Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity

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This study explores the process of religious identity formation and examines the emergence of religion as the most salient source of personal and social identity for a group of second-generation Muslim Americans. Drawing on data gathered through participant observation, focus groups, and individual interviews with Muslim university students in New York and Colorado, three stages of religious identity development are presented: religion as ascribed identity; religion as chosen identity; and religion as declared identity. This research illustrates how religious identity emerges in social and historical context and demonstrates that its development is variable rather than static. Additionally, I discuss the impacts of September 11 and show how a crisis event can impel a particular identity—in this case, religious—to become even more central to an individual's concept of self. Through asserting the primacy of their religious identity over other forms of social identity, religion became a powerful base of personal identification and collective association for these young Muslims.

The religious landscape of the United States has changed markedly over the past four decades, largely due to the passage of the 1965 *Immigration Act*, which repealed country-of-origin quotas established in the 1920s that predominantly favored Western European, mostly Judeo-Christian, immigrants. This change in federal immigration policy led to an unprecedented diversification of the American population over the subsequent years, as millions of immigrants arrived from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. The post-1965 "new" immigrants are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously more heterogeneous than the immigrants of a century ago (Warner 1993:1061). Political turmoil, wars, revolutions, disasters, and labor market trends also prompted refugees and immigrants from around the world to settle in the United States (Ebaugh 2000; Warner 1998). These and other social,

political, and economic forces have made the United States the most religiously diverse nation on earth (Eck 2001; Melton 2003).

Muslims constitute an important part of this increasingly diverse religious landscape. While estimates vary regarding the current population, and at times there is disagreement concerning who should be identified as Muslim, it is generally accepted that approximately six to seven million Muslims live permanently in America and the community is growing steadily[1] (Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001; Smith 1999). According to Leonard (2003), Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and is poised to surpass Judaism and become second only to Christianity in the number of adherents. The Muslim community is strikingly diverse, and includes large percentages of African Americans as well as many first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants of South Asian and Arab descent.[2] Additionally, a small but gradually increasing number of Caucasians, Latinos, and Native Americans has converted to Islam over the past several decades (Smith 1999). Thus, the adherents to the faith represent a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, and Islamic ideologies.

Although the body of knowledge regarding the traditions and experiences of Muslim Americans continues to grow (see Leonard 2003 for a review of the research), few empirical investigations have specifically explored the process of developing a religious identity among Muslims in the United States. Based on a qualitative study of Muslim Americans in New York and Colorado, this article examines the role that religion plays in the lives of a group of young Muslims. In particular, the analysis focuses on the development and maintenance of religious identity.

IDENTITY

The concept of identity is fundamental in modern social psychology. The nature and formation of group identity, as well as the construction of individual identity, is the subject of much theoretical and empirical inquiry (see Cerulo 1997; Frable 1997; Howard 2000; Sanders 2002; and Vryan, Adler, and Adler 2003 for overviews). Identity is generally used to define and describe an individ-

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[1]Precise figures for the number of Muslims living in the United States do not exist because the Census Bureau and the Immigration and Naturalization Service are not legally allowed to collect data on the religious affiliation of citizens or immigrants.

[2]The U.S. Department of State (2004) estimates that the ethnic composition of the Muslim American community is 33% South Asian (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan), 30% African American, and 25% Arab. The population also includes immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines), the Caribbean, Turkey, and Iran.

uals' sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses. Identity results from internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characterizations. Contrary to earlier understandings of identity as fixed and immutable, today identity is more often considered an evolving process of "becoming" rather than simply "being" (Dillon 1999:250). Individual identity can shift over time, due to personal experiences and larger social changes (Haddad 1994; McMullen 2000; Nagel 1995).

Identity theory attempts to link the individual conception of self and the larger social structure within which the individual thinks and acts. However, these approaches to identity vary in their emphases on social structure, on the one hand, and the processes and interactions through which identities are constructed, on the other (Burke et al. 2003; Howard 2000). The structural approach relies on the concept of role identities in analyzing individuals' self-conceptions, behaviors, and social relations with others (Stryker 1980, 1968; Turner 1978). The second approach highlights on-going processes of identity construction, selection, and negotiation (Cahill 1986; Nagel 1995, 1994; Waters 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987). Identity construction entails self-presentation and the management of verbal and visual impressions (Goffman 1963, 1959). Various situational, personal, and social identities are invoked based on the specific costs and rewards associated with those identities (Vryan et al. 2003).

Particularly useful in this study is the concept of identity salience, which recognizes contributing factors and processes that make one identity—in this case, being Muslim—of greater, even paramount, importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities that comprise a sense of self. According to Stryker (1980), discrete identities may be thought of as ordered in a salience hierarchy. As individuals become more committed to a given role, that role will assume higher identity salience. Moreover, the higher the identity in the salience hierarchy, the more likely that identity will be enacted in a given situation, or in many situations. In essence, this probability of invoking a particular identity, whether intentionally or not, defines identity salience and thus commitment to that identity. Although social identities and salience hierarchies tend to be stable, individuals sometimes alter or take on new social identities, shed old ones, or rearrange their identities' relative salience (Vryan et al. 2003:381).

Religious Identity

While there has been much social scientific exploration of identity over the past decade, major reviews of identity theory and research have largely overlooked the role of religion in forging identities for individuals and groups.[3] For

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[3]Similarly, very few studies of recent immigration and ethnicity say anything about religion, which according to Warner (1997:218) represents a "huge scholarly blind spot."

example, in a summary of the state of knowledge regarding identity construction and processes, Cerulo (1997) does not include religion as an identity category. Similarly, the overview essays of Frable (1997) and Howard (2000) carefully examine the individual and social bases of various dimensions of identity—including gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, age, physical and mental ability, and class—but neither mentions religion as an important defining aspect of individuals or groups in society. Interestingly, Appiah and Gates (1995:1) invoke Christian symbolism, but ignore religion as a source of identity, in their claim that gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class form the "holy trinity" in the field of identity studies.

At the same time, however, numerous investigations by sociologists of religion have explored the role of religion in maintaining group identity and solidarity, particularly for immigrants (see for example Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Gibson 1988; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Hammond 1988; Herberg 1955; Min and Kim 2002; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988). Many of these studies, rather than focusing on religion exclusively, have examined the connection between religion and ethnic identity. This research has documented the continuing importance of religion in preserving cultural and ethnic traditions, supporting the adjustment of first-generation immigrants to a new host society, and providing a source of identity for the second generation (Bankston and Zhou 1996; Chong 1998; Kurien 1998; Ng 2002; Rayaprol 1997; Yang 1999). According to Williams (1988:12-13), although religion is often a significant aspect of ethnic culture, it is difficult to establish the exact relation between the two—whether religious affiliation is essential to the ethnic community or if religious orientation is ancillary to ethnic identity. Indeed, immigrant groups differ in the ways they focus on and integrate their religious and ethnic identities. Some immigrant religious communities emphasize their members' religious identity more than their ethnic foundation, whereas others stress ethnic identity and rely on religious institutions primarily to preserve cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries (Yang and Ebaugh 2001:367).

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

ty—for example, Indian Hindus, Israeli Jews, Pakistani Muslims, or Vietnamese Buddhists coming to the United States.

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

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

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

Muslim American Identity

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

to emigration, the immigrant experience in America, and the options immigrants find as they struggle to make their home in a new, sometimes hostile, environment.

Despite the aforementioned studies and other research that explores the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of Muslims (see Haddad 1991; Haddad and Esposito 2000; Haddad and Lummis 1987; Haddad and Smith 2002; Leonard 2003; Smith 1999; Waugh, Abu-Laban and Qureshi 1991), little is known regarding the identity formation processes of Muslim Americans, particularly for the second generation (Hermansen 2003; Leonard 2003). Ajrouch (2004, 2000, 1999) has closely examined the identity development of young Muslim Arabs in Dearborn, Michigan. Although she does not specifically focus on religious identification, Ajrouch does explore the intersection of ethnic and religious identity, the significance of gender relations, and how religious teachings and parental influence shape the identities of second-generation Arab American adolescents. Hermansen (2003) has also written about the second generation and what she calls "identity Islam" among that group, a form of identity assertion that concerns her greatly because she sees Muslim youth in America becoming rigidly conservative and condemnatory. Hermansen considers this particular ideological version of Islam antithetical to progressive interpretations within the religion. Among the available work on the lives of Muslim American youth, no studies appear to have specifically documented and analyzed the ways that religious identity is constructed, developed, and enacted by the second generation.

In this paper, I utilize data from focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observation to examine the process of religious identity formation. Specifically, I explore why and how religion has become the most salient source of personal and social identity for a group of young Muslims living in the United States.[4] This ethnographic investigation is thus intended to contribute to the understanding of the significance of religion among second-generation immigrants by examining the factors and processes contributing to the development of a religious identity. This study also expands knowledge regarding minority groups distinguished by religion, rather than by race or ethnicity. Finally, this investigation broadens sociological understanding of the beliefs and practices of young Muslim Americans. This research is particularly important because of the growing number of Muslims in the United States and the increasing visibility of

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

second-generation Muslim Americans in the political and social spheres of American life.

I begin by discussing the setting in which this study was conducted, the research participants, and the qualitative methods that were used. Next, I present three stages of identity development, describing and illustrating how a Muslim religious identity emerged and gained saliency for the participants. I conclude by analyzing the individual and social factors that contributed to the identity of being Muslim becoming paramount and discuss how this particular group of young Muslims understand and enact their religious identities.

SETTINGS AND METHODS

The initial phase of my research project began immediately following the events of September 11, 2001, when I received a grant to study the response of Muslim university students to the terrorist attacks. Over the course of the following two years, from September 2001 through October 2003, I traveled to New York City four times, conducting six weeks of study and observation. Additionally, during this same time period, I regularly engaged in research in Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins, Colorado. I employed three descriptive fieldwork methods throughout my project: focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

I contacted most of my research participants through the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) on their respective college and university campuses. Since there is no official record of Muslims living in the United States, one of the most viable ways to find my participants was through the network of MSAs, a nationally recognized organization. Within each MSA, I relied on one or two key contacts to help recruit participants and arrange interviews, while also contacting interviewees through a referral snowball sample technique (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981).

During the three months following the September 11 attacks, I conducted 23 focus groups, which ranged in size from three to 15 participants and lasted between one and four hours. In the following months, I used one-on-one, semi-structured and unstructured interviews as the primary form of data collection. In total, I conducted 83 individual interviews, each lasting between one and three hours. Combining the focus groups (n = 23) and individual interviews (n = 83) conducted in New York and Colorado, I carried out a total of 106 qualitative interviews, which were audio taped, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

I also observed and participated in various aspects of the Muslim men and women's lives. For example, I attended political and religious speeches and MSA meetings, observed Friday prayers at mosques, attended weddings, and ate dinners at various religious centers. I also visited dorms and apartments that were evacuated following the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, toured and observed campuses, traveled on subways and buses with the students, and often

shared a cup of coffee, lunch, or dinner. I kept detailed field notes as I collected this data. Participating in these activities, as well as simply spending time with the students, helped me to verify the experiences and information discussed in the interviews (Bogdan and Taylor 1998; Lofland and Lofland 1995).

Sample Population

In total, I interviewed 127 Muslim students, many of whom were interviewed two or three times during the two-year period of this research. Eighty-two of the participants were women and 45 were men.[5] The students ranged in age from 18 to 33. Eighty-seven of the interviewees were United States citizens, and the other 40 had student visas or were permanent residents. Most of the participants in this study were 1.5 or second-generation immigrants[6] who were primarily raised in the United States and planned to stay in this country. I also interviewed 10 converts to Islam, and spoke with a number of foreign students who intended to return to their countries of origin upon graduation from American universities. All of the participants were fluent in English, and over 75 percent spoke at least one other language. The interviewees reported a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The majority of participants, 65 students, were of South or Southeast Asian descent. Forty-one students identified as Arab or Arab American, ten were Caucasian, six were Latino, and five were African American. However, standard ethnic categories do not depict the true cultural diversity of the sample population, as the interviewees identified with over 30 different national and/or cultural backgrounds.

Most of the participants in this study would be considered highly religious. This religious identification is based on both the self-characterization of the participants, and my own observations. Almost all of the students reported praying five times a day (one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam), fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan (another fundamental pillar of Islam), being active members of religious organizations, having Muslim first and last names, and abstaining from religiously prohibited activities (such as drinking alcohol or eating pork). Regardless of gender, most of the interviewees chose to dress modest-

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

[6]Some researchers include in the second generation those children born abroad who came to the United States before the age of 12 (Portes and Zhou 1993). However, most scholars make a distinction between the second and 1.5 generation to differentiate American-born children (second generation) from those who moved to the United States before reaching adulthood (1.5 generation) (Gans 1992; Min and Kim 2000; Rumbaut 1991). I found no significant differences between the two groups in terms of their sense of religious identity; so for the sake of brevity, in the text I refer to my sample as the second generation.

ly. The majority of women (over 90 percent) wore the *hijab*,[7] and two of the women wore the *niqaab*.[8] The level of religious affiliation and manner of dress of most of the interviewees—the fact that they were visibly identifiable as Muslim—certainly affected their individual experiences. Although my sample was not randomly selected and is not representative, the narratives provided by the interviewees suggest important insights about other young Muslims, who through a process of introspection and social interaction consciously decided to identify as members of the faith.

A MODEL OF MUSLIM RELIGIOUS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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

Religion as Ascribed Identity
Of the 127 individuals interviewed for this study, 117 were born into Muslim families (the other 10 participants converted to Islam as young adults).[9] Because the majority of the interviewees were raised in Muslim homes,[10] most viewed religion as an ascribed characteristic of their individual selves and social worlds. During this first stage of identity development, study participants reported that

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

[8]The *niqaab* is a veil that covers the hair, neck, and face, leaving only the eyes visible.

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

[10]Although most of the interviewees were born into Muslim homes, they reported a wide range of familial religious involvement during their formative years. For example, some of the interviewees said that their family members were not religious at all, while others reported that their parents and siblings were highly devout.

they engaged in very little critical reflection when they were children regarding the meaning of "being Muslim" because their religious identity was taken for granted as part of their everyday lives. Whereas most adults have the capacity to select and therefore assert a variety of social and individual identities, children are more likely to adhere to assigned identities (Adams and Marshall 1996). Indeed, most of the participants did not consider issues of identity when they were young, as they were "just kids like everyone else" who simply "did what their parents told them to." Alisha,[11] whose family emigrated to the United States from Syria when she was an infant, discussed her experiences growing up in a Muslim family:

> I have never really strayed from the religion. I have never really had a boyfriend or any-thing like that, or gone out with friends much. I have pretty much stayed within the fam-ily. It is just things like, I believed in God and stuff. I would pray, but not well. I would do the things, but not do them well.

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

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

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

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

Most of the participants stated that religion was just one of the many aspects that defined who they were during their formative years. Because the majority of

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[11]To ensure anonymity, the names of all participants have been changed. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

the students were the children of immigrants, they often identified according to their parents' national or ethnic backgrounds, at least when they were younger. After some reflection, some of the interviewees concluded that they were more likely to identify themselves this way because of social norms and external pressure in the United States to define oneself by race, nationality, or ethnicity rather than religion. Almost all of the students who were visibly identifiable as Muslim or as an ethnic minority reported being asked about their country of origin quite frequently. Salma, a native of New York City, related her thoughts on this subject:

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

Although the students most often reported not being self-reflective regarding their religious background during this first stage of identity development, their behavior—for example, practices required by their parents such as dressing modestly or attending religion classes at a mosque—nonetheless reflected a Muslim religious identity, regardless of whether as children they understood why they were doing such things. Individuals absorb and internalize many norms, values, and behaviors when they see them exemplified by their parents, peers, and others long before they understand them intellectually. This form of socialization is similar to Swidler's (1986:284) notion of culture as a repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies of action may be constructed. According to Swidler, even if people do not carefully consider the impact or dictates of culture, it still provides the rituals and traditions that regulate ordinary patterns of authority, cooperation, and interaction.

While they may not have consciously contemplated their religious identities during this stage, the interviewees were well aware of the pressure to assimilate to "American" values and norms. This pressure varied somewhat, depending on the environment in which the participant was raised. The students who grew up in predominantly Caucasian, Judeo-Christian towns more frequently described perceived demands to "fit in" than did those who were raised in urban areas. The students who attended schools with more diverse populations in New York City and the Denver metropolitan area also experienced such problems, although they felt less pressure to assimilate. Henna, a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani and Indian descent, was raised in a small town in upstate New York. She was the only Muslim girl in her entire school, and she was keenly aware of the impact of being a minority:

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

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

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

The data reported above probably represent the early stages of identity development for most children and adolescents, regardless of their religious affiliation. Very young children are typically not self-reflective about their identities and ascribed statuses (Adams and Marshall 1996; Elkind 1964). Moreover, as children age, there is significant pressure to fit in or "be cool" (Adler and Adler 1998), which results in various identity management strategies.

Religion as Chosen Identity

Prior research has documented that as children age, they begin to develop a more concrete, cognitive conception of their religious identity (Elkind 1964; Johnstone 2001). Likewise, the participants in this study reported that as they matured, they began to view religion not as an unquestionable, ascribed characteristic, but as a chosen identity. When the students told stories regarding their identity development, they frequently mentioned various factors that led to their choosing first and foremost to be identified as Muslim.

Becoming more introspective and aware of values, goals, and beliefs is a normal part of human development (Erikson 1963; Parks 1986). Some of the inter-

viewees believed it was "only natural" that as they matured, they would begin to contemplate more important life questions and their religious backgrounds, and hence re-examine that aspect of their identities. Asma, who was originally from Guyana, explained:

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

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

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

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

Another factor that both contributed to and resulted from the increased religiosity and religious identification among the participants was the new friends

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

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

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

In addition to providing introductions and links to new Muslim friends, the MSAs also offered an organizational and social setting in which the interviewees could collectively examine specific aspects of the religion of Islam and the meaning of being Muslim. Religious organizations provide a safe environment for discussing and practicing beliefs and, ultimately, constructing religious identities (Ammerman 2003; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). As Somers (1994:619) notes, religious organizations are one supplier of "public narratives," which are collective accounts that are constructed and shared and exist beyond the consciousness of any single individual. Just as research on religious converts has shown how their stories often tend to be formed in accordance with group-specific guidelines (Snow and Machalek 1984; Stromberg 1993) and "appropriate" verbal accounts of religious development (Beckford 1978:251), the interviewees in this study undoubtedly learned common narratives regarding their beliefs and identities in their MSAs. Indeed, their involvement with the MSAs clearly affected the course of their religious development and commitment because the associations provided just such a social context and narrative space in which to develop a religious identity. In her review of research on Muslims in America, Leonard (2003:135) calls for a broader understanding of Muslim student groups and what is being taught about Islam and Muslims in America's higher educational institutions in order to understand not only the present, but also the future of the next

generation of American Muslims. Clearly, such research should further examine the role of MSAs in strengthening the religious identities and social networks of Muslim students.

In this case, some of the interviewees turned to their on-campus religious organizations and friends because they felt they were not receiving enough religious education at home. While their parents taught them the fundamentals of Islam, such as the importance of praying five times a day, the interviewees sometimes complained that their parents were "too cultural" because they mixed cultural norms and values with religious practices. Ariana, a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani descent, discussed this:

> At first, even though my parents lived in Saudi Arabia, they weren't very religious. They took it for granted. We have pictures of my mom with tight dresses in Saudi Arabia. I was like, "Mom, you wore that in public?!" [laughter] She was like, "There was no religious belief where I was." She wore shorts. She was so fashionable. She was like, "There was no Islam back then." Then when they came here, they realized that we have to hold on to the religion, but they wanted us to talk English. They wanted us to assimilate, kind of. They think they should have taught us more from the beginning. We actually taught ourselves. We started looking into Islam. For them, Islam and the culture are so infused together, some things, my mom had this thing where if you eat fish, then you can't drink milk. All this weird stuff. She's like, "It's true. The prophets say so." [laughter]

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

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

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

The students sometimes chose to assert their religious identity in order to reject ethnic, national, or cultural identities that they viewed as un-Islamic. Most

interpreted Islamic tenets to say that people should not segregate themselves based on national borders or racial categories.[12] As the interviewees learned more about Islam and drew closer to the religion, they became more likely to reject or downplay other aspects of their identity. Two young women discussed this issue during a focus group:

> Famina: The whole issue of identity. In Islam, you don't support nationalism in the first place. That's what brings community. Right now you see so many different colors here among the [Muslim] sisters. If your brother or sister is not Muslim, but a stranger is, you're closer to that stranger than your own brother or sister.
> Mina: Right. What you believe is how you behave. Your belief affects your behavior. It's your way of life. Being Muslim is a way of life. That's what it is. Islam doesn't only not support nationalism, it's against nationalism.

For Saba, who was born in the United States, but spent her junior high and high school years living and studying in Pakistan, the relationship between ethnicity, nationalism, and religion was challenged as she began to assert her Muslim identity during college:

> If you had asked me before, my identity would be Pakistani. I identified myself more with my ethnic background than with my religious background. With time, I think that in America you can't be attached with your ethnic background, especially since our ethnic background, being a Pakistani, they don't really associate that much with their religion. They put their religion on hold, you could say, until old age comes their way, which I as a person really cannot do. With time I disassociated myself with my ethnic background and I have become more and more Muslim.

Religion as Declared Identity

For the participants in this study, the third stage of religious identity development occurred in response to a crisis—the events and aftermath of September 11, 2001. Within hours of the attacks, an unprecedented rash of xenophobic incidents began (Eck 2001). In the months following September 11, thousands of Muslims and Arabs (as well as Sikhs, South Asians, and other individuals who simply appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent) endured discrimination, harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2003; Arab American Institute 2002; Council on American-Islamic Relations 2002; U.S. Department of Justice 2002). Despite this reaction, most of the Muslim students continued to publicly affirm

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[12]This particular interpretation of Islam that eschews nationalism led to the formation of the MSA in the United States in 1963. The founders of the MSA were alienated by the "Americanization" of Arab mosques, so they established the MSA as an alternative umbrella organization with a mandate to promulgate "true Islam" and to discourage allegiance to something other than the religion (Haddad 1994:75).

their religious identities. Indeed, many participants reported that their religious identity became even stronger during this time.

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

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

Kaori's friend Sadiya agreed. "We're definitely more focused now."

The increasingly negative portrayal of Islam following the attacks (Haddad 2004) and participants' perceptions of how non-Muslims now viewed them and their religion caused some of the students to identify more closely with Islam. When I asked Noreen, who was born and raised in the United States and whose parents were from India, how September 11 had affected her daily life, she responded:

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

Jeena, a native of Afghanistan who came to the United States as a refugee from Pakistan when she was 13 years old, discussed how, after September 11, she felt more secure in her Muslim identity and more likely to defend that aspect of herself:

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

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

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

Sanae, who had recently moved to the United States from India, echoed a similar sentiment:

After 9/11, Muslims were so criticized for it, we all turned in. We were like, "What's happening? Let's read up." After 9/11 when we were subjected to the questions, like, "Tell us, what the hell is *jihad*?" Then we started reading more. We turned in and came together and started attending more meetings. We read up more and more and became stronger Muslims.

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

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

Regarding personal interactions and confrontations, some of the participants described how they attempted to react to others if they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. Many of the young women and men said that even if someone made them angry or upset, due to of a negative comment, a dirty look, or any other such action, they tried not to respond because they did not want to reinforce negative stereotypes about Muslims. Sara, who came with her family to the United States from Pakistan, discussed how she managed an incident with a police officer:

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

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

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

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

Another, more difficult consequence for the Muslim students was their being cast as an enemy "Other" following the attacks. Most of the interviewees were the victims of varying levels of mistreatment following September 11, ranging from stares to verbal and physical confrontations. These incidents confirmed their feelings of being excluded from the American community and provoked various emotions, including anger, sadness, and fear. Yasmin, a native of Great Britain of Pakistani descent, discussed what happened to her during a peace rally:

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

Several scholars have noted that one response to real or perceived group threats is increased group solidarity (Coser 1964; Durkheim [1893] 1984; Simmel 1955; Smith 1998; Tajfel 1981). Most of the interviewees agreed that, although they were terrible, the events of September 11 brought Muslims closer together

and reinforced their faith in Islam. Janan, the daughter of a West African immigrant and an African American Muslim convert, discussed how September 11 had impacted her work, her religiosity, and Muslims as a group:

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

Much of the discourse surrounding September 11 involved dualities such as "good and evil" and "us and them." Just as the students were aware that they had been cast as "the Other" immediately following September 11, they also believed that there was some expectation for them to choose between their American and Muslim identities. Natasha, a second-generation immigrant of Egyptian descent, talked about this duality:

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

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

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

Mina: My father literally stood in front of me...
Raina: My family doesn't cover. [everyone talks at once]
Mina: My dad said to stay home for a couple of days until everything calms down. He said, "You're going to get really bad reactions if you go out that way." But after the first week he let go. He trusted that we know what we're going to do. No way am I going to take it off. [everyone talks at once]
Daria: My dad was yelling at me, "You take that off your head." He actually said to me, "It's for safety purposes." In our religion, you are allowed to take off the headscarf if you are in danger. He was so angry at me because I wasn't obeying him. I said, "No, I'm not taking it off." Right now, thank God, I don't want to jinx myself, ever since this has happened, nobody has really come up to me or said anything or physically tried to do anything to me. It's all about how you feel inside. If you know what kind of person you are, and if you carry yourself... When people stare at me on the train, I stare right back at them. I'm not going to put my head down.
Tanisha: If you change, it's like you're proving them right. If somebody did try to say something to me, I would try to speak with them, educate them.

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

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

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

When we came back [to classes], I tried to call most of the sisters and contact them. I also urged them to go back to school, don't be afraid. Some of the girls were afraid to keep on

their *hijab*. I was like, "No, we have to keep our identity." They said, "How do we act?" I say, "This has nothing to do with us." They're like, "What about the cold looks?" I'm like, "Don't look at them. Just walk away." I put up some signs to remind them to fear God and have strength, remember nothing can happen to us. I said, "Recite some verses from the Qur'an to get some inner strength."

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

Stronger individual religious identification may result in enhanced group solidarity, cohesion, and collective identification. At the same time, visible demonstration of a minority religious identity may provoke hostility and discrimination

from the dominant population, as occurred following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Haddad (1994:79) contends that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the resultant American support for the effort, shocked the Arab community in the United States and led to the creation of the Arab-American hyphenated identity. Similarly, I argue that the events and aftermath of September 11 solidified Muslim American identity and made it a stronger social and political force. Certainly Muslim Americans recognized their role in the public sphere prior to the tragic events of September 11; however, that catastrophe led to an identity formed in response to crisis—an *identity of crisis*—as Islam came under intense scrutiny by non-Muslim Americans. Following September 11, for the students interviewed for this study, being Muslim American has new meaning, as religious identity has become even more central to their social and personal selves. Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 1996) introduced the concept of "reactive ethnicity" to describe the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter confrontations with an adverse native mainstream. Similarly, the interviewees' religious identities were shaped and further strengthened by the post-September 11 hostility as well as the perceived threat to both Islam and their individual identities. According to Smith's (1998) theory of subcultural identity formation, as long as the perception of a threat remains, personal identities and group solidarity will likely continue to be strong. Only time will tell if this is the case for the young Muslims interviewed for this study.

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

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