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**Muslim American Men and Stigma: An Argument for the Use of Theories of Stigma Management and Modified Labeling Theory in the Study of Post-Terror Muslim Experiences**

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**Abstract:** The experiences of American Muslim men deserve further study because these experiences are relevant to current civil rights discussions, especially in a social-political climate that is growing increasingly hostile toward the Islamic world. Little research to date recognizes the merit of using theories of stigma management in understanding discrimination against Muslims. Additionally, little research focuses exclusively on the discrimination practices of American Muslim men. Using semi-structured qualitative interviews with men who attend Islamic religious services in a large mid-western United States city, this research finds that these men use stigma management techniques to navigate their social environments and combat racialized stigmatization. Based on the findings in this locale, I suggest the consideration of theories of stigma and stigma management in research focusing on Muslim discrimination experiences.

**Keywords:** Muslim, Stigma, Racism, Discrimination, Islam

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## **MUSLIM AMERICAN MEN AND STIGMA: AN ARGUMENT FOR THE USE OF THEORIES OF STIGMA MANAGEMENT AND MODIFIED LABELING THEORY IN THE STUDY OF POST-TERROR MUSLIM EXPERIENCES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United States is becoming a hostile place for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim following military involvement in the Middle East and international acts of terror attributed to groups such as Al Qaeda and, more recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2017). Several government and private agencies, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation report that hate crimes committed against those perceived to be Muslim have increased 1,700% since 9/11 (Abu-Ras and Suarez, 2009, p. 48). Given this increasing hostility, discussions that center on the experiences of Muslim Americans have risen to the forefront of civil rights discussions.

Islam is one of the largest world religions, and its adherents come from an incredibly diverse array of nationalities. However, American scholarship generally discusses the experiences of Arab Americans and religiously practicing Muslims in terms of “racialization” (Garner and Selod, 2015; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Rana, 2011). Omi and Winant (2015) define racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (p. 111). In the case of Muslim men, their religious identity is transformed into a racial designation. Rana (2011) builds on this argument stating that, “the Muslim is understood not only as a totalized biological body, but also as a cultural and social entity constructed within a number of discursive regimes, including those of terrorism, fundamentalism, patriarchy, sexism, and labor migration” (p. 26). Given this literature, Islamophobia can be understood as a racism against Muslims (Garner and Selod 2015; Rana 2011).

Accordingly, the use of the word “Muslim” in an American context could refer to a religious or racial designation. Thus, it can be difficult to discern if mistreatment is related to general Western animosity toward Islam-the religion, or conflict between American nativism and Muslims’ perceived nationality of origin. Meer (2008) argues that racially or religiously classified Muslims can be viewed as a “quasi-ethnic sociological formation” (p. 66). This distinction is “quasi-ethnic” because ethnic and religious identities “intersect and are rarely clearly demarcated” (Meer, 2008, p. 66). Individuals can be personally identified as Muslim because they observe the religious practices of Islam, they were born into a religious family, or because they belong to ethnic groups who have been associated with the Islamic faith. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and can be difficult to differentiate even for individuals who self-identify as Muslims. Still, racialization is an effective theory with which to analyze the experiences of American Muslims because Muslim social categorization is often the result of a combination of religious signifiers, cues of foreignness (Brown et. al., 2013), and presumptive nationalities of origin. Muslim men’s racialized identities in turn, would be the primary factors that contribute to their experiences of discrimination and mistreatment.

I use the concept of stigma to discuss how Muslim men experience and manage anti-Islamic hostility. Using stigma to analyze the experiences of Muslim men is not in contradiction to previous studies’ assertion that Muslim men carry a racialized identity. Rather, this study seeks to understand how Muslim men manage and live with stigmatizing racial and religious identities. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as “an attribute which is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction” (p. 3). Using this definition, it can be argued that Muslim American men are assigned social stigma related to the intersections of their racialized, religious and gender identities. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the efficacy of theories of stigma management in understanding Muslim American experiences. This investigation is relevant to current discussions which center around the rights and mistreatment of individuals who are perceived to be Muslim.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

I begin my discussion with literature that focuses on the history of Muslim experience in the

United States using 9/11 as the turning point. Though there has been a resurgence in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in the 21st century, most scholars agree that the mistreatment of Muslims is not new (Akram and Johnson, 2002, p. 302; Rana, 2011). The social construction of Muslims as violent dates as far back as the 9th century in Europe (Mastnak, 2010; Selod, 2016, p. 63). In United States history, “Islam represented a liberatory identification for African Americans; however, this presented a threat to white Christian supremacy that was then used to further racialize immigrant and Black Muslims” (Rana, 2011, p. 28). Additionally, contemporary scholarship suggests that Islam has been crafted as the new conceptual opponent of Western Democracies after the fall of Communism (Mastnak, 2010; Rana, 2011). Muslims’ racialized identities come to take on nationalist meanings and stand in contradiction to a normative White Christian America and the United States nation-state. The framing of Muslims as anti-American contributes to the experiences of religiously practicing Muslim men in modern time.

However, most scholarship views 9/11 as one of the most pivotal points in modern history with respect to anti-Islamic stigmatization. Singh (2002, p. 3) states:

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

Using September 11 as a turning point, many agencies have observed consistent increases in anti-Islamic discrimination, violence, and aggression. CAIR began producing public reports on the number of civil rights complaints that they received per year following 1995, when some reporters wrongly attributed the Oklahoma City bombing to radical-Islamic-terror, to 2008. In 1995, CAIR recorded 80 civil rights complaints; in 2002, the year following 9/11, 525 complaints; by 2007, the number of civil rights complaints

was up to 2652 respectively (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2008). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2017) reports that the number of anti-Muslim hate groups has grown since 9/11. This number increased the most between 2015 and 2016, jumping from 34 to 101. Given these findings I argue that American hostility toward Muslims is on the rise, and furthermore, worthy of greater study.

Anti-Islamic action is not restricted to the attitudes of isolated individuals and groups. Some scholars suggest that the government is the primary source of discrimination against Muslims in the United States (Cainkar, 2002, p. 23). In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States and other western powers passed legislation to police Arabs and Muslims under the guise of national security (Werbner, 2005). Despite preceding the 9/11 attacks, the treatment of American Muslims as a threat has surged and gained political support following Islamic terror (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2008). During the 2016 presidential campaign, major political leaders appealed to a fear of “Radical Islamic Terror” in the voting populous. Both Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton and Republican nominee Donald Trump made the claim that American Muslims need to be the United States’ “eyes and ears” when it comes to terrorist activity when prompted to discuss Islamophobia in the American context (New York Times, 2016). These statements imply that religious Muslims have heightened associations with terrorist activity. Anti-Islamic rhetoric was especially central to the campaign of President Donald J. Trump, who has been criticized as appealing to xenophobic and nationalist groups. CAIR reported in April of 2002 that over 60,000 individuals experienced discrimination from the United States government by means of “interrogation, raids, arrests, detentions, and institutional closures” (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2002; Cainkar, 2002, p. 23). The agency of the State against Muslims has created a scenario where many Muslims may feel they have nowhere to turn, and may mean that incidents of discrimination are underreported.

In this study, I focus specifically on the experiences of Muslim American men. This focus is justified for two reasons. First, scholars have recognized gender as a central variable that contributes to the experience of stigma. Razack (2008) discusses the importance of gender to the

stigmatization of Muslims:

Gender is crucial to the confinement of Muslims to the pre-modern as post-colonial scholarship has long shown. Considered irredeemably fanatical, irrational, and thus dangerous, Muslim men are also marked as deeply misogynist patriarchs who have not progressed into the age of gender equality, and who indeed cannot. (p. 16).

This analysis does not mean that Muslim women do not experience stigmatization. Scholarship has documented instances of women being discriminated against and mistreated by anti-Islamic perpetrators (Aziz, 2012; Cankar, 2002; Selod, 2014). Rather, men face a double stigma. According to Razack (2008), Muslim men are viewed as opponents to western democracy, social progress, and have become symbolic of a rigid gender-oppressing regime (p. 16). Second, despite the acknowledgement that gender is central to the experience of anti-Islamic stigma, there is a dearth of masculine experiences with the post-terror backlash and discrimination in research literature. I seek to contribute to this gap.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Goffman's (1963) work on stigma management serves as the foundation for much of the theoretical literature that I use to understand Muslim men's experiences. Goffman (1963) discusses three distinct forms of stigma: "physical deformities; blemishes of individual character; and a stigma of race, nationality or religion (p. 4)." Racialized American Muslims experience stigmatization in an overlap of "race, nationality and religion"; and because of recent political narratives, the "blemishes of personal character" categories. O'Brien (2011) uses stigma management as a theoretical framework for the study of the experiences of religious Muslim Americans (p. 295) in his case-study of Muslim American adolescents. In this ethnographic study, O'Brien (2011) recorded these adolescents literally acting out or talking through real or hypothetical scenarios involving discrimination. These rehearsals allowed young people to "openly discuss strategies, and express emotions" in ways that they were frequently unable to when facing discrimination (p. 296). I

connect this theoretical work more broadly to the racialized nature of Muslim identities.

Goffman argues that the prominence or visibility of social information that connects individuals to a stigmatizing category has a significant impact on experiences of stigma or abilities to manage stigma (Goffman, 1963, p. 49). He (1963) coins the term stigma symbol to refer to "signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity discrepancy, breaking up what would otherwise be a coherent overall picture, with a consequent reduction in our valuation of the individual" (Goffman, 1963, p. 44). Visibility largely depends on the possession of or the salience of these symbols or markers. Variability in social visibility contributes to (1) an individual's experiences of stigma: How often? How much? And how severe stigmatizing and discriminatory experiences are. And (2), variance in visibility influences individuals' abilities to manage stigma or what management strategies are possible. It is further worth noting that all stigma symbols are not equal in their salience or power to mark identities.

Individuals who hold stigmatizing identities often experience a heightened double-consciousness; that is, they must learn to manage a perceived identity without forfeiting the realities of their self-identification. Scholars sometimes refer to the balancing of these two identities as "stigma management," which can be operationalized as "the attempt by persons with stigmatized social identities to approach interpersonal interactions in ways aimed at minimizing the social costs of carrying these identities" (O'Brien, 2011, p. 292). Thus, the experience of stigma forces many individuals to downplay or otherwise alter the performance of their identities, and while stigma can be managed by withdrawing from social relationships, attempting to hide one's stigmatizing status, and/or educating others (Shroeder and Mowen, 2014, p. 459), a stigma nevertheless wields a powerful influence on the identity development of stigmatized individuals (Link et. al., 1989, p. 401). This study focuses on the ways that Muslim men in one locale engage these strategies in managing their stigmatized racial identities.

### **METHODS**

The broader research project from which this paper originates began in the Spring of 2016 and has extended well into 2017. During this process I spent time in the field attending religious activities, building

relationships, and making contacts for later interviews. Ultimately, I utilized a grounded theory, whereby observations in the field determine what research questions are developed and later asked (Charmaz, 2012).

This paper focuses on the findings generated from 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews (Gillham, 2004) with congregants from three different Islamic religious centers in Greensburg (pseudonym), a large Mid-western city. These interviews were procured by a combination of availability, purposive, and snowball sampling (Charmaz, 2012), contingent on participant availability and receptivity in the field. Interview questions focused on: 1) the experience of mistreatment or stigma; 2) how participants generally responded to said mistreatment or stigma; and 3) the role of religious institutions in how participants understood and responded to mistreatment and

stigma. Most interviews lasted approximately an hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed except for one participant who did not wish to be recorded. To address this interview, I took physical notes during the interview and immediately after we finished, recorded my own account of the interview in my car.

In the interest of further protecting the identities of the men in this study, participants either selected or were assigned pseudonyms. Study participants were given the opportunity to select pseudonyms for themselves; however, only six interviewees elected to do so. I assigned pseudonyms to the other nine participants based on themes from interviews or other common religious Muslim names. Transcriptions from interviews, including names were member-checked except for one interviewee, who I was unable to contact after interviews.

A chart of pertinent demographic information on research participants is provided in Table 1.

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Nationality of Origin	Religious Practice	Years in U.S (Immigrants)	Years Muslim (Converts)
Alex	23	White American	“Not often”		10
Kareem	42	African American	Once weekly		24
Red	26	Iraqi - American	Once weekly – Once daily		
Abraham	81	Indian	Twice Weekly	53	
Zain	27	Pakistani	2 – 3 times weekly		
Aidan	49	Pakistani	4 times weekly	45	
Pasha	23	Libyan	4 -10 times weekly		
Johnny	18	Somali	1 – 2 times daily	10	
Mostafa	23	Palestinian	Once or more daily	10	
Hamza	36	Indian	3 times daily	7	
Mohamad	65	Iraqi	5 times daily	30	
Hassan	38	Indian	5 times daily	30	
Ali	37	African American	5 times daily		18
Omar	45	Yemeni	...		
Samir	36	Egyptian	...	7	

Table 1

**FINDINGS**

I divide my discussion of research findings into the following sections: Stigmatizing Racialized Identities, Stigma as a Perpetual Foreigner and Conceptual Enemy, Visibility and Stigma Symbols, and Muslim American Stigma Management Strategies. I found these men, in this locale, to provide evidence that their identities have been both racialized and

stigmatized, and actively engage in strategies aimed at stigma management.

*Stigmatizing Racialized Identities*

The findings of this study regarding the racialization of Muslim men is consistent with those of previous research which assert that Muslim identities have been racialized. I argue that racialization is the basis for experiences of anti-

Islamic stigma. That is, if men hold external racialized or otherwise socially discernable Muslim identities, they are more susceptible to discrimination and mistreatment. Though responses varied 7 of the 15 men interviewed either ambiguously or otherwise had difficulty racially classifying themselves. For example, Ali, an American born black and white racially mixed 35-year-old Muslim convert, discusses how his Muslim identity has taken prominence when discussing his racial identity.

Now, since I've been Muslim I just feel like a Muslim because now I'm looked at not because of the color of my skin...

When they see me dressed like this with a beard, before they hear me talk they'll just think I'm from one of those Muslim countries. I don't really know. I don't really have... I feel like with that question I'm just me, honestly.

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

As previously stated, the implications of carrying a racialized Muslim identity carry more weight than simply influencing how Muslims identify themselves. Being classified as a Muslim has pejorative repercussions, such as a heightened association with terror. Responses to demographic questions about race revealed attempts to manage the stigma associated with being a Muslim or from a part of the world identified as predominantly Muslim. Zain, a 27-year-old first generation American-born Pakistani Muslim, responded to the prompt: how do you racially classify yourself? by asserting his American identity: “Um, well I classify myself as American, first and foremost. Racially I guess I would say I am- my family hails from the Indian Sub-continent. So, I guess racially that’s, yeah.” Racially speaking, Zain never gives an exact designation but instead specifies a general area of the world from which his family emigrated.

Furthermore, he asserts that his identity as an American is more important to him than his racial identity. Other men brought up their “Americanness” during racial classification. According to interviews, it appears that racialized “Muslim” identities cause ambiguity in racial self-designation and treatment, and furthermore national allegiances to be called into question. This is relevant to discussions of stigma management. I argue that by asserting one’s American citizenship, individuals attempt to distance themselves from both ideologies and parts of the world associated with terror by communicating that they are allies of the Western World.

#### *Stigma as a Perpetual Foreigner and Enemy*

The relationship between Muslim identities and supposed United States interest was central to participants’ stigmatizing experiences and ensuing management of said experiences. Men in this study discussed how the mistreatment that they experienced often cast them as un-American – enemies to the Western world. This sentiment was present in both the experience of stigma and the consequential management of stigma. Quoted previously, Ali is an American-born black and white racially mixed Muslim convert. His wife is also an American-born Muslim convert. Both Ali and his wife wear traditional religious clothing – i.e. a thobe (religious robe) and kufi (religious head covering). Ali has a long beard and his wife wears the hijab. During the interview, he recalled a confrontation where he and his wife were criticized as being un-American.

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

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

[W]ell there's the incident in the mall. ... [T]hat always stands out because that turned into a really big argument. As I was explaining to the guy that we are American, and we were born here, and we cheer for the United States in the Olympics. Then another lady saw us arguing and she actually came by and said, “Go back where you came from.” I

turned and I was like, “I just got done explaining. That's the whole argument.” Ali's experience reveals that the presentation of this couple as Muslim automatically designates them as foreign to the United States regardless of their racial background or nationality of origin. More than just being designated as foreign, individuals who are recognized as Muslim are susceptible to being cast as opponents to the United States. This is clear in both the confrontation itself and response to mistreatment, where Ali is forced to paradoxically appeal to nationalist notions of what American citizenship looks like; i.e. “we were born here, and maybe my ancestors were here before yours.” Instances such as this one suggest that dominant group members understand Islam and United States interests in dichotomous terms. In this dichotomy, the “Muslim-world” and dominant group interests in the western world are in conflict. By “acting Muslim,” individuals are not “acting American,” and by extension they are acting against America.

In addition to scenarios where individuals' identities as Americans were overtly scrutinized, several men reported that they were prompted by dominant group members to provide commentary on international politics and defend their religion following acts of terror. For instance, Aidan, a 49-year-old immigrant from Pakistan who has lived in the United States since the age of 4, recalls having to apologize for the actions of terrorists.

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

seems like the Muslims of America, we are supposed to go down there and put our stamp on it that says that we disagree with it, and that it's wrong. Why? Why do we have to say anything?

Respondents generally expressed irritation at the prospect of having to speak on terror. However, some respondents viewed prompts to condemn terrorist actions and to discuss international politics and religion as an opportunity to challenge dominant group perceptions. Men reported experiences such as being individually singled-out in the work-place, watching religious or community leaders denounce international terrorist activity, or otherwise being prompted to discuss news, politics, or beliefs that they were assumed to have and pressured to provide unique insight on. Muslim Americans are socially positioned to the extent that their allegiance to the United States is questioned routinely, denouncing terror becomes a means by which Muslim men must prove their “Americanness.”

The stigmatization of masculine Muslim identities was further evidenced by participants' experiences of hyper-surveillance. Interviewees reported being stared at, a heightened involvement from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and being filmed or photographed by camera phones. Experiences of heightened surveillance are important to the studying Muslim American men because they are evidence of both the presence of stigma and general distrust. Again, the implied logic of this surveillance can be assumed to be that Muslim men are enemies to western democracy.

#### *Visibility and Stigma Symbols*

Goffman (1963) argues that social visibility is central to both the experience of, and management of stigma (p. 49). Furthermore, he operationalizes the term stigma symbol to discuss markers that contribute to the social visibility of stigmatizing statuses or identities. The men that I interviewed discussed the following identifiers that appear to function as masculine Muslim stigma symbols: association with Muslim women, association with other Muslim men, names, dress/beards, accent, and religious practice. These symbols appear to contribute to participants' experiences with stigma and discrimination whereby more prevalent or visible stigma symbols are believed to elicit greater quantities of, or more explicit mistreatment.

The masculine stigma symbol discussed most frequently in my interviews were Muslim sounding names. Names are perhaps the most universal stigma symbol to men in this study. Even Muslim men who possess relatively low social visibility likely hold religious or otherwise foreign names that can identify them as Muslim. One example is Red. Red is a 26-year-old American born Muslim and describes himself as half-American/half-Iraqi. Here he offers commentary on how his birth name reveals his Muslim identity.

I know some stories with people that didn't get it as easy as I did. ...

[P]robably because of the fact that they couldn't tell, until they heard what my name was.

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

Red believes that his name distinguishes him from others. Even if the name does not explicitly mark him as Muslim it singles him out as foreign or other and, thus, susceptible to discrimination and mistreatment.

Even though identifiers such as names can be discussed individually, stigma symbols do not appear to typically occur in isolation. Men discussed stigmatizing experiences in tandem with a combination of intricate symbols of Muslim identity. For example, Ali discusses his traditional dress and his association with his wife, who wears the hijab, collectively.

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

Whereas individual identifiers such as a thick beard may not be sufficient markers of Muslim identity, combinations of factors such as, traditional dress and being associated with a woman who is wearing the hijab, clearly mark Muslim men as such.

The participants in this study generally understood themselves to occupy a relatively privileged position in comparison to the quantity of discrimination that women experienced. This was largely attributed to the feminine religious practice of wearing the hijab. Recall that scholarship has identified the hijab as an explicit marker of Muslim identity (Selod, 2014, p. 8). All interviewees believed that Muslim women experienced mistreatment and discrimination at higher rates than Muslim men. This was almost always discussed in tandem with or directly attributed to the practice of wearing the hijab. Participants also expressed an understanding that there was some variability between the experiences of men in being labeled as Muslim and threats. Not all the men in this study possessed stigma symbols that made their religious identity obvious. An ability to be viewed as a dominant group member, and to consequently bypass stigmatizing experiences is sometimes discussed in stigma management literature as "passing" (Goffman, 1963, p. 73; Park, 2002, p. 32). For example, Alex, a 23-year-old, white, American Muslim convert, shares:

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

As a white convert Alex is not identified as Muslim in most social settings. His racial identity allows for him to pass as non-Muslim despite having a thick beard. Some participants discussed an ability to pass as a form of privilege. This distinction changed for him in school when he greeted other practicing Muslims with

a religious expression in Arabic, a combination of language, religious practice, as well as an association with other known Muslims. It was after this identification that he experienced discrimination and the stigma of being linked to terror.

*Muslim American Stigma Management Strategies*

Stigma management strategies in this study were consistent with categories developed in the research literature. Recall that these categories include withdrawing from relationships with others, concealing stigmatizing identities, and education aimed at minimizing the consequences of stigma (Schroeder and Mowen, 2014, p. 459). It is worth noting that the “quasi-ethnic” (Meer, 2008) nature of masculine Muslim racialized-religious identities likely influences the possibility and desirability of certain stigma management strategies. This preference is first evidenced because most of the men in this study discussed strategies for stigma management that involved social withdrawal and concealing Muslim identities in the third person, and morally favored educational stigma management strategies. This preference is second evidenced because men discussed their social environments as being shaped by factors outside of their control. Still, some men selectively engaged in friendships where their potentially stigmatizing identities were not scrutinized. For example, Johnny is an 18-year-old Muslim from Somalia. Here he describes consciously shaping his closest network. He discusses how he generally spends time with people who are well informed regarding Islam and world affairs.

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

Some men, however, discussed their social environments as being shaped naturally by their progression of life, rather than their religious or

racial identities. Kareem, a 42-year-old African American Muslim convert, holds this view.

I was 19 when I became Muslim and I'm almost 43 now, so I'd say the only friends who've faded away or whatever, I think it's just part of the natural progression of life. As you get older, you don't run with the same people you ran with as a teenager. I don't attribute that to Islam in anyway, I think it's just getting older.

It is worth noting that, in comparison to other strategies, participants discussed social withdrawal minimally. This reluctance could be due to their identities as religious Muslims and thus the natural shaping of their social networks by religious organizations and associates. In other words, because the men in this study are religious, social withdrawal is unnecessary because their relationships are shaped by engagement with other religious Muslims. An alternative hypothesis is that social withdrawal is simply not a very effective or practical strategy for managing stigma. Goffman (1963, p. 73) theorized that complete social withdrawal was near impossible for individuals who remained engaged socially in society.

The second method for stigma management involves the concealing of stigmatizing identities. Though this method was prominent in interview data, many of the references to this strategy involve people that interviewees know rather than interviewees themselves. As previously stated, it appears that hiding one's identity is not the stigma management strategy of choice for these religious Muslim men. Some individuals made conscious efforts to hide their Muslim identities. Others were asked by parents or loved ones to conceal these identities to protect themselves from mistreatments. Still, most reported the ways that those around them attempted to hide their identities as Muslims. Red discusses his desire to pass as a non-Muslim in connection to the creation of a less foreign nickname: “I am going to be honest. I do it too, because sometimes it's just easier and quicker if people think that you are one of them.” Implicit in this statement is the dichotomous relationship between the Muslim world and the western world. Life is “easier” in America for individuals who appear to belong more fully to the western world and thus, sometimes it is advantageous to conceal one's Muslim identity—especially in social interactions. By hiding Muslim

status individuals can avoid the negative consequences of stigma. Generally, identity concealing stigma management strategies involve covering up or directing attention away from masculine Muslim stigma symbols. Strategies identified in this study aimed at hiding Muslim identities are controlling public interactions, name changing, beard shaving, and practicing religion carefully.

As discussed previously, one such example of strategies for stigma management aimed at concealing identity involved beard shaving. Pasha shares that one of his relatives shaved his beard in response to the 9/11 attacks.

A relative of mine did that after 9/11, and he used to have a full beard. He kind of shaved it off. I remember it.

I'll say this, a lot of them feel like... they need to be more Americanized, more assimilated into the culture, and at the same time, kind of lose their Muslim identity.

Above, Pasha cites how someone he knows conceals his identity. This is an example of the third-party reporting that frequented this study. Pasha directly ties this identity concealing practice with an attempt to become more "Americanized." Pasha believes that in these attempts to become more "Americanized" men lose some of their Muslim identity, reflecting a dichotomous understanding of American and Islamic identities.

Some men, however, reported the ways that they specifically adjusted their life to avoid stigma induced confrontation. Another example of an identity concealing strategy for managing stigma involved limiting or controlling public religious practices, such as prayer. Participants discussed the vulnerability that public religious practice creates. Many stated that they were already conscious of where they were at certain times of the day for prayer regardless of post-terror backlash. However, men did note that they take extra precautions following backlash related to terror to ensure their safety before praying. Kareem discusses changes in his perceived safety following the rise of Islamophobic rhetoric.

When I travel on road trips, often we pray five times a day. Before, I would stop at a rest area and just go over in the

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

Though Kareem discusses this heightened consciousness as a measure to protect himself, protective action would naturally include a limitation of visible religious practice. Other men discussed doing prayers in seated positions in vehicles as something that they do when they were on the road. While some of these practices are nuanced and could contain multiple considerations, they intentionally take religious stigma symbols out of the public eye to protect practice or identity.

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

I found educational stigma management among the men that I interviewed to take a variety of forms. Many men discussed general interactions and engagement with dominant group members as a common place for the management of stigma. For example, Hassan is a 36-year-old immigrant from India who dresses in traditional clothing, a thick beard, and a head scarf, and describes himself as visibly Muslim. This presentation of self indicates to observers that he is a religious Muslim. This signaling leads to interactions whereby he can engage with dominant group members regarding his religious beliefs.

This woman approached me, and we had a long conversation for like half an hour in the store, and we actually ended up trading information, contacts. And you know, she invited me to come to her church. And this is just out of me going shopping, you know. It's nothing. So, it also becomes an avenue of opportunity to spread the true teachings of Islam.

Hassan's presentation leads to this positive interaction where he was not only able to discuss Islam in that moment, but further opened an avenue for him to engage in longer dialogues with this dominant group member, thus combating stigma with other dominant group members in a more focused setting. Other men didn't offer specific examples, but suggested that how they engaged with broader society was central to how they combat stigma. Ali offers:

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

Ali seems to believe that the everyday lives of American Muslims are central to combatting anti-Islamic stigma. He states that rather than withdrawing, Muslims have a responsibility to be involved in their communities and allow their lives to be positive representations of Islam.

Additionally, conversations and attendance at religious services revealed that men collectively engaged dominant group members

and ideas, using mosques and religious non-profits as rallying points with the specific goal of educationally managing stigma. It seems that religious organizations provide programmatic responses to stigma, and in these responses an opportunity for men to engage with non-Muslims in safe spaces. Hamza, a 36-year-old immigrant from India, discusses his involvement with an open-house conducted at his local mosque.

One of the example is the open-house that we conduct here. What is their perspective? Is there something that needs to be shared to the other people about Islam? ... Because continuously hearing this horrible stuff they might have bad impression about this religion, or Muslims.

In this example, the primary purpose of the open house is to engage dominant group members to combat negative ideas and images of Islam. Other examples of organizational or programmatic stigma management included non-profit organizations designed specifically to engage dominant group members and promote compassion and understanding toward the Islamic community, formalized processes for non-Muslim guests at mosques to ensure that they are connected to any resources that might aid them in understanding Islam in a more positive light, and public meals and service targeting the communities that mosques are in.

## DISCUSSION

My findings are largely consistent with and support the theoretical positions and findings of other studies on the experiences of American Muslims (Selod 2014). Men in this study appear to hold racialized Muslim identities in addition to other racial, national, and religious identities. This racialization is evidenced primarily by ambiguous racial self-designations and discussions of what identities were most relevant to interviewees experiences. I argue that these racialized identities can be understood in terms of stigma.

My argument for a stigma management theoretical approach to analyzing the experiences of Muslim Americans is first based on the stigmatizing experiences of men in this study. The primary stigma that participants reported was that they were cast as opponents to western democracy and United States interests. This portrayal was evidenced (1) by instances where American Muslims were told to "go back" to where they came from or to "act more

American,” and (2) by individual or collective prompts to defend Islam or their allegiance to the United States. I argue that these manifestations of stigma are endemic of a popular dichotomous understanding of society. Stigma was additionally evidenced by the heightened surveillance of Muslim bodies; participants reported being filmed during altercations and religious practices, general stares, and visits by members of the FBI. Collectively these experiences evidence that these men’s identities are simultaneously scrutinized and viewed as a threat.

Second, the experiences of the men in this study parallel discussions of stigma and visibility in the research literature (Goffman 1963). That is, the experiences of Muslim men appear to vary primarily based on the visibility of their identities. Visibility that made men susceptible to experiences of discrimination and stigma was contingent on the prominence of stigma symbols. Men varied on how recognizably Muslim they are and occupy relative positions of privilege, with respect to their Muslim visibility. Men who appear or present themselves to be less visibly Muslim may pass to avoid the consequences of stigma. Not all men shared this ability or desired to do so.

Finally, individuals who possess stigmatized identities are likely to engage in social interactions in ways that attempt to minimize the consequences of their ascribed stigma. The men that I interviewed discussed engaging in such social interactions. Participants’ responses to stigmatization fit into categories of stigma management previously developed in the research literature. Muslim men managed stigma by withdrawing from social relationships, concealing their religious or racial identities, and educating non-Muslims (Schroeder and Mowen, 2014, p. 459). These efforts were often intentional.

With respect to Stigma management as a theoretical framework itself, Goffman (1963, p. 4) classifies stigma of race, nationality or religion as one of his three primary forms of stigma, this form is especially relevant to the experiences of Muslim men in the United States in the aftermath of attributed Islamic terror. To date, stigma management theories have been used extensively

to discuss medical conditions. However, research that focuses on race, nationality, and religion remains under developed. Greater research attention needs to be paid to this category and how these identities are negotiated. Furthermore, I suggest that “race, nationality, or religion” as a singular category will need to be expanded and dismantled to analyze the intersectional experiences of racialized groups, such as Muslim Americans.

## **CONCLUSION**

Whereas socio-political landscape of the United States continues to grow hostile toward Muslims (Council on American Islamic Relations, 2008), studies that focus on Muslim experiences in the United States are increasingly important during the 21st century. The findings that I offer are important to the study of Muslims because (1) they represent conscious efforts by men to perform identities, and (2) they offer potentially transferable results. As I have shown, stigma was both experienced and managed by the men that I interviewed. These negotiations can be viewed as evidence for the use of theories of stigma management in broader understandings of Muslim experiences with discrimination. Future studies of Muslim American groups should consider this theoretical framework in their interpretation of experiences of discrimination. Additionally, if stigma and stigma management are broadly applicable, allies to the Islamic community should be conscious of and seek out the spaces where stigmatized individuals are actively managing stigma to partner with, and empower subordinate group members. Finally, United States groups interested in protecting Muslim Americans should produce and advocate for political leaders who resist a dichotomous understanding of Islam and America.

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