that I love my husband dearly and I try not to embarrass him more than once a week anymore. And he also seems to have an affection for my insanity so I don't want to totally get rid of it.

Similarly, another participant explained how he, as a Pakistani immigrant, turns to his wife to provide balance to his personality as well as provides a cultural bridge to “the American side” of things when experiencing religious discrimination.

I think [my wife] is a very pragmatic person, very down-to-earth and straightforward. Sometimes I am not like that, I ended up being, partly because of my training, partly because of where I come from, I end up being very kind of emotional, end up over-intellectualizing things and she can bring it down and just say, “You've got to remember, Americans generally can be kind of pragmatic, straightforward people and this is how they are looking at the problem or this is

how they are looking at the situation, they don't know the details and whatnot. You've got to just keep that in mind." I think that works best for us as a couple.

Use of Shared Islamic Faith Practice in Coping with Religious Discrimination

In order to account for how Islam specifically supports couples with religious discrimination, couples were asked, "Do you feel you as a couple have turned to Islam to cope with experiences of religious discrimination?" Couples reflected that, in utilizing Islam to respond to issues of discrimination, they not only know and can relate to one another's experience of prejudice, they can then positively affirm one another's character, their basic goodness, and their Muslim identity. One female participant explained how her and her husband comfort each other after receiving discrimination:

We help each other. I'll come home and he'll say, "Don't worry. You come from your heart. You are a good Muslim mother and a good wife."

Again, couples can provide basic character affirmation for one another. Moreover, according to participants, being seen as a good Muslim in your spouses' eyes is far more important than how others perceive you. Two female participants described how their marriage supports them in continuing to wear the *hijab* despite how it identifies them as Muslim and, as a result, how they are constant targets for religious discrimination.

I think one thing as a couple, it does help that he is supportive. You know if I am having a difficult time with *hijab* and people think I should take it off and this and that, it does help to have a husband that also believes what I believe in.

I will give you some examples of women who took off *hijab* just to blend in and, while you are saying about the strengths of Muslim couples, that none of them are married the ones who took it off. I mean I think, one of my friends who is married we were discussing this phenomenon. We were saying in marriage you don't have to impress someone else, you are worth something if your husband thinks you are worth something. Marriage really helps. It deters that self-doubt, that insecurity.

Similarly, as documented earlier, while couples turn to one another to support their Islamic practice, conversely couples turn to Islam as a shared source of strength and support for one another.

If there is an issue going on, we go back to Allah first. In that way, we both support each other. We give each other advice. We are both servants of the same creator. We are both able to support each other very well. If we were both servants to different areas, if one of us was a servant to money and the other was a servant to other desires whatever it would be, we would be in different directions and there would be a lot of discord. Because our same source is the same place, even if there is disagreement, even if there is a different way of dealing with it, we have a general understanding together and that is priceless.

Couples reported looking to the life of Muhammad as an exemplary and inherited model of how to operate as a husband-wife dyad in Islam. Moreover, couples stated that they take strength from Muhammad's ability to fulfill his role as husband, father, leader, provider and devotee while in the midst of similar persecution. The following participants depicted how the history of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad provides a guideline for Muslim couples when enduring discrimination.

I personally have turned to Islam for some sort of serenity. You look at the lives of the prophets and you look at the life of the Prophet Muhammad himself and he was viciously attacked and slandered against, society was working against him at every sort of level. The thing that I get from that is: you need to be humble, you need to be patient and endure all of this because there are people who don't know any better and those are the people you can reach out to, just kind of open their eyes up to, not for conversion, just to be neutral, that is what Islam is all about. And to realize that there are people in the world who have malice and evil intentions and that there is nothing special about me or the Muslim community today about getting attacked because it's always been like that.

We have the same source of understanding. There are countless books just on how the Prophet Muhammad interacted, how he interacted with his wives. We have so many examples of interaction and documented sources on how he lived. We go back to that. We both share. Myself, I always try to go back and fix it and try to be a better husband and better father. My father always said, "There is not guidebook to life" and that is the one area where I have to respectfully disagree. There is a guidebook in life. If there wasn't we would have a pretty unjust

existence. Going back to the Qur'an and the Prophet and how he lived the word of God. His example is the walking word of God. We always go back to his example.

Lastly, couples located Muslim activism and community involvement as a way in which they turn to Islam to cope with experiences of discrimination. Not only is the Muslim community a place in which couples are relieved from bearing the burden of religious discrimination, couples are strengthened by drawing together and “empowering others.”

I think as a family we involve ourselves in the community more because it's a safe zone. That is how we as a couple and a family cope: turn to community and community events which uplift you.

Negative Effects of Discrimination on Coupleship

A predominant response to whether “religious discrimination negatively affects you as a couple” was that discrimination, if anything, has actually brought them closer. One participant likened it to how discrimination has tested her faith, and that when her faith is questioned, she digs deeply into her heart, answers her doubts, and her faith becomes stronger. The participant continued,

Usually when just two people are as close as we are, and have a positive relationship, incidents like that will bring them closer as opposed to ripping them apart. We have the same beliefs so we handle them in the same way. I already know how [my husband] is going to handle it so we can play it off each other pretty well. It usually doesn't cause any discord between us.

Couples described how they fortified their relationship against such a negative impact by sanctioning their homes as safe havens from such negativity. One couple repeated how, “One of things that we first set up [when we got married] was he said, ‘Everything inside these walls is Qur'an and Sunnah. They can do anything they want out there, but in here we have Qur'an and Sunnah.’” Another participant affirmed the home as

a retreat from outside discrimination in stating that “when you leave the house, you are geared up, with so many layers of protection so you don't freeze to death, protection so that you can go out in the world and then come back and retreat.”

Three couples identified discrimination against Muslim women as “a negative element that impacts our life and our discussions.” One mixed-race couple talked extensively on the issue of discrimination against women as negatively impacting their relationship.

I am not wearing my scarf anymore because I needed a break from the whole being "on" and I just needed a break. I think because [my husband] grew up having always been Brown that maybe he is used to that where I know I can just take off my scarf and everyone can see me as the average American girl like they did before. So I know that I *can* get a break from that. With my son, its hard being out in the public because I don't want them to see him as any different just because I am wearing the scarf. And so, because I haven't worn a scarf, [my husband] believes that a woman should wear a scarf, in that way I think it has affected our relationship. I think we have come to terms with me not wearing a scarf and me trying to figure out if I will wear a scarf again and when. In that way it has affected our relationship. It's not easy being at the park and you just want to be a regular mom and kid at the park doing regular fun things and then you have a scarf and instantly turns into, like, “I wonder what her parenting style is. I wonder if she beats her kids.” Again it's all me thinking, you know, I don't know what the person is actually thinking, they might not even notice.

However, two of the couples were clear that gender discrimination did not cause a negative impact on their relationship per se, but rather brought extreme negativity into their home. One participant specified the extent to which discrimination has had a presence in their lives,

Not just from a personal, but from a governmental or other additional level that we can feel, that even though we are citizens, we can feel a lot of negative energy, so that maybe we should just leave this country and go somewhere else where we don't feel like an outsider on a daily basis.

Two couples identified 9/11 as a source of negative impact on their relationship not due to subsequent discrimination as much as due to shared trauma. For one couple, the husband worked near the twin towers on 9/11 and was exposed to the trauma of the terrorist attack. For this couple, they shared a sense of devastation and fear with their community immediately after 9/11 had to draw upon their faith and their connection to recover. Their description is detailed below:

When he had to go to work after September 11th, I think it was two weeks or so because his building was somewhat destroyed a little. They had to fix the building before he could go back to work. I think he went through a depression with it because it was a hard time. Those who were affected and those who had to go back into the city right after, it was very hard for them. My husband did view a lot of the body parts and the smoke. He saw the plane hit the building. It was traumatizing for him. So I was nervous about him going back, "What are people going to say because you are Muslim?" I don't think they bothered him. I think we were hurt and traumatized by everything, everybody was supported by everyone. No one was like, "[He] is a Muslim, he probably knew this would happen." They were suffering too. That was a trying time for us because it was very difficult for him to go back to work and I know that he had to go back so I know I had to be very supportive in him going back to work. That was a bad time... He kind of just was in a depressive state for a while so that was pretty hard. So I had to support that along with taking my kids out of that school. It was difficult. I think that our strength in God is what pulled us through. We did a lot of reading, a lot of prayers.

She basically talked about all the emotions. It was surreal. The whole experience was very surreal. Having her there. I really feel that it's hard for men sometimes to talk about emotions to the wife but, especially at that time, I felt happy. I felt blessed to have her in my life because I know she was there. She's like the glue that keeps us together. I think that sometimes you get so caught up in emotions that you go through all your life that. [inaudible]. I think that I always have to turn to that strength. I think I always have to remind myself even though we have hard times we have each other.

For the other couple who identified 9/11 as impacting their relationship, they pointed out that because 9/11 made them objects of suspicion they are "more self-conscious and paranoid" or "upset and anxious" about the discrimination and violence that could be

directed to them. Discrimination negatively impacts their relationship in that the husband cannot protect his wife from experiencing discrimination nor can he entirely console and reassure her during this time of increased hatred towards Muslims.

About it affecting the dynamics of our relationship, I would say it has had an affect in that, part of it is our personalities in that [my wife] is much more self-conscious and paranoid about public displays about religion than I am. "Its bad," I say, "Its just a storm we are going through, kind of weather the storm, keep doing what you are doing, don't let this knock you from what you are doing because if it does those forces will overtake your force of good." I think at all times, there are times when I get upset and anxious, but I think it has affected our dynamics in that [my wife] is much more afraid of this kind of stuff now than I am.

Difference in Public and Private

Couples were asked whether they thought "there was a difference in how you are in public and in private with one another" in order to gather information on the ways in which couples experience themselves in the prejudicial public arena versus in the safety of their homes. The question focused on whether couples felt disempowered or empowered together as a visibly Muslim couple in public.

All couples unanimously stated that there was no difference in how they are in public or private together. Couples claimed that "we always represent Islam in our private live and our public lives." Two participants expounded that, in effort to live according to God as a couple, it easy to continue to be a stable unit in the public eye despite how others might perceive you:

We consider that we always represent Islam in our private lives and our public lives. And we don't do that for anybody except God. We are always pleasing him. There should never be a contradiction between how you are perceived and how you want to be perceived. Islam makes everything easy in life. It makes everything easy for us.

The values stay the same. The respect for each other. The words we give to each other, it's just those core values we don't throw out the window just because the

door is shut. That is the sign of someone who is a hypocrite. I don't know why, probably being religious, whatever the reason, probably to impress people, to live your life...we have an idea called *tawla*, that is awareness of God, that he is always watching you so that you are accountable. At the end of the day, you are going to ask the right way, because you are trying to please God. That is the common denominator of our lives.

The difficulty for couples is that irregardless of living for God, they are aware of public contempt towards them. Four of the six couples decidedly joke about this prejudice. One example of the common joke is as the following participant retold it:

I joked with [my husband] that people are going to think that he is oppressing me because he is the male Muslim who is going to dominate his wife. In public you have to be extra nice to me. You know, you are couple, a disagreement about should we buy this, should we not buy this, you should just listen to me because people are going to think you are going to go home and beat me. You have to be extra nice and give me whatever I want.

Four participants reported that they relish the experience of being in public with their spouse as it allows them to be role models to other Muslim couples and to feel pride in displaying and feeling “the wealth of the Muslim family.” The following three respondents elucidated this point:

Yeah, like when I am in public with him I feel more of a sense of pride about myself but when I am by myself...and I do kind of like to show our interaction in front of people. I don't really change it from when I am with him alone. I feel like it's just another opportunity to show how Muslim couples interact together. I am not walking ten steps behind him. He is holding the kids. You know, it's not like the idea people have of Muslim families. I would say that I feel that I have more to show, like the wealth of the Muslim family.

I am happy for people to see that I am Muslim you know because I do want people to know that. When you come to work or a company event or we go out somewhere I am happy because you know, many people don't know that I am Muslim and they would lump me up as maybe Hindu in the end or not being very religious. [The *hijab*] is such a total symbol of being observant in Islam that I am actually pleased that it is clear—this is when I am with co-workers—so I can bring up the topic in the kitchen and say, "Hey, you know, I see your wife wears *hijab*," and that discussion goes into Islam and Muslims are so hungry to talk about Islam because its so misunderstood. For me, being with my wife as a couple

is an opening into that discussion. Not that I want to always talk about Islam and it certainly has had the opposite effect as [my wife] mentioned.

Affect of Discrimination on Couple's Children

Participants were asked, “If you have children, how do you see the present day social and political climate affecting your children and, as a result, affecting the dynamics in your relationship?” Two participants responded that it is tough on their children to have to distinguish between what they see and hear about Muslims from who they are and what Islam teaches them. All of the participants echoed one another in stating that their primary goal in combating this was to teach their children to do their own thinking and to incorporate Islam into their lives through their own volition.

I think that as they discover who they are its kind of tough for them. They see stuff on the war, they see all these things "Islam this, Islam that." And they are like, "Wait a minute, we are not like that." I think that we have a responsibility to teach them that we are not like that. These are problems that are political, you know, society problems. We try to explain to them and try to speak upon that even though we are in America, things go wrong here. It's kind of tough and challenging. We are blessed that we have two children, they really are, they are Muslims. That helps quite a lot. They do it on their own. They take it up on themselves. It makes it easier.

I think our main goal is to raise her so that she is confident in herself and her beliefs and her family. We don't want her just out there. We are proactively against [discrimination]. We say, “It's okay to be different. It's okay to believe what you believe. If someone is different that's okay, that is their opinion and this is yours.” That sort of thing. I think that will pre-empt a lot of it just to make her build her own confidence in it. We kind of have an open policy about it. If she has any questions, she can always come to us and ask and we will help her work through problems. Being in education I have thought about this kind of down the road. Just working with children all the time and helping children who aren't our children deal with these same issues so we can kind of pull what we learned from our fields into helping our daughter. That is how to proactively prevent it instead of fighting against it.

Rather than through direct teaching, one couple stated that their children have learned from them by example, by witnessing, observing and hearing both the

discrimination their parents have experienced, but also how they deal with that prejudice through the practice of Islam.

Our children have lived through our lives presumably and they have seen some of that, "bamboozled, hoodwinking and running amok." And they've seen times maybe when we've been hurt, some of that prejudice, discrimination from another person's perspective. They might have been through everything from hearing about it or seeing it. I've talked with the children about how it is that you are doing different things. They are soaking up information—[wife interjects] they are watching, they are seeing things go on that we don't necessarily consciously appreciate or observe.... I am very convinced than example is a much better way to teach than lecture.

Three of the couples examined their fears of “the hatred they might experience” in growing up as Muslims in America. These quotes are included in full as they demonstrate the range of concerns of Muslim parents—from their daughters being targeted due to *hijab*, to the difficulty in representing Iraqis (or terrorists) who killed American soldiers.

I do deeply, deeply worry about it. It is a social challenge. I covered my hair in middle school, and then there wasn't any preconceived notion about it. I worry about that. I worry about the hate they might encounter, more than anything I worry about the hate they might encounter. Right now my daughters see someone wearing *hijab* and they are like, "Oh, look mom!" Like even in this magazine article, they are showing a Muslim woman in a Muslim country and my daughter said, "Look, mom!" but if she could only read that article and what they are writing about Muslims and there will be a day where she will hate it when she sees a Muslim in a magazine. That's all. I worry about people hating them.

We are not in control of what happens to her in the future. We will do the best job we can. It takes some of the nervousness out to say, you know what, at the end of the day, God's will is more powerful than our own. We will just have to learn along the way, do the best that we know how to do. I worry about things like if she wears the *hijab*. I have some middle school students, a group of twelve or thirteen year old girls who wear the *hijab*. They were at a pizza place where people called them "terrorists" and chased them down. I worry about things like that, but at the same time we are both active members of an Islamic school and that might make it easier that she is part of an Islamic school and has that strong identity, but we don't want her to live in a shell. We don't want to protect her and put her in bubble where she not going to be ready to go out and live her life. Islam is a balance between protection and exposure. We just have to strike that right balance. It's just like a sprout growing. You want to protect it, give it water and

light, but at the same time it's not going to grow if you don't give it some exposure. It's a tough job.

I am quite worried about that. There are soldiers returning from the war. They might have lost a limb. [The media] might have a visual of a woman with a scarf paired up against a roadside bombing. How you could not see a woman with a scarf, even if she is with a child or not, and not have her produce some anxiety and fear? It's not possible. Or you have soldiers who aren't returning home, and they are leaving their kids childless and those kids will know that my Dad didn't come back and it's because of somebody that looks like you. And so I am worried what our son is going to have to face, just dealing with the next generation.

Two of the couples also examined their fears of their children falling prey to American culture, American values, and other societal factors that contradict the values and practice of Islam. For these couples, the dilemma has fallen on whether to keep their children protected in Muslim schools or how to guide them through the transition from an Islamic environment into general society.

Definitely: society, American values, crazy people doing these crazy heinous crimes, violating young girls and young boys, just sick, so bad that [inaudible]. We tell them that these things are so inappropriate... Even in the environment that the children are in now, our children go to public school, I felt that being in a Muslim school would keep them in a protected environment. That they wouldn't have to deal with [inaudible] situation because Muslim children aren't safe in the real world.

I think for us the biggest concern is violence, drugs, issues around sexualization, television, movies you name it. Those are the biggest concerns for me. Our children are 11, 12 and 13 so our eldest will be graduating this year. In some way, she won't be protected and encapsulated in a Muslim school... Those are probably the biggest concerns: how this teaching, how being in this Muslim environment (we have Sunday night dinner and are discussing these things), how that will really play out when they are not around us anymore or when they are in an environment that is not an Islamic environment and have not really been affected or been touched by the negativity that is out there. I wonder how shell-shocked, if you will, they will be when they are in situations or circumstances and how they will be able to react and get themselves out of something or be strong enough to pull away from something and not have the pressure.

Couples, overall, did not remark on how these fears and concerns have shaped or affected their relationship. One participant, in reflecting on the impact of 9/11 and The Iraq War on her child said, “I think he is still so young. I think we haven't fully seen the affects of the war yet on the soldiers. I think its going to be years in the making so I haven't seen it affect our relationship yet.”

Other Sources of Support

Lastly, couples offered where they turn to for support—mental health services, Muslim community, family, etc.—aside of one another. All of the couples stated that the Muslim community is an essential, vital support system. Two of the couples stated that family is more difficult to utilize as a support because they don't share the same perspectives or beliefs. Four participants spoke of turning to those around them—friends, family, non-Muslim and Muslim alike.

Remarkably, three of the couples described how, having not grown up with a stable, positive family structure, Islam and the Muslim community have provided them with a strong, cohesive family role model and family system.

Definitely. Family is important. I am establishing our family structure and a family image right now. Like the generations before have been established. [inaudible] I have to give my children what I didn't have. I didn't have a family structure, I didn't have Islam, I didn't have the doctrines, I didn't have any of those. I feel blessed and fortunate that I can give my children the life I didn't have.

I recently formed a men's support group—[wife interjects] I didn't know that— One thing we've learned about dealing with life is that we can't enclose ourselves and not use our resources. It's actually helpful. We have to deal with everything but it's a lot harder, like, for me personally. I am the first family structure success story in my family. It's hard sometimes because you don't know all the answers, there was no role model to base your decisions on. It becomes very challenging.

All twelve participants spoke of the Muslim community as full of resources and services for supporting family stability, for advising couples, and for building friendships, or men's and women's religious and social groups. In addition, two participants detailed how their own contribution to the community, particularly in acting as role models and mentors for younger couples or youth or other brothers and sisters in their *masjid*, is in and of itself a support system.

A lot of it for me is the community. I actually thrive on it and I really need it. Without it, it's very difficult for me. It's not even really about talking about Islam or anything like that. It's just the presence of people who understand you. You are not some representative of Al Qaeda. They know who you are. Just to be able to talk about normal things, like the weather or anything else. It's a relief. I can breathe. I don't have to be constantly in political mode and talking about things. The community is a very, very big thing for me. It's actually a requirement for me when we move to different places.

I know, just very subjectively it's a lot of support, these are people that share my beliefs and we talk about religious topics and you get that energy from the weekly prayer, from the service, knowing your religious identity. Just doing that weekly obligation and reaching out provides a lot of energy for me and besides that I have my friends from college and my brothers these are people that I talk to and discuss being Muslim in general. I would say for me just being around Muslims presence in general gives me a lot.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the fifteen questions asked of six Muslim couples. It is clear that in initially defining “what it means to be a Muslim,” all participants uniformly take refuge in Islam's monotheism—the absolute of a single God—and the wisdom and guidance of Islamic texts as passed down from God through Muhammad. This collective response from participants, again, reflects the Muslim creed, the *shahada*, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger.” For all participants as well, anchoring their lives in monotheism provides them with both a rich

inner life of “balance, having a peaceful disposition, a primary and ultimate truth and a clarity of purpose” as well as a rich outer life through the practice of the faith.

Participants located their Muslim identity as their primary identity over other held racial, cultural, social or political identities. Regarding definitions of religious discrimination, participants were, across the board, unanimous in seeing discrimination as being treated differently, good or bad, based on your religion.

The manner in which participants responded with how they came to Islam and how they came together carried an evident theme of discovering or growing up in Islam on their own individual journey, but then enhancing their practice and belief through marriage. In other words, a re-occurring theme was the extension of belief into practice through marriage, that marriage is “half of religion” and truly puts faith into action. Reciprocally, having an Islamic foundation in marriage holds couples together, fosters their resiliency, and aids them in navigating through this time of increased discrimination against them—including discrimination by family, society, and within the Muslim community itself.

Couples’ experience of religious discrimination crosses all sectors of society—in public, in interpersonal exchanges, through government initiatives, in the media and in Muslim communities—however, it is clear that participants attributed the media and the government for the propagation and continued fueling of religious discrimination against Muslims. The primary recipients of discrimination in the public sector are Muslim women as their headscarf identifies their religion and, thus, specifically targets them. Participants stated that responses to experiences of discrimination were to counteract

negative media and government images with mass re-education in interpersonal exchanges, public forums, or community activism.

Couples' identified other types of discrimination they concurrently experience, namely gender and racial/ethnic discrimination. For women, the combination of their headscarf (being visibly Muslim) with stereotypes about Muslim men being oppressive and Muslim women being ignorant of feminist values, places them in a uniquely painful position of experiencing dual discrimination. Similarly, for African-American Muslims, racial prejudice and religious discrimination is part and parcel of an identity struggle. Additionally, African-American Muslims experience rejection from within immigrant Muslim communities for practicing an indigenous form of Islam. Lastly, for "brown-skinned" participants, they are often mistaken as an Arab and subject to racial stereotyping of Arab Muslims being terrorists.

All couples agreed that while it is difficult to determine whether discrimination has increased since 9/11 and The Iraq War, it is clear that these sociopolitical events have surfaced underlying discrimination that was already part of American attitudes towards Muslims.

Regarding couples' strengths in coping with religious discrimination, numerous strengths were identified, the majority of which are rooted in their shared Islamic faith. Most notably, couples reassure one another of their basic goodness and their Islamic character as positive, charitable, and truthful. Couples uniformly turn to Muhammad as an exemplary figure who was likewise persecuted but still succeeded in being a good Muslim husband, father, teacher and devotee. Couples had little to say regarding the negative effects of discrimination on their relationship. Likewise, couples did not locate

any differences with how they are in public and in private together. Couples were confident in their faith fortifying them against the discriminatory public eye and any negativity that might reach into and alter their relationship. However, they had a multitude of fears and concerns for the negative effects of discrimination on their children's lives.

Lastly, couples jointly and unanimously elaborated on the strength and support they derive from sharing their faith together with a larger Muslim community. The community, founded in Islamic principles, is a vital core of their resiliency and ability to cope with religious discrimination.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the strengths fundamental to and utilized by Muslim American couples as they endure the vicissitudes of Islamophobia in our current sociopolitical climate. The narratives of six Muslim American couples revealed the complexities of the experience of being a Muslim in America—the conflicts in identity formation, the power of relationships with other Muslims, the foundation of marriage, and the trauma of discrimination and its affects. This chapter situates the study's findings within the broad frame of the literature review. The findings are discussed in relation to the current strains of Islamic studies and multicultural counseling literature as presented in literature review. The findings are examined in the following order of key findings regarding: participant demographics, Muslim identity formation, the Muslim American experience of discrimination in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War, the strengths of Muslim American couples and, lastly, the manner in which Muslim American couples have utilized their strengths to cope with religious discrimination. Limitations of the study and the study's findings are included throughout the discussion section. The chapter closes with a review of implications for clinical practice.

Demographics

The demographics of the participant sample were accurately representative of the general Muslim American population. Firstly, the ethnic and racial variability amongst

the couples—including South Asian, Caucasian, African-American, Latin American and European—was decidedly representative of the uniquely diverse Muslim American population. In fact, the sample itself attested to the fact that the Muslim American population is, by far, the most multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial religion in the country as well as in the world (Esposito, 2000; Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2006; Smith, 2007). According to population polls, however, the largest segment of the Muslim American population, Arabs, were not a part of the participant sample (Bukhari, 2003; Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2004). Moreover, two ethnic and racial groups—Caucasians/Europeans and Latin Americans—were included in the study’s participant sample that did not either appear or factor in national statistics. As such, it is possible that this study incorporated a number of cultural, ethnic and racial voices that have yet to be accounted for in statistical gatherings or in current Muslim studies.

Following other national statistics (Ernst, 2003) of the Muslim American population (which is 90% Sunni) 100% of the sample was Sunni. Likewise, mirroring the population as a whole (Ba-Yunus et. al., 2006), 83% of the sample was under the age of 50. The majority of the couples (5 out of 6) lived in a highly urban area, and all were educated and worked at a professional level occupation. This reflects national statistics of Muslim American demographics regarding geographic location, education and occupation (Ba-Yunus et. al., 2006). Also in sync with national statistics (Ba-Yunus et. al., 2004), two participants were born abroad and the rest were born as naturalized U.S. citizens. Lastly, the sample significantly reflected the commitment to activism and community involvement of the general Muslim American population with 100% of the participants reporting membership and active involvement in religious organizations,

youth groups, *masjid* or mosques, and Islamic educational centers (Ba-Yunus et. al., 2006).

Overall, the sample was limited in being representative of the national population by its size (merely six couples) as well as its lack of inclusion of the largest Muslim ethnic population in America, Arabs.

Muslim Identity in America

Despite the extreme variability in cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds as well as indigenous and immigrant forms of Islam, Muslim Americans uniformly described a simple, common core to their Muslim identity. The root belief system in Islam is encapsulated in the *shahada*—There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger—the Muslim creed that exists so intimately with the religious practitioner that it is understood to be embedded in one’s every breath (Ernst, 2003). Therefore, Muslim identity consists of belief in a monotheistic tradition and in the revelation of the Qur'an as given to Muhammad. In other words, Muslim identity is simply comprised of: belief and practice, Allah and the Five Pillars of the Qur'an. As endlessly repeated by scholars of Islamic studies (Khan, 1998; Moore, 2003; Ernst, 2003) as well as the study’s participants, the many ways in which the term “Islam” has been extrapolated to serve political ends, to excuse human action, and to fulfill social and cultural agendas cannot be fused together with or superimposed onto this simple formulation of Islam.

In fact, the task of differentiating Islam as a faith practice from “Islam” as a political tool has been vital for Muslim Americans in defending their identity. Just as Muslim Americans, such as those in this study, distinguish and prioritize their individual, Muslim identity from that of their other personal social, political, ethnic or racial

categories, they work to distinguish the core faith practice of Islam from the multivariate social, political, ethnic or racial agendas which use the term “Islam” to achieve specific ends (Smith, 2007). Participants described how their Muslim identity is hijacked by larger institutions (the government and media) as well as sociopolitical events (9/11, The Iraq War, Israel/Palestine, etc.) which have turned “Islam” into a blanket term denoting hatred, vengeance, violence, oppression and evil. This negative use of “Islam” can work in two ways. On one hand, institutions such as the government and media equate “Islam” with evil for manipulation of public opinion, for political control, and other such reasons. On the other hand, some members of the Muslim population, as described both within the indigenous and immigrant Muslim Americans, equate “Islam” with justified vengeance towards Western oppressors, as if Islam itself condones violence and hatred. For the Muslim Americans interviewed who represent the vast majority of the Muslim population as a whole (Khan, 1998; Moore, 2003; Esposito, 2006), their Muslim identity—their faith practice, their Islamic moral and ethical codes of living a peaceful, charitable, honorable life—is usurped by those who selectively use “Islam” to promote certain agendas.

In essence, therefore, what Muslim Americans risk in claiming their Muslim identity is being laid open to a sheer multitude of negative assumptions, stereotypes, and contempt. As participants demonstrated and contemporary literature affirmed (Khan, 1998; Moore, 2003; Esposito, 2006), to claim one’s Muslim identity is to be constantly in the defensive, to be perpetually “on guard,” and to actively combat stereotypes through action, by living example or in word and speech. Therefore, to be a Muslim in America you have to stake claim not just to who you are, but more so, to who you are *not*. Endlessly, Muslim Americans must endure and defend themselves against being the

target of suspicion, curiosity, and derision—they are guilty unless proven innocent, they are considered malicious, ignorant, un-American unless proven otherwise. This chronic, repetitive onslaught of massive, culturally-permitted disdain towards one's primary (and sacred) identity not surprisingly falls under the rubric of trauma literature (Carter, 2007; Bryant-Davis, 2007).

Reflecting Islamic studies and multicultural counseling documentation (Kobeisy, 2004; Smith, 2007), participants emphasized their vital need for support and cohesion within the Muslim community. In attempt to balance the forces of oppression and assimilation with cultural integrity, Muslim Americans form and own their identity in and through community membership (Kobeisy, 2004). As a result of having to be hypervigilant about their public behaviors and presence in order to appear fully assimilated and non-threatening, Muslim Americans turn to their religious communities for sanctuary as well as for reaffirmation of their core identities. Supported by Islamic studies literature (Haddad & Smith, 2002; Kobeisy, 2004), the participants described how the majority of Muslim communities, in a sense of survival of faith and culture, countermand ethnic, racial, immigrant, indigenous, or conversion differences to form protective, cohesive, and vastly diverse communities.

In fact, what emerged from this study was that the Muslim community, for Muslim Americans, can and does function as an extended family unit. For eight out of the twelve participants who were converts—many of them were rejected by their families as well as being rejected by society and the culture at large. They exemplify the vital role that the Muslim community plays in supporting one's individual identity as a Muslim American and holding together one's communal identity as a Muslim couple and Muslim

family. The study provided evidence for how Muslim Americans turn to Islam and the Muslim community for strength, cohesiveness and the creation of a solid identity not as much in spite of the trauma of religious discrimination, but *in response* to it.

*The Psychological and Relational Impact of Religious Discrimination in Light of 9/11
and The Iraq War*

As an endemic force in the current sociopolitical climate, this study revealed that religious discrimination against Muslims can be categorized as trauma. This is supported by the study's findings of the vast psychological and relational impact of religious discrimination. Following contemporary literature on religious discrimination (Weller, 2004), participants located religious discrimination in all sectors of society and in all forms—religious prejudice, religious hatred, religious disadvantage, direct and indirect discrimination, and institutional and structurally embedded discrimination. Thereby, participants identified religious discrimination against Muslims in particular, as pervasive and endemic (Haddad, 2000). Participants further identified government initiatives and media (indirect discrimination) as the culprits behind the structural and institutional reinforcement of discrimination and the propagation of religious prejudice, hatred and disadvantage. Participant experience is largely reinforced by Islamic studies literature (Noakes, 2000; Ansari, 2004; McCloud, 2004) which extensively catalogued Muslim American's response to unbalanced media exposure and civil rights abuses by the government. Moreover, participants stated that it is from these larger sources that indirect discrimination trickles down into direct experience (through interpersonal exchanges and in the public). Islamic studies scholar, Beverly Amina McCloud (2004), echoes the experiences conveyed by the participants and captures the trauma of this trickle-down

effect of discrimination: “American Muslims have been inundated with questions about violence and terror in Islam, while they themselves are experiencing ongoing terror and violence” (p. 79).

Contrary to this study’s assumption that 9/11 and The Iraq War engendered and fostered this prevailing discrimination towards Muslim Americans, participants revealed a common understanding that these sociopolitical events, in fact, *surfaced underlying discrimination* that was already present in the culture as well as the government.

Participants uniformly stated that discrimination towards Muslim Americans has long been a part of both their personal experience as well as of principal messages given and actions taken by the media and government. As one participant stated, “What 9/11 did was shed a light on Islam itself, for better or for worse.” Participants felt that 9/11 effectively replaced the deeply engrained fear of “communism” with “terrorism,” where “Islam” was *already* fully equated with terror and violence. Mirroring the supposition by scholar Asma Gull Hasan (2002), African-American participants felt that the vilification and eradication of Islam in America has been occurring since Muslim slaves from Africa were forcibly converted. Following the work of Charles Negy and Christopher Ferguson (2004), participants agreed that since the advent of the country there has been a vicious struggle to preserve the notion that the United States is a Judeo-Christian country.

Nonetheless, due to 9/11’s surfacing of this underlying fear of Islam, participants described increased periods of “powerlessness, helplessness, despondency, and humiliation” and, consequently, heightened hyper-vigilance of unwanted public attention. September 11th significantly shifted participants’ confidence in being a public figure or claiming their right to a public voice. Many participants described the shift from feeling

the right to free speech (i.e., declaring their opinion about the government or The Iraq War) and the right to defend their civil rights (i.e., standing up for themselves at the airport) to feeling ashamed of their identity, living in fear of repercussions, sensing that they are seen as a terrorist and a disloyal American, and knowing that they will automatically be labeled “combative.”

Much of Islamic studies literature (Haddad, 2002; Bukhari, Nyang, Ahmad and Esposito, 2004) has reviewed the post-9/11 Muslim American experience of suppression and censorship. It should be noted that current literature as well as this study could not determine the impact of The Iraq War on the experience of Muslim Americans. Two participants suggested that the focus on The Iraq War and the growing public opinion against the war has created a unified political stance that no longer centers on anti-Muslim rhetoric (of the “good” U.S. versus the “evil” Muslim world) but rather anti-war rhetoric. Another participant surmised that “it is too early to foresee the impact of The Iraq War” in an over-arching sense, but did feel another shift in unwanted public attention in that she “represented someone who might have been the reason their father or mother was killed in Iraq.” Thus, this study captured some potential emerging changes due to The Iraq War—1) an emerging recognition that the American public was polarized in order to promote the war (i.e., good versus evil, the Christian world versus the Islamic world, and the United States versus the Middle East) and, therefore, Islam is no longer the target or 2), a further dividing of America versus Islam as Muslims in America begin to further represent “why we have not succeeded in Iraq” and “why so many U.S. soldiers have fruitlessly been killed.” It will be important to pay close attention to the

psychological and relational impact of The Iraq War on the Muslim American population, namely on those who fought in The Iraq War.

The study did capture, however, that although powerless against the vilification of Muslims in the media and government-sanctioned Islamophobia, participants primarily located their power and ability to combat discrimination in interpersonal exchanges. Participants reiterated that in interpersonal exchanges, they have the opportunity to transform from a figure representing a media image to a “natural, normal guy” inside the national character of the country (i.e., a regular American) with "a quiet, unobtrusive" faith practice. The majority of participants were involved in promoting positive images and messages of Islam in the public arena (via lectures, articles, by living example), and all participants felt that once they were “known” in direct conversation, through direct experience, they were able to actively disband stereotypes and discrimination.

However, participants elucidated that the prospect of being able to be “known” in direct conversation or through direct experience is complicated by compounding factors of discrimination—ethnic, racial, gender, and class discrimination. In other words, due to their race, Caucasian participants had the most freedom in their ability to relate their faith practice to those outside the Muslim community. At the same time, some felt favored within the Muslim community and thereby treated differently or another felt excluded due to her status as a White convert. This complexity exists for African-American Muslims who have a long history of racial exclusion from dominant American culture as well as mixed inclusion/exclusion within the Muslim community. Likewise this was the case for “brown-skinned” Muslim participants who appear Arab and thus are extremely

targeted outside the Muslim community and have the least capability to represent their voice or be “known” in the public arena.

Of course, participants echoed much of Islamic studies literature (Haddad, 2000; Smith, 2007) in emphasizing how much of this burden—the need to prove oneself a loyal, non-threatening American—falls to Muslim women. Muslim women are particularly targeted because if they wear the *hijab*, they are visibly Muslim in the public arena. One of the participants described the difference between being protected within her Muslim community to being in the public eye: “When I am in my religious circle like at the mosque or with my friends I feel free and independent and free-thinking. The only time I feel constricted is the *idea* that the general public has of me and I feel I have to fight that idea. That is the only pressure I feel as a Muslim woman, that I have to prove myself to the rest of the world.” Thus, while this study underpinned Islamic studies literature which describes the burden of religious discrimination on Muslim women and the strength they derive from their community, it revealed how this discrimination affects Muslim couples and how they are supported within the sacred union of an Islamic marriage.

The Strengths of Muslim American Couples

This study was comprised of couples who have successfully coped with the trauma of chronic religious discrimination. These are couples who have staked claim and found *refuge* in their Muslim identities, communities, and marriages despite the risk of unremitting cultural condemnation. While a limitation of the study is that it utilized a non-clinical sample, meaning participants represented a healthy, high functioning segment of the Muslim population, the sample provided evidence of the tremendous

strengths of Muslim American couples who have remained intact, built families, continued to adhere to their faith practice, and assiduously persisted in community involvement and activism (rather than isolating and shutting down). These couples provided key findings as to resilience in the face of chronic trauma. Their narratives shed light on some of the long-term effects of overt and underlying discrimination and, more importantly, the vital coping mechanisms utilized to combat the difficult dynamics of a daily struggle with living in an anti-Muslim era.

Much of the strengths evidenced by the couples interviewed were inherent to Islam itself. Firstly, Islam calls for embedding one's faith practice in a community (*ummah*) and building the community through the fundamental unit of marriage (Kobeisy, 2004; Smith, 2007). In Islam, as one participant put it, "marriage is half of religion," reiterating Islamic studies literature on how marriage constitutes the basic relational unit through which God operates and, reciprocally, how Muslim couples consider Islam the basic, principle strength of their marriage (Goodman and Dollahite, 2006). Similarly, participants echoed the qualitative research of David Dollahite and Nathaniel Lambert (2007) in stating how Islam has provided them with the strengths of a "sanctified marriage" (a marriage ordained and guided by God) which includes: 1) sacred time together, including mosque attendance/involvement, Qur'anic study, prayer, and observation of holy holidays; 2) shared holy vision and purpose; 3) shared moral values; 4) divine relational assistance, meaning divine blessing and guidance; and 5) relational commitment through religious vows. Specifically, this study illuminated how Islam provides the couple the strengths of sacred time together, shared community involvement and shared moral values and, remarkably, how the marital unit (within Islam) provides

the couple with the strengths of mirroring, reaffirmation of identity, and resilience particularly in the face of religious discrimination.

Firstly, the study supported literature on how Islam provides couples with the strength of sacred time together, shared community involvement and shared moral values. Jane Smith (2007) described how “Muslims in America look on the family as the bulwark of their existence in this Western (secular) society, the unit through which they filter, accept, or reject various elements of American society that they see as compatible or incompatible with their understanding of what it means to be Muslim” (p. 211). Participants in this study affirmed the Muslim community and the family unit within Islam as protective factors in raising their children and concretizing their Muslim identities. As one participant stated, “Inside these walls [the home] are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They [society] can do whatever they want out there, but in here it's the Qur'an and the Sunnah.” Participants avidly stated that Islam functions to provide life-guidance—“whether children or food or finances or fashion or decision-making”—and a moral and ethical compass by which they filter out American values, raise their children, and sort of issues between one another.

Couples echoed one another in stating that petty arguments are not only resolved by turning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah for support and guidance (“to depersonalize the argument”), but they are equally supported by the knowledge that their partner is a good Muslim, that they hold shared sacred moral, ethical values and that that is never questioned. In other words, this study pointed to the deeply held value in Islam of believing in their spouse's core identity as good, moral, positive and valuable. In disagreements and difficulties, participants stated that they return to their spouse's

“Islamic goodness and also general goodness... because a good moral character is really important to us, we try not to get caught up in other flaws because the main thing that what we want in a person and in life is really good, strong character.”

Islam also allows for equal respect among gender relations—in Islam this is part and parcel of shared moral values. In line with the work of Islamic gender studies scholars, Fatima Mernissi (1993), Azizah al-Hibri (2005) and Jane Smith (2007), both male and female participants explained how Islamically guided roles and responsibilities provide equal *respect* among genders, as well as harmony in the relationship because these guidelines are “the right thing to do and best thing to do according to God.” For participants, the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities in Islam allow for each member of the marital unit to take pride in and earn respect for their commitment and contribution to one another. Participants were highly aware of the contradiction between Islamic views of gender equity with that of Western views. In fact, the tension between these varying interpretations of equality and equal respect between Islam and American society is a key entry point for the negative impact of religious discrimination on the couple.

All six couples interviewed commented that religious and gender discrimination—namely the stereotyping of Muslim women as subservient and Muslim men as oppressive and violent—is the primary identifiable aspect of religious discrimination that negatively affects their relationship. The study found that, particularly in public, Muslim woman and men fell under heavy scrutiny regarding the dynamics of their relationship. Couples felt that, through the public eye, the man is assumed to beat his wife and children, and the wife is assumed to defer always to the man. Male

participants found themselves wanting to constantly declare their women's right advocacy and female participants found themselves wanting to declare their feminist values. However much this negativity exists, couples found that in turning to one another, they were affirmed, mirrored, and confident in living according to God rather than according to the public. Therefore, what this study further elucidated is that Muslim Americans do not just use the marital unit and Islam to filter out unwanted American values, they use it to protect themselves and manage the aftereffects of their experiences of religious discrimination.

As described by participants, *Islam within a marital unit* exists as a filter by which American values are either welcomed or rejected, and *a marital unit within Islam* exists as a unique haven for one's core identity, a place in which you are mirrored, affirmed, comforted, protected, and built up. In one apt example, a participant described her husband comforting her following an incident of religious discrimination, "We help each other. I'll come home and he'll say, 'Don't worry. You come from your heart. You are a good Muslim mother and a good wife.'" Likewise, a number of female participants reported that more often than not, women who have chosen to remove their *hijab* (in effort to no longer be a publicly visible Muslim and a target of discrimination) are not married; they don't have the confidence and support from a husband who might reassure them of who they are despite being such a target. The study, then, revealed the Muslim marital unit as a protective and strengthening haven for Muslim Americans in the face of the abuse and trauma of chronic religious discrimination.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have significant relevance to clinical social work with Muslim American individuals, couples and families. In brief, the study examined the repercussions and struggles of being a Muslim in America in today's sociopolitical climate. What emerged is that Muslim Americans are subject to myriad forms of religious discrimination—from prejudice to hatred, from indirect (media, government) to direct (interpersonal exchanges, the public arena)—the psychological and relational impact of which ranges from despondency and identity loss to community cohesion and closer adherence to faith. It is vital that the social work field recognize the shear impact of chronic, pervasive religious discrimination as it is particularly directed towards Muslims during this current era. The study also alerted the social work field to September 11th and, potentially, The Iraq War as having surfaced underlying discrimination which is now chronic, long-term and, most likely, internalized by many Muslim Americans.

The psychological and relational affects of such chronic discrimination gives evidence to the fact that discrimination against Muslim Americans can be experienced as trauma. As such, literature on race-based trauma indicates that counselors need to be effectively trained to conduct assessment and interventions with individuals and couples who have been victimized by intersecting or multiple forms of trauma (.i.e., religious, racial, ethnic and gender) (Bryant-Davis, 2007, p. 136). However, the study not only looked at cumulative trauma, it took an inventory as to the decision process and abilities to *not to give up* religious symbols and identification or compromise beliefs in the face of such overt and internalized discrimination. As such, it is essential that the social work field honor how Muslim individuals, couples and families, such as those in this study,

have not resorted to hopelessness and depression, but have developed positive coping strategies in turning to their communities and their families to re-establish and reaffirm their identities.

The study provides detailed evidence of the necessity of the social work field not to reproduce a dynamic of the therapist as holding dominant, “American,” cultural values which work to convert, suppress, or scrutinize the Muslim client. This dynamic, as detailed in the work of Belkeis Altares (1996) , Gargi Roysircar (2003), Kobeisy (2004) and Dwairy (2006), of multicultural counseling between a Muslim client and non-Muslim therapist runs the risk of the therapist espousing mainstream values (which have clear links to Judeo-Christian ideology) as well as replicating a historical relationship of Western dominance and imperialism. While most of the Muslim American couples in this study have not sought counseling, they have emphasized how crucial it is to recognize that Muslim values and ethical systems can stand in distinction from American values and how, outside the Muslim community, those values are not honored, but are rejected, stereotyped, and maligned. This is something for the social work field not to replicate, but to repair in respecting and fostering connection to community systems and Islamic value systems.

Moreover, the study supported multicultural counseling literature (Dwairy, 2006) in that it is essential for therapists to be away of the importance placed on collectivism and community, as well as the centrality of the family unit for upholding the strength and confidence of their core identity as a Muslim. The study emphasized how Muslim Americans locate their resilience and power in their core identity—that of being a Muslim. And this core identity is precisely what is at risk in this current era of

sociopolitical turmoil. Stated plainly, the social work field must recognize that for the Muslim American population, religious discrimination cuts to the deepest part of their identity and their way of living in the world. In therapy, the ways in which discrimination has compromised one's sense of self should be carefully explored as, according to this study, it is participants' life-source. In fact, the participants interviewed may have been a healthy, high-functioning segment of the population because they were able to mobilize community and marital/family networks to protect their primary identity, their core self, and their life-source which is being Muslim.

For couples specifically, they are at risk of religious discrimination infiltrating their relationship. The couples' interviewed had found, in one another, a key reliance and fortitude to the negative affects of discrimination. However, for many couples (Smith, 2007), the difficulty of enduring pervasive exclusion and discrimination has torn at their intimate relationships. In essence, Muslim American couples need (and are justified in needing) wide networks of support. It is clear from the participants in the study that they cannot do it alone—that the survival of their family as intact and the maintenance of their family's ability to live for God (rather than at the behest of society) are dependent upon community support. In addition, it is important to recognize the variability amongst Muslim Americans—the conflict and complexity of immigrant and indigenous forms of Islam, of dual discrimination against African-American Muslims and Arab-appearing Muslims, the added pains of gender discrimination, and the particular struggle of converts being rejected both by family and society. As such, this study honors the need for the social work field to have an understanding of the larger, endemic, historical forces of oppression at play as well as internal dimensions and struggles when working with

Muslim Americans. Moreover, this study documents and acknowledges the remarkable strengths that Muslim Americans have successfully utilized in coping through this time of extreme anti-Islamic fervor.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Brianne Goodman. I am conducting a study of the experiences of Muslim American couples. The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work. Data collected in this study will be used in contribution to my Social Work thesis as well as in future publications and presentations.

I am interested in how Muslim American couples have been psychologically and relationally impacted by the heightened prejudice and discrimination resulting from September 11th and The Iraq War. You are being asked to participate in this study if (a) you self-identify as a Muslim American, (b) are a U.S. citizen, (c) you are married to another Muslim American, and (d) you have been married to your spouse for at least six years. As a participant in this study you will be asked to take part in a face to face interview. Questions will be open-ended and will focus on your experiences (both positive and negative) of being a Muslim American and how these experiences have effected, supported or challenged your relationship, particularly in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War. The interview will take between 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews will be digitally tape recorded with your consent, and tapes will be coded numerically to ensure your confidentiality. As required by Federal regulations, digital recordings will be kept private and secure in a locked file for a minimum of three years.

Your participation is voluntary. You will receive no financial benefit for your participation in this study. However, you may benefit from knowing that you have contributed to identifying the mental health and service needs of the Muslim American population generally and particularly of Muslim Americans whose relationships are internally impacted by discrimination. It is my hope that this study will help social workers have a better understanding of those affected by discrimination in light of 9/11 and The Iraq War. You may also benefit from being able to tell your story and having your perspective heard.

The potential risks of participating in this study are the possibility that you might feel strong or uncomfortable emotions while talking about your experiences. In case you feel the need for additional support after participating in this study, you will be given a list of appropriate resources for mental health services in your area.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, as consistent with Federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Confidentiality will be protected by coding the information and storing the data in a locked file for a minimum of 3 years. Your identity will be protected. I will use a code to identify you and your name will never be recorded anywhere in the data collection or documentation materials. The codes will likewise be used in the analysis of the data. Therefore, your name will never be associated with the information you provide in the

interview. The data may be used in other educational activities, publications and presentations as well as in the preparation for my Master's thesis.

This study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you and materials relating to you will be immediately destroyed. In the event that you do decide to withdraw from the study, please contact me no later than March 1, 2008.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

DATE

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS AND THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

I am a graduate student at the Smith School for Social Work and a recent graduate of Islamic Studies from Harvard. I am writing to see if you would have any available time in the coming month to meet with me, discuss my thesis project and/or consider participating in the project as an interviewee.

For my thesis, I am looking at the strengths of Muslim American couples, particularly in the wake of our current sociopolitical climate (post-9/11 and The Iraq War). The purpose of this study is 1) assess how Muslim American couples are psychologically and relationally impacted by heightened discrimination in the wake of September 11th and The Iraq War, 2) gather information about the particular strengths employed by Muslim American couples, and 3) aid social workers in identifying the current mental health and service needs of the Muslim American population generally and of Muslim American couples specifically as they work through this formative time in America's sociopolitical and inter-religious history.

My hope, in writing this thesis, is that I can contribute to filling the gap in social work literature about the particular strengths of Muslim Americans who cope with religious prejudice.

[As I develop my thesis, I think you may be of great help in locating Muslim American couples would be interested in being interviewed.] or [As an interviewee, I think you may be of great help in identifying the mental health and service needs of the Muslim American population generally and particularly of Muslim Americans whose relationships are internally impacted by discrimination.]

Participants for the study would include those who 1) self-identify as Muslim American, 2) who are American citizens, and 3) who have been married for at least six years (i.e., from September 11th through The Iraq War).

Please contact me via email or by phone. Thank you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,
Brienne

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

Age
Area in which you were born
Area in which you were raised
Area in which you now live
Race/Ethnicity
Religious identification (Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi, Ismaili, etc.)
Type of occupation
Year married
Number of children

Definitions

What does it mean to you to be a Muslim? How do you define your Muslim identity?

How do you define religious discrimination?

Strengths as a Couple

What are the stories of your families of origin—how do they self-identify religiously and how were you raised as a Muslim?

What is the story of you as a couple—how did you meet, how was your relationship supported by the community or by family, and how did you choose one another?

How do you feel Islam—your faith practice, the Muslim community and your shared values—supports your relationship in general?

Experiences of Discrimination in Light of 9/11 and The Iraq War

Where do you experience religious discrimination (in the public sector, through government initiatives, in interpersonal exchanges)?

How do you experience religious discrimination (through others' actions, looks, words, laws, etc.)?

What has been your response to experiences of discrimination?

What other types of discrimination (ex. racial, ethnic or class discrimination) do you experience or do you think exacerbates your experience of religious discrimination?

Have you experienced an increase in religious discrimination since 9/11 and The Iraq War?

The Impact of Religious Discrimination on Relational and Psychological Dynamics of Your Couplship

As a couple, what do you think are your strengths? Have you used these strengths to cope with experiences of religious discrimination or other forms of discrimination?

Do you feel you as a couple have turned to Islam to cope with experiences of religious discrimination?

Do you feel religious discrimination negatively affects you as a couple?

Do you think there is a difference in how you are in public and in private with one another?

If you have children, how do you see the present day sociopolitical climate affecting your children and, as a result, affecting the dynamics in your relationship?

Aside from one another, where do you turn for support—mental health services, Muslim community, family, etc.?

Appendix D

Referral Sources

Directory of Mosques and Centers in the United States

<http://www.pluralism.org/directory/results.php?sort=state%2Ccity%2Ctitle&tradition=Islam>

Directory of Muslim Therapists

http://www.crescentlife.com/psychexperts/directory_of_muslim_mental_health_professionals.htm

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

453 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.

Washington, DC 20003

Tel: 202-488-8787

Fax: 202-488-0833

Email: cair@cair-net.org

Website: <http://www.cair-net.org/>

Dr. Hamada Hamid

Muslim Mental Health (part of ISNA)

admin@MuslimMentalHealth.com

Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)

166-26 89th Avenue

Jamaica, NY 11432

Phone: 718-658-1199

Fax: 718-658-1255

Website: www.icna.org

Imam Mohammed Hag Magid

Imam of the All-Dulles Area Muslim Society

ADAMS Center (Muslim Mental Health Center)

<http://adamscenter.org/>

imam@adamscenter.us

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

1732 Wisconsin Ave, NW

Washington, DC 20007

Phone: 202-244-2990

Fax: 202-244-7968

Website: www.adc.org

Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights
Tel: 202-234-7302
Fax: 202-234-7304
Email: karamah@karamah.org
Website: <http://www.karamah.org/contact.htm>



Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950
F (413) 585-7994

October 15, 2007

Brianne Goodman

Dear Brianne,

Your amended materials have been reviewed and all is in order. There is one very minor thing in the Consent you should change. This has to do with writing about saving and destroying the materials. The feds don't require you to destroy them, they require you to keep them (secure, obviously) for at least three years. Please correct that and just send the page to Laurie.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

We are happy to give final approval to this very interesting study and wish you the best of luck in finding your sample. It is such a crucial topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Hartman" followed by the initials "lhw".

Ann Hartman D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Carolyn Jacobs, Research Advisor



March 24, 2008

Dear Brienne:

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that you have been selected to receive the 2008 Alumni Association Thesis Grant. Your thesis, entitled "The Strength of Muslim Couples in the Face of Heightened Discrimination from September 11th and the Iraq War" is a fine example of the high quality of research undertaken by Smith College School for Social Work students. We were delighted with the caliber of your proposal! (The Association Treasurer will forward your check for \$500 under separate cover.)

Traditionally, grant recipients are asked to make a presentation of their thesis for the Executive Committee members while they are on campus. This year, the School celebrates its 90th anniversary July 17-20 which is also Supervisor's Annual Conference Weekend. The presentations are prescheduled and are a part of the 90th program where many alumni and supervisors will be in attendance. Pat Gilbert, Alumni Assistant and/or Roxanne Pin, Director of Advancement and Alumni Affairs will be in contact with you regarding more details. If for some reason you will be unable to present during this weekend, please contact one of them as soon as possible.

On behalf of the entire Alumni Association, I congratulate you and wish you the best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Bellows".

Karen Bellows, Ph.D. '99
President, Smith College School for Social Work
Alumni Association

KB/pg
cc: Ashley Varner, Treasurer
Dean Carolyn Jacobs, Research Advisor



90 Years of Excellence in
CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK