Fall 12-2009

Post-Conversion Experiences of African-American Male Sunni Muslims: Community Integration and Masculinity in Twenty-First Century Philadelphia

Brian L. Coleman

University of Pennsylvania, brianco2@sp2.upenn.edu

Post-Conversion Experiences of African-American Male Sunni Muslims: Community Integration and Masculinity in Twenty-First Century Philadelphia

Abstract

African American males form the largest category of converts to Sunni Islam in the US. This study aimed at understanding the ways in which the conversion process impacted social connections, both preexisting connections and creation and fostering of new ones post-conversion. This study sought to capture this understanding from the perspective of the converts themselves, in their own voices. Specifically, this study explored the ways in which conversion to Sunni Islam among African American men living in Philadelphia impacted their relationships with family members, friends, neighborhood members, those in the broader African American community, and in places of employment.

This study was exploratory in nature and consisted of a total of 26 in-depth interviews. The primary data consisted of 21 interviews conducted with converts. An additional 5 interviews, conducted with key informants, formed a second data source and served to contextualize the findings that emerged from the primary data source. Efforts were made to interview participants representing a diversity of ages, lengths of time converted, and denominational affiliations.

Several key findings emerged from this data. In light of the processual nature of religious conversion, the degree of religious intensification was found to be associated with the degree to which converts had traversed the boundary of their faith. Denominational affiliation was found to be important for understanding post-conversion experiences as adherents from different theological perspectives oriented their day-to-day lives in notable ways in respect to different criteria. The primary line of demarcation was found to be between fundamentalist and more moderate groups. Finally, it was found that prolonged exposure to Muslims in the city has led to nonpersonalized-acceptance, the acceptance of Muslims in the physical space of Philadelphia; this has served to curtail excessively negative reactions towards Muslims by non-Muslims in the various domains of community life, yet it appears that this acceptance has been limited to the physical realm and that true acceptance and integration are relatively speaking, lacking. The acceptance and integration to date however is suggestive of a process by which marginalized organizations with rigid boundaries began to diffuse into their broader communities and gain full acceptance.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Social Welfare

First Advisor
Ram Cnaan

Second Advisor
Roberta Sands

Third Advisor
Jamal Elias

Subject Categories
Social Welfare

POST-CONVERSION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE SUNNI MUSLIMS: COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND MASCULINITY IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PHILADELPHIA

Brian L. Coleman

A DISSERTATION

in

Social Welfare

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2009

_____
Ram A. Cnaan, Professor, School of Social Policy and Practice
Supervisor of Dissertation

_____
Ram A. Cnaan, Professor, School of Social Policy and Practice
Graduate Group Chairperson

Dissertation Committee:

Ram A. Cnaan, Professor, School of Social Policy & Practice
Roberta G. Sands, Professor, School of Social Policy & Practice
Jamal J. Elias, Professor, Department of Religious Studies

POST-CONVERSION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE SUNNI
MUSLIMS: COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND MASCULINITY IN TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY PHILADELPHIA

COPYRIGHT

2009

Brian L. Coleman

To my parents for their love, support, and encouragement.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Ram Cnaan, Roberta Sands, and Jamal Elias, for their invaluable comments and assistance in helping me bring this project to fruition. I also have to thank all of my colleagues in the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania for providing feedback over the past few years which was invaluable in helping me to narrow my focus and develop my ideas. Additionally, I'd like to acknowledge the support of colleagues and friends from throughout the university community. My time at the university would not have been as meaningful or fulfilling without these interactions. Finally, to the participants who took time out of their schedules to share their stories and experiences with me, as well as countless other individuals in the Philadelphia Muslim community that shared their time, information, and resources that aided me in the completion of this project, I am grateful.

ABSTRACT

POST-CONVERSION EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE SUNNI

MUSLIMS: COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AND MASCULINITY IN TWENTY-

FIRST CENTURY PHILADELPHIA

Brian L. Coleman

Ram A. Cnaan

African American males form the largest category of converts to Sunni Islam in
the US. This study aimed at understanding the ways in which the conversion process
impacted social connections, both preexisting connections and creation and fostering of
new ones post-conversion.   This study sought to capture this understanding from the
perspective of the converts themselves, in their own voices. Specifically, this study
explored the ways in which conversion to Sunni Islam among African American men
living in Philadelphia impacted their relationships with family members, friends,
neighborhood members, those in the broader African American community, and in places
of employment.

This study was exploratory in nature and consisted of a total of 26 in-depth
interviews. The primary data consisted of 21 interviews conducted with converts. An
additional 5 interviews, conducted with key informants, formed a second data source and
served to contextualize the findings that emerged from the primary data source. Efforts

were made to interview participants representing a diversity of ages, lengths of time converted, and denominational affiliations.

Several key findings emerged from this data. In light of the processual nature of religious conversion, the degree of religious intensification was found to be associated with the degree to which converts had traversed the boundary of their faith. Denominational affiliation was found to be important for understanding post-conversion experiences as adherents from different theological perspectives oriented their day-to-day lives in notable ways in respect to different criteria. The primary line of demarcation was found to be between fundamentalist and more moderate groups. Finally, it was found that prolonged exposure to Muslims in the city has led to *nonpersonalized-acceptance*, the acceptance of Muslims in the physical space of Philadelphia; this has served to curtail excessively negative reactions towards Muslims by non-Muslims in the various domains of community life, yet it appears that this acceptance has been limited to the physical realm and that true acceptance and integration are relatively speaking, lacking. The acceptance and integration to date however is suggestive of a process by which marginalized organizations with rigid boundaries began to diffuse into their broader communities and gain full acceptance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Charts, Tables, and Figures

Chapter 1

From Mecca to America: African American Sunni Muslims: An Introduction

Islam is currently the second largest religion in the world with nearly 1.4 billion

adherents residing in countries all over the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

Approximately 85% of all Muslims belong to the Sunni tradition, the single largest

denomination of Islam in the world (Esposito, 1988). In the United States (US), the

majority of Muslims also follow the Sunni tradition and African Americans make up a

significant portion of these Muslims. African American male converts to Sunni Islam in

the US far outnumber the proportion of domestic converts from all other racial/ethnic

groups in the US. Yet there is a dearth of social scientific literature focused on this

population. Even less is known about the ramifications of their conversions.

This study will explore the implications of conversion to Sunni Islam among

African American males on community integration. Community is a middle ground

where multiple connections are made between one's primary (such as family) and

secondary (such as work) groupings. Community then encompasses broad categories

such as family, neighborhood, religious groupings, and work environments. Community

integration refers to the degree to which individuals feel solidarity with, or inclination to

affiliate or disaffiliate with various groupings in the multiple domains of community. It

is important to recognize that inclinations to affiliate or disaffiliate can be, though not

necessarily so, concomitantly accompanied by feelings of acceptance or rejection by

those in the various community groupings. The process of religious conversion results,

to some extent, in the creation of a new sense of self. Introducing this new self into one's

old environment may prove difficult because the conversion process itself may have resulted in the disruption of the social bonds that linked an individual to others pre-conversion. Bonds of mutual identification and interdependence among individuals produce a sense of collective belonging. This sense of belonging is one of the primary markers of belonging to a community.

The process of religious conversion can have dramatic ramifications for the social order of an individual's life. Relationships with individual family members can be destroyed or greatly altered, one could experience discrimination in places of employment, and collectivities to which individuals once belonged could now shun the convert. Conversely, converts themselves may choose to disaffiliate from their old social networks. While converts may become completely absorbed in their new networks, most converts maintain some degree of pre-conversion social ties. However, when converts maintain ties with those in their old social networks, they may choose to alter, sometime dramatically, the ways in which they interact with their pre-conversion associates. In short, the implications of religious conversion can be profound.

Islam is a faith in which males have a particularly prominent role. The very fact that male converts may reconceptualize how they view themselves as men may prove disruptive to the nature of connections held prior to conversion with numerous individuals in disparate primary and secondary groupings. To date, very little research has been done examining social connections post conversion and no research, to the knowledge of this study's principal investigator, has investigated how the conversion processes has precipitated changes in the nature of connections that one held in his social network prior to conversion among male converts to Sunni Islam.

This study will serve the important role of beginning to address the many as yet unanswered questions regarding the largest group of religious converts to Sunni Islam in the US. This woefully understudied population presents several opportunities for advancing social scientific knowledge. First, by gaining knowledge of this population one directly addresses a large gap in the field of the sociology of religion. While there is limited information available about African American Sunni Muslims, the information gathered through this current research project will greatly buttress the scant information already available within the field by increasing our direct knowledge of this population. Strengthening the body of knowledge in this subfield is also important for acquiring the fullest understanding possible on the role of religion in society. One must focus not only on mainstream groups but also on those located towards the fringes of American society. As has been shown in other areas of the social sciences, the study of seemingly marginal material can lead to great benefits in increased overall understanding (e.g. improved understanding of network analysis through studying weak ties-see Granovetter, 1973).

In addition to directly improving the body of knowledge in fields concerned with the social scientific study of religion, this study will also give additional insight into the ways in which members of marginalized groups cope with the challenges they face in society. This study then has the potential to lend insight into the study of other marginalized populations in the US, not only those concerned with religion.

Furthermore, many people in the US admit to being relatively uninformed regarding the basic tenents of Islam despite the religions increased media coverage in the post-9/11 environment. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror" have likely further contributed to additional confusion regarding the boundaries between many

people's already ill-informed understandings of Islam and various acts of violence reported by media that have been conducted by some Muslims in the Middle East and throughout the world. In the minds of some US citizens terrorism and Islam have become synonymous. Perhaps the tendency on the part of some in the US to view Muslims, regardless of where they originate from or reside at, as a homogenized monolithic group is normal given the lack of interaction that many in the US have had with Muslims. This study could aid in contributing valuable knowledge about one of the largest domestic groups of US Muslims and could aid in deconstructing the concept of Muslims as a monolithic group. This would likely aid many in developing a more nuanced understanding of this community in the US and could be an important part of decoupling, on the part of some, the misconception of Islam being inextricably tied to terrorism.

It is extremely important to gather as much information as possible on the ways in which individuals are connected to society. Given that Islam is currently not only a marginalized religion in the US society, but is also a marginalized religion within the African American community, the proposed study provides a unique opportunity in which to gather information on such individuals' connections to society. To address the aforementioned lacuna in the literature, the proposed study addresses the following research question: How do African American men who have become Sunni Muslims perceive the impact of their conversion on their lives, including:

(1). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships with their family (includes family of origin, extended family, and current partner and children)?

(2). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships with those in the broader African American community (includes African American Christians, and those in their neighborhoods)?

(3). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships at their places of employment, or the impact on their attempts to gain and retain employment?

(4). How does their conversion affect their perception of themselves as men?

(5). To what extent are the experiences of African American male converts to Islam shaped by racism and anti-Islamic feelings in the US?

As an initial step in gaining a fuller understanding of the proposed research, one must first understand the population under consideration. It is for this reason that the remainder of this introductory chapter will review, as background information, existing knowledge on Islam in the following areas: (1) History, structure, and presence of Islam across the globe; (2) the role of race and religion in the US; and (3) the limited existing literature on African American Sunni Muslims.

History, Structure, and Presence of Islam

Islam: History and Belief

Muslims trace their community back to Abraham of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and view the God they worship, known as Allah, to be the same God mentioned in those texts. Furthermore, Muslims believe that their religion is part of a long tradition of divine revelations given by God to man through prophets dating all the way back to Adam of the Garden of Eden, as referenced in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Muslims believe their prophet, Muhammad, is the final prophet in that line of successive prophets and the last prophet of the monotheistic religions (Rahman, 2002; Renard, 1996). Muhammad himself believed that the revelations given through him were a continuation of, or more accurately a revival of, messages received by earlier prophets (Rahman, 2002).

Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca, located in current day Saudi Arabia, in approximately 570 CE. Muhammad was orphaned as a small child and as a young adult was thought to have become a successful merchant; Muhammad managed the trade of a rich widow fifteen years his senior that he was to later marry. Muslims believe that in the year 610, Muhammad heard a voice commanding him to recite in the name of the Lord. It is believed that the voice was that of the angel Gabriel and the recitations that Muhammad made are considered to be the first of his divine revelations (Renard, 1996). The compilation of Muhammad's revelations became known as the Qur'an (the Holy Book of Islam) and forms the base for the Muslim faith. The Qur'an contains the core set of beliefs that structure the lives of Muslims.

The other significant source of instruction and inspiration for Muslims is the

Sunna--the sayings, confirmations, and actions of Muhammad (Omar, 1997). The Sunna

therefore showed the normative behavior of Muhammad. Muslims believe that

Muhammad was divinely inspired to act wisely and in congruence with God's will.

Therefore Muhammad's life and the example set by it have acted as a supplement to the

Qur'an. The Qur'an and Sunna together form the basis for Islamic law (Esposito, 1988).

Additionally, the Qur'an and Sunna are important sources of instruction for Muslims all

over the world because they collectively are the basis for the five pillars of Islam, the

basic duties or responsibilities that all Muslims are to fulfill. One is informed about

Muhammad's Sunna through Hadiths.

The second most important scriptural source for Muslims are the *hadiths* (Elias,

1999). Renard (1996) noted:

> The term *hadith* embraces three distinct bodies of textual material: reports of the
> words and deeds of Muhammad called Prophetic Hadith; a much smaller
> collection of sayings attributed to the imams of Shi'I Islam; and a still smaller
> group of Sacred Hadith (*ahadith qudsiya;s., hadith qudsi*), sayings attributed to
> God but held distinct from Qur'anic revelation. (p. 1)

Among the *hadiths*, Prophetic Hadiths are considered to be the most important (Renard,

1996). Elias (1999) noted that the Prophetic Hadiths also contain information about

things to which Muhammad did not speak about but gave unspoken approval of. *Hadiths*

were originally orally transmitted beginning with the accounts of the companions of the

prophets. For generations *hadiths* were orally transmitted until efforts began to record

them. As *hadiths* were transmitted orally, it is believed that many forgeries exist; thus, a

tradition has been established to try to ascertain which *hadiths* are valid through

attempting to trace the lineage of those who orally transmitted a specific *hadith*. A *hadith*

is accepted only if there is a continuous chain of accepted authorities. Nevertheless, in practice many Muslims do not make distinctions between *hadiths* deemed fake or not (Elias, 1999). These controversies notwithstanding, the *hadith* is a source of guidance for Muslims (Esposito, 1988).

Irrespective of denominational affiliation, the core beliefs of all Muslims are reflected in the five pillars of Islam. The five pillars are essential beliefs and practices in the Muslim faith and community. The first of the five pillars is a profession of the faith known as *shahada* (witness or testimony). While all pillars of Islam are important for Muslims to follow, Shahadah is the most important among them in that it is necessary to perform Shahadah at least once in order to be considered a Muslim. In the *shahada* one affirms a belief in the oneness of God and in Muhammad's prophethood. In taking the *shahada* one recites "I bear witness that there is no god except God and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of the God" (Elias, 1999, p. 66). The first part of the *shahada*, the belief that there is no god except God is an affirmation of belief in monotheism, it is the second part of the Shahadah, the belief that Muhammad is the messenger of God that truly makes one a Muslim (Elias, 1999). Generally, Muslims believe that the *shahada* needs to be recited three times in the presence of witnesses in order for one to be considered a Muslim (Smith, 1999). The *shahada* is foundational and the rest of the pillars are built upon it.

The second pillar of Islam is the performance of ritual prayer and is known as *salat*. Muslims are to engage in formal prayers five times a day. The times of prayer are at dawn, before the sun rises; after the sun passes its highest point, which is around early afternoon; in the late part of the afternoon; just after the setting of the sun; and again

between sunset and midnight. While praying one is to face the city of Mecca where the

Great Mosque, the Ka'ba, is located (Smith, 1999). Before one engages in prayer one is

to cleanse the body. There is a ritual of purification, known as *wudu*, done with water

that every believer is to undergo before engaging in *salat* to ready their minds and hearts

for prayer. Prayer can be done individually or collectively at a mosque (Elias, 1999).

Congregational prayer is traditionally held on Friday and is known as *Jum'ah* (Smith,

1999).

The third pillar of Islam is known as *zakat* (almsgiving). All Muslims are duty-

bound to attend to the social welfare of their community. Muslims pay an alms tax to

redress economic inequality. All adult Muslims are to pay this wealth tax annually; it is

usually two and half percent of their accumulated wealth for Sunni Muslims. Elias

(1999) noted "There is also a great deal of variation in what forms of wealth and income

are considered taxable for *zakat*: for example, whether or not income (as opposed to

assets) is taxable, and in how one calculates the tax for agricultural products" (p. 70).

Regardless of the means of calculating the *zakat*, the duty of Muslims towards the social

welfare of others in their community is paramount. Rahman (2002) pointed out that "So

strong is the emphasis of the Qur'an on this point that even prayer is seldom mentioned

without being accompanied by Zakat" (p. 37).

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast of Ramadan, known as *sawm*. Islam requires

that all Muslims fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. All

healthy adult Muslims are to abstain from food, drink, and sex from sunrise to sunset.

Ramadan is to serve as a period of reflection and spiritual discipline (Esposito, 1988).

The fifth and final pillar of Islam is the *hajj* (pilgrimage). The pilgrimage season is during the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar known as Dhu al-hijja. Every adult Muslim who is physically capable and financially able is to make a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime (Elias, 1999). The focus of the pilgrimage is the Great Mosque in Mecca. Once at the Great Mosque, pilgrims are to circle the Ka'ba (a cube shaped building in the center of the mosque that represents the House of God) seven times (Esposito, 1988).

Structure of Global Islamic Community

There are two major historic divisions in the global Islamic community: Shiite and Sunni. There are subdivisions within those divisions, but these two broad divisions hold almost all of the world's Muslims. Sunni Muslims form 85% of the Islamic community; the remaining of the 15% consists mostly of members of the Shiite tradition (Esposito, 1988).

Sunnism and Shiism (Shiites) are basically two responses in the Muslim community to the death of Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad left no instructions as to who should succeed him as the leader of the community. The Shiite response sought to preserve the charismatic authority of Muhammad through a series of imams who were his descendents (Robinson, 1999). Rahman (2002) views Shiism as the only major or important schism in Islam.

Those of the Shiite tradition believe that Muhammad wanted Ali, who was both Muhammad's first cousin and son-in-law, to lead the Muslim community after his death. After Muhammad's death Abu Bakr was chosen by senior members of the Muslim

community to lead. He became known as the first Caliph. Those of the Shiite tradition do not accept the legitimacy of Abu Bakr and his successors, prior to Ali, as leaders of the Islamic community. Citing Prophetic Hadiths, Shiites claimed that Muhammad wanted leadership of the community to remain among *ahl al-bayt*, members of the household (Elias, 1999).   Various other factions in Shiism arose over time due to further claims of illegitimate succession in this line of leaders.

Those who practiced Sunni Islam reacted differently to the crisis brought about by Muhammad's death. After the death of Muhammad, the majority of Muslims believed the era of charismatic leadership was over (Robinson, 1999). Muhammad himself served as the leader of the Muslim community in all respects. After the death of Muhammad, those of the Sunni tradition did not believe that any one man could replace Muhammad. Sunni Muslims viewed the Caliph as primarily a political figure (Robinson, 1999).

Sunnis sought a more egalitarian approach. As long as an individual was of high character, a senior member of the community, and well versed in the teachings of Muhammad they could be considered for leadership, one need not be a direct descendent of Muhammad to do so (Rahman, 2002). Sunnis have emphasized a commitment to maintaining a sense of community. Elias (1999) noted that the very word Sunni is derived from the word Sunna, which is itself an abbreviation for a term meaning "people of tradition and community." Regardless of the schism, Islam can be found in almost every country across the globe.

Islam's Presence in Countries Around the Globe

Islam, the second largest religion in the world, can be found in almost every country of the world, including such diverse countries as China, India, and the US (Esposito,1988). Weeks (1988) noted that there are more Muslims in Southern and Southeastern Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa than in all Arab countries of the Middle East. From the Arab world Islam spread in all directions. Though Islam is a proselytizing religion, its growth in the latter part of the twentieth century was more the result of natural causes, meaning a surplus of births over deaths among Muslims (Weeks, 1988). As previously mentioned, Sunni Muslims form the largest group of Muslims in the world today. The countries in which you can find a majority Shiite population are Azerbaijan with 93.4%, Iran with 89%, and Iraq with 60-65% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007). Currently, the countries with the largest overall Islamic populations are Indonesia, which has 202,071,531 Muslims representing 86.1% of the population; Pakistan, which has 159,799,666 Muslims representing 97% of the population; India, which has 151,402,064 Muslims representing 13.4% of the population; and Bangladesh, which has 124,872,121 Muslims representing 83% of the population. Further down the list of countries with a Muslim presence are countries like Nigeria, which has 67,515,582 Muslims representing 50% of the population; Morocco, which has 33,318,331 Muslims representing 98.7% of the population; Algeria, which has 32,999,883 Muslims representing 99% of the population; and Saudi Arabia, which has 22,570,580 Muslims representing 100% of the native population. Much further down the list is the United States, which has 3,011,399 Muslims representing 1% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

Presence of Muslims in the US. The exact number of Muslims in the United States is not known. The 3,011,399 Muslims said to be in the US by the CIA is only an estimate. The US decennial census does not ask about religious affiliation, therefore a precise number cannot be provided. Surveys have helped to fill gaps in census data. However, getting accurate estimates for small groups is problematic. Because a large percentage of Americans are Christian, even small samples provide reasonable estimates of Christian affiliation. Additionally, surveys have only recently begun to routinely include Islam as a response category (Weeks, 2003). The Pew Research Center (2007) stated that faulty methodologies and incomplete data are leading reasons to question the veracity of estimates of the Muslim population that have been put forth. Additionally, the Pew Research Center noted that many immigrants, some of whom are likely Muslims, have limited or no English language skills and therefore "could not be interviewed by the GSS [General Social Survey], Gallup, the Washington Post-ABC News survey, the American Religious Identification Survey, or other polls done primarily or exclusively in English" (2007, p. 12). Thus, there is no consensus on the number of Muslims in the US. Some Muslims claim that estimates of the number of US based Muslims put forth by non-Muslims underestimate the size of the population in order to diminish Muslims' influence while non-Muslims sometimes claim that estimates put forth by Islamic groups are exaggerated (Cho, 2002).

Despite the problems obtaining an exact count of the Muslim population in the US, a number of estimates have been put forth. Kosmin, Mayer and Keysar (2001) estimated the US Muslim population to be around 1.1 million. These numbers are based on a random digit-dialed telephone survey and therefore excluded anyone without a land

line telephone. The Pew Research Center (2007) estimated the total Muslim population

to be 2.35 million. However, it should be noted that the Pew Research Center used a

variety of methods to contact Muslims. One of the major ways in which they did this was

to compile a list of US telephone numbers in which Muslims were thought to have a

relatively high probability of belonging. A segment of the phone numbers compiled was

based upon households where a resident had either a first or last name thought to be

common among Muslims. This method suggests that any Muslim with a non-traditional

Muslim name or without a land line phone was excluded from the sampling frame. The

second major effort by the Pew Research Center involved purchasing a database with

"more than 450,000 households thought to include Muslims" (2007, p. 60). In the

methodology section of their report, the Pew Research Center noted that:

> The list [referring to the purchased database] does not, however, by itself
> constitute a representative sample of American Muslims. Muslims in the Experian
> database earn higher incomes, are better educated, are more likely to be of South
> Asian descent and are much less likely to be African American[1] compared to
> Muslim Americans as a whole. (2007, p. 60)

The US Central Intelligence Agency's World Fact Book listed a 2002 estimate of the

Muslim population as 1% of the total US population. The World Fact Book also listed a

2007 US population estimate of slightly above 300 million. Taken as a whole, the

current CIA estimate of the total number of Muslims in the US appears to be

approximately 3 million (2007). A study by Bagby, Perl, and Froehle (2001) found that 2

million Muslims are associated with mosques. However, there are a number of Muslims

who do not associate with any Mosque. Some Muslims have claimed that the Muslim

---

[1] At places throughout this chapter I have used Black instead of African American to keep with the original
language of the source.

population is actually around 6 or 7 million; this assertion is supported by Bagby et al., (2001) who stated that "estimates of a total Muslim population of 6-7 million in America seem reasonable in light of the figure of 2 million Muslims who associate with a mosque" (p. 3). McCloud (1995) stated that the African American Islamic population alone consists of 1.5 to 4.5 million people. Given the range of estimates that have been put forth, it seems reasonable to consider the US Muslim population to be at least 3 million, which is consistent with the estimate generated by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mosques in the US tend to be fairly evenly spread across the country and racially diverse. Bagby et al. (2001) found that 30% of US mosques are located in the East/New England region, 29% were located in the Midwest, 26% were located in the South, and 15% were located in the Mountain/West region. Four-fifths of all US mosques are located in metropolitan areas. Generally, mosques are racially and ethnically diverse with only seven percent of mosques containing only one racial or ethnic group (Bagby et al., 2001). While only seven percent of mosques have one racial or ethnic group, sixty-four percent of mosques are dominated by one racial or ethnic group and in most cases this group is either African American or South Asian (Bagby et al., 2001). The authors also estimated that the largest groups of US Muslims are South Asians which comprised 33% of regular mosque participants, followed by African Americans who comprised 30% of regular mosque participants.

The Pew Research Center (2007) estimated that 35% of US Muslims are native-born Americans, and 65% are thought to be first-generation immigrants. Additionally, one-fifth of native born American Muslims are thought to be second-generation immigrants. Foreign-born Muslims from the Arab region are estimated to be 37% of the

American Muslim population and those from the South Asian region are estimated at 27%. Among all US Muslims, 38% of describe themselves as White, 26% as Black, 20% as Asian, and 16% as other or of mixed race/ethnicity. Among native-born Muslims, 56% are Black (Pew Research Center, 2007).

African Americans represent one of the largest racial/ethnic categories of all Muslims in the US. The Pew Research Center found "Overall, 20% of U.S. Muslims are native-born African Americans, nearly half of whom (48%) identify as Sunni. Another third (34%) of native-born African Americans say they are just a Muslim, and 15% have another affiliation, including Shia and the Nation of Islam" (2007, p. 22). As with gauging the number of total Muslims in the US, there is a degree of uncertainty as to the exact size of the African American Muslim community. Whatever the exact number, African Americans comprise a significant proportion of the US Muslim population. Additionally, the African American Muslim community is still growing as a significant number of Islamic converts each year are African Americans.

It should be noted that among converts to Islam overall, including those of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, 55% identified with the Sunni tradition and another 24% identified with no one form of Islam. Additionally, when looking at converts overall, 49% converted before the age of 21 and another 34% converted between 21 and 35. The majority of converts to Islam have come from Protestant churches, 67%; an additional 10% of converts belonged to the Catholic tradition, 5% were from other religions, and 15% claimed no religion prior to their conversion (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Bagby et al. (2001) noted that among mosques that contained at least one convert in the past twelve months, 63% of converts were African American; the majority of these

converts were male. This resulted in nearly fourteen thousand African American converts, the largest of any racial/ethnic group (Bagby et al., 2001). The Pew Research Center (2007) found that 91% of converts to Islam are US born and that among converts, 59% were African American. Bagby et al. (2001) found not only that the majority of converts were African American but also that 68% of converts were male.

Before engaging in a more detailed discussion of Islam in the African American community, it is first necessary to give some background information on the role that race has played in America. This is important because any understanding of African American Muslims will require knowledge about the social context from which they come, as well as an understanding of the conditions present in America which have led African American Muslims to define themselves as they do.

Race and Religion in America

Every society is stratified along some dimension, be it race, class or caste. The US is no exception to this rule. America is divided along several lines, but race has consistently played a prominent role in US history as a line of demarcation. From the division in the country that eventually resulted in the Civil War to the appropriateness of welfare in the US, race has consistently been at the center of many heated debates in the American public arena.

In the first half of the twentieth century, racial discrimination caused many African Americans to be denied residential housing in desired areas, blocked access to quality educational institutions, barred African Americans from gainful employment, restricted involvement in the political process, and led to negative health outcomes for

African Americans (Bennett, 1993). America itself has existed in caste-like fashion for most of its history. White Americans have dominated the socio-economic environment while African Americans have largely been relegated to subordinate positions.

How race is viewed has changed over the course of the past century. While ethnocentric views of biological determinism (which led to claims of innate African American inferiority) have dominated debates on race in the past, contemporary social scientists tend to recognize race as a social construct (Omi & Winant, 1994). According to the social constructionist view, racial groupings are created by artificially divided people using somatic characteristics (such as skin color, hair texture, etc.) and\or perceived cultural distinctiveness (such as cuisines, clothing, languages). Nevertheless, while race is socially constructed, its ramifications, as previously noted, are very real. Race continues to act to organize the lives of individuals in real ways not only in the occupational area, or the public arena in general, but in terms of religious involvement as well.

Religion in the African American Community

African American religion has served as a central fixture in the black community from slavery to the present day. African American religion encompasses a diverse and wide spectrum of denominations and faiths, though Christianity is by far the largest religious expression practiced by African Americans. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008) found that 85% of African Americans adhered to Christianity. Because of its centrality, many scholars refer to African American Christian churches

simply as the "Black Church," despite the wide variety of groupings it refers to (Calhoun-Brown, 2000).

The historic lack of secular opportunities and the centrality of the black church led to high levels of religiosity for African Americans (Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison & Sherkat, 1999). Numerous scholars (Glenn, 1964; Glen & Gotard, 1977; Jacobson, Heaton & Dennis, 1990; Roof & McKinney, 1987) have asserted that blacks have a high degree of religiosity. Levin, Taylor, and Chatters (1995) suggested that the term religiosity is used loosely and it covers a wide range of attitudes, beliefs and experiences. One of the approaches used in more recent research (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995a; Hunt & Hunt, 1999; Sherkat, 2002) gauges religiosity using two variables, participation in religious organizations and rates of affiliation. Based upon these measures, Sherkat (2002) stated that "African Americans are among the most religious people in the entire world…" (p. 485). The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008) found that African Americans were more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to have a formal religious affiliation. Additionally they found that 12% of African Americans were unaffiliated and that among those unaffiliated three in four thought religion to be at least somewhat important compared to one in three for the overall population.

Active participation in religious services has historically provided a social context that was not otherwise available to blacks. Taylor, Thornton, and Chatters' (1987) study found that the majority of African Americans view the socio-historical role of the black church as favorable and they see the church as making significant contributions to the overall improvement of conditions for African Americans. Creating an institution, and a corresponding identity, centered on the black community proved invaluable to the

19

progress of the African American community. It was control over the institution, the Black Church, that allowed for the creation of identities that contradicted negative conceptualizations of Black Americans. This ability to create definitions of self is the reflexive aspect of identity formation.

Marking the racial boundary line has both external societal and reflexive aspects. The reflexive aspect however considers how those inside the perceived group adopt markers of racial distinctiveness (Anderson & Massey, 2001). In other words, reflexive considerations include how members of any one group define themselves.

This reflexive aspect of identity formation is also an important part of understanding early Muslim groups in the African American community. The Moorish Science Temple emerged to refute racist practices and corresponding notions of African American inferiority that existed near the turn of the twentieth century (McCloud, 1995).

Moorish Science Temple. In his popular book *The Black Muslims in America*, Lincoln (1994) argued, "all black nationalist movements have in common three characteristics: a disparagement of Whites and their culture, a repudiation of "Negro" identity, and a concomitant search for the commitment to the black (African) heritage" (p. 47). The Moorish Science Temple was perhaps the first religious organization in this tradition, and certainly the first Islamic one, to garner a degree of notoriety.

The Moorish Science Temple was founded by Timothy Drew from North Carolina. Timothy Drew established the first Moorish Science Temple around 1913 in Newark, New Jersey. The term Moorish Science Temple did not come into use until 1925; in 1913 it was known as the Canaanite Temple (McCloud, 1995). Drew was not

formally educated but was deeply impressed by oriental philosophy.[2] He was

particularly impressed by what he perceived to be a lack of race consciousness in the

religious doctrine of the orient and thought it contained the potential to help alleviate the

conditions of African Americans, who lived in a very race-conscious society (Lincoln,

1994). After starting the Moorish Science Temple, Drew became known as Noble Drew

Ali.

Ali claimed that he traveled to Africa and was given a commission by the King of

Morocco to teach Islam in America (Marsh, 1984). Ali believed that due to the history of

persons of African descent in America, a true sense of their identity had been lost. He

thought a positive identity key to well-being and thus declared that all African Americans

were Asiatic, or Moorish by heritage (Lincoln, 1994). Drew's message centered on five

tenets: love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice. The text he provided for the guidance of

his followers was *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America*. Drew Ali

considered himself a prophet of Allah with a calling to minister to African Americans

(Lincoln, 1994). At the forefront of his teachings was the tenet that African Americans

needed to understand their true Asiatic origins and take pride in their heritage. Members

were required to carry a membership card which stated:

> This is your nationality and identification card for the Moorish Science Temple of
> America, and birthright for the Moorish-Americans. We honor all the divine
> prophets, Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha and Confucius. May the blessings of God
> of our father Allah, be upon you that carry this card. I do hereby declare that you
> are a Muslim under the Divine Law of the Holy Koran of Mecca—Love, Truth,
> Peace, Freedom and Justice. "I am a citizen of the USA." (Marsh, 1984, p. 47)

---

[2] I have used the terms oriental philosophy and orient as they were used by Lincoln, 1994.

Members of the Moorish Science Temple did not seek separate citizenship, rather they pledged allegiance to the US. They claimed dual citizenship in the US and Morocco. They sought an end to the prejudice, discrimination, and oppression they faced as African Americans. Moorish Science Temple members believed that by showing their membership cards they could end the oppression of African Americans, both individually and institutionally (Marsh, 1984).

The Moorish Science Temple still exists and follows all of the teachings and philosophy put forth by Drew Ali. However, scholarly information on the contemporary organization appears to be nonexistent. The national website for the Moorish Science Temple of America indicates that there are 33 temples for the organization spread across the country (Moorish Science Temple, Inc.). No indication of the size of these individual temples is given. However, in a recent interview with the head of a Moorish Science Temple, I was told that the number of active participants in congregational affairs was under 25; additionally, the physical space of the temple could not have allowed seating for many more than that number (A. Rahim, personal communication, August, 17, 2007). If the size of this one congregation is any indicator, then the overall number of contemporary adherents seems likely to be very small. Certainly the days of the Moorish Science Temple serving as the preeminent African American Muslim organization have passed. In fact, that role was assumed by another organization, the Nation of Islam, in the earlier part of the twentieth century.

Nation of Islam. To understand the history of Islam in the African American community, one must consider the impact of the Nation of Islam (NOI). The Nation of Islam was the first movement of African American Muslims in America to gain large

scale public attention. The Nation of Islam was founded by Wallace Fard Muhammad, who was a follower of Noble Drew Ali. Fard appeared in Detroit around 1930 and claimed to be from the holy city of Mecca. He had a message for the Black man in America. Fard's mission was to gain "freedom, justice, and equality for people of African descent residing in the United States" (Marsh, 1984, p. 51). According to Fard, Black Americans were members of the lost, and now found, ancient Tribe of Shabazz (Smith, 1999). His followers officially became members of the "Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America" which was later shortened to "the Nation of Islam" (Smith, 1999, p. 82). After ministering to Black Americans for three years, Fard vanished.

Before Fard's disappearance one of his followers, Elijah Poole, began spreading his message. He was later given the name Elijah Muhammad and became the chief minister of the Nation of Islam. He assumed a leadership position in the organization and after Fard's disappearance he moved to Chicago and established Temple Number Two, which became the headquarters for the NOI (Smith, 1999). As Smith (1999) noted, "those who wished to join the NOI had to submit a letter of application to the Chief Minister, who soon adopted the role of messenger of Allah" (p. 82). Mr. Muhammad led the nation of Islam until his death in 1975 (Marsh, 1984).

One of the central tenets of NOI teachings, that African Americans are essentially good while Whites are evil, found favor with many African Americans who grew up surrounded by racism (Smith, 1999). According to this doctrine, by nature, every African American was a Muslim; whether one chose to acknowledge their true nature was irrelevant (Marsh, 1984). Simply living within the borders of the United States did not

make one an American. African Americans were seen not as Americans but as citizens of Mecca; Muhammad did not encourage his followers to integrate into White society, but rather he advocated a separation of the races. Muhammad did not believe that the Black man could achieve freedom, justice, or equality as an American citizen (Marsh, 1984). Muhammad wanted a separate state. He preached a message of Black liberation and economic empowerment. Black liberation occurred through learning about one's history and the "true" nature of Black and White men. Muhammad encouraged economic independence through the establishment and patronage of Black-owned businesses (Smith, 1999). As Smith (1999) noted "economics and ethics were combined into a structure in which NOI members were required to be personally abstemious and professionally industrious" (p. 85).

The Nation of Islam today is not the same organization that existed under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, but is instead a resurrected form of Muhammad's organization now under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan (Mamiya, 1982). Elijah Muhammad died in 1975 and the original NOI changed its name and moved towards orthodoxy under the leadership of Muhammad's son, Wallace D. Muhammad. Wallace had been inspired and influenced by the conversion that he observed Malcolm X make to the Sunni tradition. Farrakhan, not happy with the changes brought about, reconstituted the NOI in 1977 (Curtis, 2002). Most of Farrakhan's followers at that time were not old members of the NOI but rather new converts (Smith, 1999). The NOI in this incarnation still exists and espouses a Black Nationalist ideology. Much of the information about the NOI is disseminated through its newspaper, *The Final Call*. In the late 1980s Farrakhan began to move the NOI towards traditional Islam in some ways. For instance, Farrakhan

24

now encourages Friday prayer (the main day for prayer in traditional Islam), especially at

the NOI's main center in Chicago. In 1990, Farrakhan gave a speech addressing the

Continental Muslim Council in Chicago in which he espoused belief in the dual elements

of *shahada*, that there is one God (Allah) and that Muhammad ibn Abdullah was his

prophet (Lincoln, 1994). Despite some movement on the part of the NOI towards

traditional Islam, in the late 1990s Farrakhan received criticism for continued adherence

to traditional NOI beliefs (Smith, 1999). Curtis (2002) noted that Farrakhan often

presented traditional NOI beliefs and his more recent universal statements about Sunni

traditions and the need for inter-faith engagement side by side without providing any

additional comment. Curtis further noted that Farrakhan has not explored the tensions

which exist between seemingly contradictory statements and that he seems comfortable

with the ambiguity. While Farrakhan and the NOI have received considerable media

coverage relative to other African American Muslim groups, the largest single

denomination of African American Muslims is the Sunni (Lumumba, 2003).

African American Sunni Muslims. Very little scholarly literature has focused on

African American Sunni Muslims despite the fact that it's the largest denomination of

African American Muslims (Lumumba, 2003). What little we know about African

American Sunni Muslims comes from only a few studies. Additionally, these studies

have mostly been disjointed and do not provide an overarching view of the population.

What information is provided does give some insight into the leadership roles of African

Americans in mosques across the country and insight into the attitudes of African

American Sunnis on a variety of topics and issues.

Most imams in the US are African American. Overall, 81% of mosques have an imam (spiritual leader). Among mosques with predominately African American memberships, nine-tenths are led by an imam. Almost a quarter of American mosques have memberships where over 90% of participants come from one racial/ethnic group; ten percent of mosques report membership dominated by one racial/ethnic group. In both cases, these mosques are comprised mostly of African Americans. Regardless of the racial/ethnic makeup of mosques, two-thirds of imams in the US are African American (Bagby et al., 2001).

Concerning attitudes, Bagby et al. (2001) found that 39% of respondents from predominately African American mosques reported strongly agreeing that America is immoral or hostile to Muslims, compared to 23% for South Asian dominated mosques, and 20% for Arab dominated mosques. The Pew Research Center also found that African American Muslims were dissatisfied with the US along a number of dimensions. The Pew Research Center did not focus exclusively upon Sunni Muslims in their report, but given the small percentage of Shiite and NOI found by the Pew Research Center among African Americans (around 15%) it seems reasonable to assume that their findings on African American Muslims generally refer to those who are Sunni. Their report stated that:

> …native-born African American Muslims are the most disillusioned segment of the U.S. Muslim population. When compared with other Muslims in the U.S., they are more skeptical of the view that hard work pays off, and more of them believe that Muslim immigrants in the U.S. should try to remain distinct from society. They also are far less satisfied with the way things are going in the United States. Just 13% of African American Muslims express satisfaction with national conditions, compared with 29% of other native-born Muslims, and 45% of Muslim immigrants. (Pew Research Center, 2007, p. 6)

Despite this seeming dissatisfaction with their prospects for a good life in America, most African American Sunni Muslims have been characterized as middle-class, in contrast to the more lower-class membership of the NOI (Mamiya, 1982). This finding is consistent with that of the Pew Research Center (2007), which found that the majority of Sunni Muslims in the US, of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, were middle-class.

Information available suggests that African American mosques are quite involved in social service provision relative to mosques dominated by other racial/ethnic groups. Bagby et al. (2001) found that African American mosques were more likely to provide counseling services (88%), prison or jail programs (81%), food assistance (67%), clothing/thrift assistance (60%), tutoring or literacy (37%), anti-drug or anti-crime (43%), and substance abuse programs (28%) compared to mosques dominated by other racial/ethnic groups. African American dominated mosque participants were also more likely (compared to participants in all other mosques) to visit a school or church to present on Islam (82%), participate in an interfaith dialogue or program (79%), write or call a political leader (71%), have a politician visit the mosque (53%) and participate in an interfaith social service project (58%).

Regarding political participation, 66% of participants at African American dominated mosques thought that Muslims should be engaged politically (Bagby et al., 2001). Jamal (2005) found mosque participation to be associated with higher levels of political activity overall. However, once Muslims were broken into racial/ethnic groups, Jamal found that mosque participation only served as a significant indicator of political activity for Arab Muslims, and not African American or South Asian Muslims. Jamal found age to be the one significant predictor of political involvement among African

27

Americans, with older Muslims being more engaged. Overall, African American

Muslims were found to be more disengaged from the political sphere relative to other

racial/ethnic Muslim groups. Jamal argued that African American Muslims have

remained skeptical of the political process in the US, and that it appears that

discrimination experienced by African American Muslims may have muted their political

activity.

Mosque participation was found to be associated with higher levels of civic

involvement for Arab and South Asian Muslims, but not for African American. Mosque

participation was found to be linked to a stronger sense of identity among African

Americans. Finally, mosque participation on the part of African Americans was linked

with greater awareness of discrimination against other Muslims (Jamal, 2005).

Summary

In the sixth century A.D. a young merchant, Muhammad, was thought to receive a

divine revelation from the angel Gabriel. This momentous event marked the beginning of

a series of revelations that collectively would be known as the Qur'an, the foundational

text of the Muslim faith. The Muslim faith, known as Islam, is the second largest faith in

the world with over a billion adherents.

Islam is based on five core beliefs known as pillars. The five pillar are: the

affirmation of belief through the recitation "These is not God but God (Allah), and

Muhammad is the messenger of God,"; the obligation to pray five times a day; the

obligation to give alms to provide for the betterment of those less fortunate; fasting

during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; and at least once in a Muslim's life to make a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, where the Great Mosque is located.

Approximately 85% of the Muslims in the world belong to the Sunni tradition. Muslims can be found all over the world. The spectrum of countries with Muslim populations range from those with a high concentration of Muslims, such as Pakistan with over 150,000,000 Muslims representing 97% of the population, to the United States with it's estimated 3,000,000 Muslims representing 1% of the total US population.

The Islamic population in the US has been dominated by immigrant Muslims; first-generation immigrant Muslims comprise 65% of the US population. The scenario drastically changes when considering the origins of domestic born Muslims. At least 56% of domestic born Muslims are African Americans, and over 60% of converts to Islam in the US are African American, the majority of whom are male. The literature is clear in that the majority of African American Sunni Muslims are male converts.

Perhaps the growth of Islam among African American males is related to the role Islam played in some of the early twentieth century movements for racial equality in the African American community. Most notably the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam emerged as powerful organizations, which not only introduced the concept of Islam to many Americans, but combated notions of black inferiority. These organizations paved the way for the later acceptance and growth of more orthodox forms of Islam.

African American male converts tend to have stronger Muslim identities compared to US converts from other racial/ethnic categories. African American male converts are also very active in leadership positions in the US Islamic community.

It seems logical to suggest that these converts are deriving some benefit from their engagement with Islam. Perhaps their strong identity is indicative of the positive bonds they have developed with their fellow Muslims. Positive perceptions of identity may be the result of pride from being able to assume leadership roles, not only in their respective mosques, but also in the broader African American community. Conversion to Islam conceivably could then have resulted in the convert feeling more integrated in their society.

Additionally, these converts' lives have at least to some extent likely undergone a reorientation as a result of their new identities. Males have a prominent place in Islam and perhaps new conceptualizations of what it means to be a male has buttressed their sense of self. Conversion could have impacted African American males in some other way not yet identified. The next chapter should then consider the ways in which conversion may have affected the lives of these men in general, and particularly attention should be given to the arenas of integration into society and perceptions of masculinity.

Chapter 2

Conversion and Post-Conversion Experiences: Community, Integration, and Masculinity

Religious conversion has received attention from numerous scholars and as a result various definitions of conversion have been offered. Mathew (2001) stated that "converting is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations and experiences" and that it is an ongoing process that cannot be extricated from the complex web of relationships in which it occurs (p. 25). McGuire (1997) considered conversion a process whereby a new sense of self is created concurrently with a transformation of "one's basic meaning system." McGuire further contended that "conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world" (1997, p. 71). As a result of the process of conversion the manner in which one is situated in a community may thus be altered.

In this chapter several theoretical concepts that will serve to orient the research are presented. Consistent with an exploratory approach, this study does not seek to test hypotheses or to understand causal relationships, but rather to gain understanding of the ways in which converts themselves feel the conversion process has changed their lives. The theoretical constructs offered here help not only to orient this study, but suggest ways in which this study could contribute to existing theoretical knowledge concerning the connections between religion and other spheres of life.

First, literature on theories of conversion is presented. This study will not examine processes of conversion but rather consider the effects of the conversion

process. Nevertheless, it is important to review theories of conversion as they provide the foundation for studies centering on conversion. Additionally, these theories also provide insight into the social conditions thought to influence conversion and thus are important to keep in mind as the conditions which served as impetuses for conversion indicate potential areas of significance when considering the effects of conversion. The ways through which the conversion process may impact individuals is indicated in each of the respective theoretical section to come.

Secondly, literature on community integration is reviewed and the ways in which religious conversion potentially impact integration are discussed. Finally, ideas of masculinity are examined and the potential linkages between religious conversion to Islam and masculinity are discussed. The inductive nature of this study mandates flexibility in consideration of important theoretical concepts addressed in this study. Therefore the study is not limited to these areas; however, by focusing upon them, a solid foundation is provided for the further exploration of the effects of conversion to Islam through delimiting specific domains of knowledge in which there is scope for increased theoretical understanding of the impact of religious conversion.

<p style="text-align:center">Theories of Religious Conversion</p>

Broadly speaking theories of religious conversion can be viewed from two not necessarily mutually exclusive perspectives-an active and a passive one. The passive paradigm is the traditional approach, which views human beings as passive and conversion the result of forces (internal or external) beyond the control of the individual. The active perspective assumes individual agency and conceptualizes conversion as a

negotiated processes between the individual and surroundings (Straus, 1979). Understanding the social context in which an individual is situated then becomes an important factor in understanding the conversion process, but these conditions are important only insofar as one understands an individual's engagement with them.

The traditional passive perspective has been associated with "brainwashing" and such theories tend to be psychological in nature in that they depict converts as vulnerable and often unsuspecting victims (Conway & Siegelman, 1978; Enroth, 1977; Singer, 1979). The brainwashing model of conversion was first suggested by psychiatrists and psychologists to explain why people join new religious movements (convert to unconventional religious groups). According to this perspective, new religious recruits are stripped of their identities through "cult" members' use of coercive means and deprivation. Through this process, the will of the recruit is thought to be weakened, their dependency on the new religious group is thought to increase, and they are then deemed ready to be programmed with a new belief system. At the time during which this theory was prominent, psychologists and psychiatrists thought the individual to be so radically altered that it was only through a process of "deprogramming" that the individual was thought to be able to return to normalcy and break ties with the religious group (Long & Hadden, 1983).

Other perspectives have touted the role of deprivation as well. Bainbridge (1992) noted that strain theory can be used to explain individuals' attraction to religion due to relative deprivation. Here, the term relative deprivation is used to indicate that an individual is lacking something that others seem to have. The primary scholarly approach to studying relative deprivation had been to focus on what makes a person feel

that something is lacking in their life. There are multiple ways in which a person can be made to feel deprived. For instance, if a person once had more than he currently does, or if he is constantly exposed to images of others with more, he may feel deprived. Sociologists have traditionally studied deprivation in the context of economic and societal inequalities affecting whole classes of people. In addition, it has been suggested that those who ultimately convert to another religion have experienced deprivation and that these individuals often struggled with existential, moral, or social doubt (Mathew, 2001). Religion then stands as a venue through which one can attempt to transcend deprivation (Bainbridge, 1992). While the theory of deprivation may help explain why some people engage religion it does not suggest that religious people are any more deprived than non-religious persons, therefore the theory cannot count for all converts. Bainbridge (1992) argued that the missing link is the need to take into account the role of absolute deprivation. According to this perspective, all people experience a type of absolute deprivation since all people, rich and poor alike, have unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Under the Lofland and Stark (1965) model of religious conversion, the potential convert feels a tension that must ultimately be resolved; this model contains elements of both the activist and passive tradition.

In their seminal 1965 paper, Lofland and Stark presented a model of conversion which has been used throughout the scholarly world for a variety of populations. The model presented relies on personal bonds to explain the conversion process. Lofland and Stark (1965) stated that "When a person gives up one such perspective [one's philosophy of life] or ordered view of the world for another we refer to this process as conversion" (Lofland & Stark, 1965, p. 862). According to Lofland and Stark, most converts join a

group or adopt a philosophy which is thought to be associated with a more developed cultural perspective. One can then conceive of more developed cultural perspectives as the ones that mark the norms for a society. However, conversion does not always occur in this manner as it happens that people sometimes adopt less well known or deviant perspectives (Lofland & Stark, 1965).

The model presented by Lofland and Stark necessitates seven conditions be met for conversion to occur: (1) a person must feel a gap between their desired life conditions and their actual life conditions which lead to feelings of strain or tension; (2) for whatever reason, the person experiences the inability to solve one's dilemma through more conventional or mainstream channels; (3) a person thus comes to view himself or herself as a religious seeker and searches for a new religious outlook that will provide a solution to his/her problem; (4) a person feels that he or she has come to a turning point in life where one segment of life had just come to a close or was about to come to a close and he/she was in a process of deciding what to do next; (5) a person must develop affective bonds with persons in the new religious group which encourages the acceptance of the new teachings as true; (6) one does not posses any intimate bonds outside the new religion who are aware of potential conversion and thus are not likely to disrupt the conversion process; (7) the final step to becoming a "total convert" or "deployable agent" is that the person, in addition to a verbal conversion, makes an investment of time and energy to the new religious group and makes herself accessible to members of the new group for regular interaction.

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) argued that subjective experiences of conversions qualitatively differ; these varying experiences have been grouped into a series of

35

conversion motifs. The authors view these motifs as containing not only subjective experiences but also the social, or external, factors impacting conversion as well. The authors identify six conversion motifs and five major dimensions along which the six motifs vary. The six motifs are: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive. The five major dimensions along which the motifs vary are: degree of social pressure, temporal duration, level of affective arousal, affective content, and belief-participation sequence.

According to the intellectual motif, the individual privately investigates new traditions or faiths and develops conviction in the new beliefs before any formal contact with actual organization members. This is a very activist approach to conversion. Through readings books, watching television programs, etc. individuals explore possible new ways of being.

The mystical motif, perhaps the longest researched venue of conversion is associated with an inability on the part of the convert to fully express the perceived depth of the impact of the experience upon the convert. The authors argue that "The level of emotional arousal is extremely high – sometimes involving theophanic ecstasies, awe, love, or even fear" (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981, p. 378). Thus, unlike the intellectual motif, where there is individual control, the mystical motif is thought to result from processes, or phenomena, beyond one's control.

The experimental motif acknowledges that conversion, which may result in dramatic changes in lifestyle, need not be the result of an equally dramatic process. Some potential converts take a "try-it-out" approach and may take months or years before they fully transform their identities or behaviors. A person may thus be considered an

experimental convert even after they have made considerable sacrifices and contributions to their new paths.

In affectional conversion, the convert first develops strong bonds with members of the new organization and the conversion process is seen as a result of the positive affective bonds developed with members. This motif has become increasingly popular in the social science literature since its discussion in Lofland and Stark (1965).

The revivalist convert undergoes a profound experience in the midst of an emotionally charged crowd. Lofland and Skonovd (1981) argued that the idea of revivalist conversion has been largely debunked, and they remain cynical as to its relevance in the contemporary era.

The sixth motif, coercive conversion, is otherwise known as "brainwashing" or "mind control." This type of conversion occurs when the convert is subjected to "an extremely high degree of external pressure over a relatively long period of time, during which there is intense arousal of fear and uncertainty, culminating in empathetic identification and even love" (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981, p. 383). Chart 1 below shows the six types of conversion and the five major dimensions along which these types of conversion can be understood. The degree to which each dimension is relevant for each conversion type is also given below.

Chart 1: Conversion Motifs

		Conversion Motifs					
		1. Intellectual	2. Mystical	3. Experimental	4. Affectional	5. Revivalist	6. Coercive
Major Variations	1. Degree of Social Pressure	low or none	none or little	low	medium	high	high
	2. Temporal Duration	medium	short	long	long	short	long
	3. Level of Affective Arousal	medium	high	low	medium	high	high
	4. Affective Content	illumination	awe, love, fear	curiosity	affection	love (& fear)	fear (& love)
	5. Belief-Participation Sequence	belief-participation	belief-participation	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief

Source: Lofland and Skonovd (1981).

Another well known theorist stated that "conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic set of force fields involving people, institutions, events, ideas, and experiences" (Rambo, 1992, p. 160). In other words, the complex process of conversion involves a combination of active and passive processes (Richardson, 1985). Rambo (1992) presented a model of conversion which consists of understanding the various stages in the conversion process beginning with an understanding of: context, social and cultural as well as other environmental factors; the crisis, believed to precipitate conversion; the quest, during which individuals seek to enhance meaning and purpose in their lives; the encounter, where potential converts come into contact with advocates (members of the new religious organization); the

interaction, during which the potential convert increases his/her understanding of the new path and is exposed to opportunities to become more involved with the group; the commitment, a public declaration of such is often required for full membership; and the consequences, which are in part determined by the intensity and duration of the conversion experience. Kilbourne and Richardson (1988) summarize the active paradigm of conversion as potential converts being characterized by "1) volition, 2) autonomy, [and] 3) search for meaning and purpose" (p. 2). Additionally, while traditional perspectives tend to view conversion as sudden process, active perspectives contend that the conversion process may actually be quite gradual or even continuous. The activist perspective also contends that conversion experiences involve rational interpretations, that there is a negotiation between the individual and the new organization, and that belief follows behavior-meaning that as one engages in the routines that are required for active members in an organization they acquire the corresponding belief system. Finally the activist perspective acknowledges that converts may have multiple conversions, or "conversion careers." Thus the agency of the individual may lead them to try several paths before settling on one (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988).

One's relationship with others is an important factor not only in religious conversion but in many other arenas of social life. Processes, such as conversion, may disrupt social bonds and thus potentially impact the ways in which one is situated in a community. While scholars of religion have acknowledged the potential for religious conversion to affect one's social connections, there has been limited discussion of the ways in which conversion could impact the connections within one's networks or community. The following section discusses literature relevant to understanding how

individuals are integrated into society, specifically addressing potential linkages between religious conversion and one's integration in society.

<center>Society, Community, and Integration</center>

Society and Community

Before getting into a more detailed discussion of the potential linkages between religious conversion and being integrated into society, it is important to first discuss what a society is, how individuals form a sense of self, and how individuals are linked to the social world, or society. Society can be thought of as the world in which we live, and it may appear to be a sort of suprastructure, or something independent of human creation. However, Berger and Luckmann (1967) argued that though society may appear to be reified, it is important to remember that society was and is created by individuals. According to this perspective society is actually continuously recreated through ongoing human interactions.

The understanding that society's seemingly fixed nature is actually maintained through numerous face to face interactions on an ongoing basis is the bedrock of microinteractionist theory. Thus, one way to understand society is to analyze it at the level at which it is maintained, the individual level. In these face to face interactions, individuals react to perceptions of the meanings and actions they've attributed to other individuals. Through ongoing interactions, individuals come to not only know the world, but to form their own self; the reflexive aspect of identity formation acknowledges that how one comes to view himself is dependent upon how he feels others perceive him to be (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1962).

<center>40</center>

Interactions between two people create the base level at which to understand society, but the social world is often viewed in terms of larger groups. While a dyad is the smallest group possible, larger groups are just conglomerations of individuals. Groups themselves are formed through a negotiated process through which the norms and values of that group are established. One's relationship with others in a group is dependent upon the meanings that one has ascribed to the actions and language of others in those groups (Blumer, 1969). One may then feel degrees of closeness or distance from other group members based upon notions of shared ideals. The importance of shared ideals can be seen when one considers the concept of community (Shriver, 2001).

Communities can be thought of in more than one way. When one thinks of the concept of community, one likely thinks of a group of individuals with shared characteristics. Perhaps the most common notion of community relates to geographical area, that a community consists of individuals residing in the same geographical location (Schriver, 2001). The concepts of community and neighborhood are often conflated though they need not be. While one may debate whether or not there can be neighborhood without community, it is likely more readily accepted that there can be community without neighborhood. Belgrave and Allison (2006) noted that "for many African Americans, their personal sense of identity includes a strong sense of membership in the Black community, regardless of the racial composition of the neighborhood within which they currently reside" (p. 111). This sense of belonging has been described as a fictive kinship by anthropologists and has been prominently discussed in regards to the African American community. In a fictive kinship, the bonds that one usually reserve for family extend beyond the boundaries of the immediate family

to those in the broader collectivity without blood relationships. These other individuals then become brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins (Carsten, 2000).

Regardless of which community one is referring to, a notion exists that there is a sense of belonging among community members, that the members of a community have a sense of "we-ness." These mutual feelings of belonging and identification are common markers of community (Schriver, 2001). Hyde and Chavis (2007) point out that this feeling of connection has been described variously depending upon the field of study that one is in (from social capital, neighborhood cohesion, social support, to sense of community), but regardless of the terminology used this affective element is a key element of the human experience and a basic human need. Cooley (1909), one of the predecessors and informers of microinteractionist theory, understood that individuals feel different degrees of belonging to different groups. In fact, Cooley coined the term "primary group," and said such groups represented a collection of individuals, usually small, that had a feeling of "we," a sort of mutual identification or collective identity. The most prominent primary group is the family, but it can also include other groups such as neighborhoods or sports teams, as long as they have developed the requisite sense of mutual commitment. In such groups there is a sort of solidarity, or integration, based upon emotional attachment that creates this sense of belonging (Cooley, 1909). While Cooley discussed a sense of "we" among primary members, Schriver (2001) clearly posited that this sense of "we" can extend beyond primary groups to other domains of life where individuals have a sense of belonging and identification. This definition of community has an affective element. This allows for the examination of multiple populations that one can think of as a community; for instance, one's neighborhood,

one's church or religion, or even one's school or place of employment may be thought of as communities.

This definition of community is also very much related to Tonnies' definition of *gemeinschaft*, in which he postulated that individuals were connected to one another via a shared way of life based upon shared tradition or culture. Out of this shared way of life arose a sense of mutual responsibility. Individual members of a community would assist one another based upon these feelings of a shared responsibility that each member had for others in the collectivity. In Tonnies' (2001) conceptualization of the organization of life, he thought that relatively homogenous populations were organized according to the gemeinschaft concept. These populations also tended to be more rural. With increased urbanization he postulated that individuals began to relate to one another more based upon contract-like exchanges, which he called *gesellschaft* (Tonnies, 2001). More recent scholarship has shown that not only are these two concepts not mutually exclusive, but that *gemeinschaft* can and does thrive in urban environments (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Building upon the previous discussion, this research project will view community as a kind of "middle ground" or context in which individuals' "primary relationships" (such as family and close friendship) come together with their "secondary relationships," which are more specialized associations such as those in formal organizations (work, school, religion). This notion of community suggests that community is the place where individual and society meet (Schriver, 2001). This notion of community as a middle ground can be seen in the definition of community given by Chaskin and Richman (1992):

It is referred to by its geographic identity, but its place on the map is only one of its attributes. It is a place of reference and belonging, and the community includes dimensions of space, place, and sentiment as well as of action. It is defined by a dynamic network of associations that binds (albeit loosely) individuals, families, institutions, and organizations into a web of interconnections and interaction. (p. 113)

Given this definition of community as a middle ground, one may then consider possible ways in which changes in one's conceptualization of the self can impact the various domains of one's community, be it family or work.

Integration

In this proposed research study, integration refers to the degree to which one feels connected, involved, and invested in a particular group; it refers to the degree to which one feels inclined to affiliate or disaffiliate from a particular group. One can then have feelings of affiliation or disaffiliation to groups in varying degrees. Integration is not reserved solely for the family or neighborhood, but extends to all domains of community, such as one's educational institution (if in school), work environment, or circle of friends. This study is concerned with how conversion to Sunni Islam impacts integration into the various domains of community among African American males. To date, very little research has been done examining social connections post conversion.

Families' acceptance of new religious identities has been one area in which there has been some research regarding post conversion experiences. Research has suggested that family members and converts go through a process moving from conflict to mutual accommodation (Anderson, 2000; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2001). Anderson (2000) noted "Converts to any religion share the post-conversion process; however, members of

44

different religions may provide variations on this theme, both because of their different religions and because of differences in their personal circumstances" (p. 13). Roer-Strier, Sands, and Bourjolly (2009) examined African American mother's reactions to their daughters converting to Islam. The authors found that the conversion process caused initial distress and confusion among a majority of mothers in their study. The authors concluded that despite mothers' initial shock, with time these mothers increasingly accepted their daughters' conversions; although lingering doubts regarding the reasoning and the appropriateness of their daughters' decisions remained for some mothers. This study was in many ways a sequel to a 2001 study they conducted in which they examined South African Jewish families where daughters became Ultra-Orthodox and a 2004 study in which they looked at American Jewish families where daughters became Orthodox and immigrated to Israel (Sands & Roer-Strier, 2004). Here, too, they focused on mother-daughter relationships and similarly found a change in mothers' attitudes over time. In these specific studies the authors found that mothers became more positive or ambivalent as time passed regardless of their initial reaction. Roer-Strier, Sands, and Bourjolly (2009) noted that families in general tend to be quite resilient and adaptive to the introduction of new stressors. The previous studies focused on religious change among daughters. The proposed examination of men presents an opportunity to further explore the ways in which conversion impacts integration into the family unit. Other studies have focused specifically on African American women converts (e.g., Rouse, 2004) or on women converts to Islam, including African Americans (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Karim, 2009). No research known to this study's principal investigator has been done

45

examining the implications of conversion among African American male Muslims,

concerning the family or any other domain of community.

Economy and Ecology

In order to understand the ways in which integration into community among

African American men are impacted by conversion to a marginal religious organizations,

such as Islam in the US, this section draws on both organization ecological literature and

religious economic theory. Religious economic theory describes the religious landscape

in economic terms. The most prominent early exposition of this theoretical position can

been seen in the Peter Berger's seminal 1967 *The Sacred Canopy*. Berger (1967) stated:

> The key characteristic of all pluralistic situations, whatever the details of their
> historical background, is that the religious ex-monopolies can no longer take for
> granted the allegiance of their client populations. Allegiance is voluntary and
> thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result, the religious tradition, which
> previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed. It must be
> "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy." The pluralistic
> situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions become
> marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities.
> And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be
> dominated by the logic of market economics. (p. 137)

Using an economic model, religious organizations are seen as competing in an open

market where consumers have choices from among a wide array of products. Firms

(religious organizations) then engage in competition for market share. As in any market,

particularly one confined by physical space, potential market share is limited-there are

only so many potential members. The African American religious community however,

has been seen less in terms of belonging to an open market and more in terms of

operating in a separate religious market, one in which there is a monopoly (Ellison &

Sherkat, 1995b). The African American religious market is dominated by what has come

to be known as the Black Mainline religious denominations, Baptist and Methodist.

Religious participation has served as an important element in community

integration, particularly among African Americans. Religion may not only serve as a

pathway though which one becomes a member of a religious community, but also

through which one becomes an accepted member of a broader cultural community. If

religion is important to a cultural group, full membership in that group may require the

acceptance of its most cherished beliefs (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995a). Historically, there

have been sanctions for non-participation in the dominant religious organization, the

"Black Church," in the African American community (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995a).

Ellison and Sherkat (1995b) further noted that "the consolidation of social ties across

cultural, social, and economic spheres makes it difficult for individuals to sever religious

connections without paying a price in other context" (p. 1262).

An ecological perspective gives additional insight into the nature of competition.

It allows us to consider the ways in which religious organizations fit together and thrive

or struggle in an environment. There is a selection effect in the determination of a

community's organizational composition, and this certainly includes religious bodies

(Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Competition is a fundamental part of community

organizational life. Organizations depend upon resources for survival and these resources

are limited. The primary resource that organizations compete for is membership.

However, it is important to recognize that time itself is a precious commodity and

potential members have limited time to devote to any one organization (McPherson,

1983). It could be for this reason that some religious organizations in highly competitive environments find niches in which they attempt to thrive or at least survive.

McPherson (1983) noted that "the niche is a location in multidimensional space defined by the resources in the environment" (p. 520). Niches can expand or contract depending upon the configuration of organizations in their environment. The niche then is not fixed but rather constructed through interactions with other organizations and environmental factors. The process of construction is often through competition and organizations compete when drawing on the same population, defined by social characteristics such as age, race, and location.

There are certainly benefits to participation in organized religion. Ellison and Sherkat (1995b) noted that individuals engaged in religious congregations received benefits from not only being embedded in their religious congregations, but that these individuals also often enjoy denser and larger social networks compared to unaffiliated individuals. Given the preceding benefits of network size and density of religious affiliation, it seems reasonable to assume that the size (or market share) of a faith may be correlated with the size of individual members networks.

In general, organizations in a similar location and in competition with one another may not have rigid boundaries. Not only can organizations have shared members, but members may at any point time choose to invest their energy elsewhere with another organization. There are however elements which increase the likelihood of an organization existing in a relatively isolated state. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) noted that race and ethnicity serve as the largest markers for organizational distinctiveness. This is no doubt related to the history of racial discrimination in the US

and in part helps to explain why scholars believe that African Americans largely, though not exclusively, operate in a separate religious market. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) went on to explain that age and religion are the next two prominent markers which allow one to understand the niche (or social location) of an organization. One can then understand how the boundaries surrounding different religions, even in the same geographical location, can be fairly robust. Furthermore boundaries can be additionally strengthened according to the degree of strictness of that faith.

Islam as a Strict Religion

Islam is considered a strict religion and as such, there are certain costs involved in participation which could certainly affect one's integration into various arenas of society. According to Iannaccone (1994) strict religions eliminate free-riders by exerting a cost upon membership which may cause them to forgo pleasures (such as giving up foods they like or alcohol) and may even involve actions that cause one to be socially stigmatized (such as shaving one's head, wearing orange robes, or chanting in public). Those that, despite the cost, choose to adhere to strict religions gain the benefits of participation in a group of similarly highly committed individuals. Thus, one benefits from the "externalities" of other members' participation. In other words the active engagement of other members enhances not only individual members' experiences but those around them as well. Personal benefit is then maximized (Iannaccone, 1994). While some have taken issue with Iannaccone's explanation of free-riders and whether or not strictness influences the strength of a religious body (Marwell, 1996), such critiques do not hinder the usefulness of the theory for highlighting markers of strictness.

Islam, according to this perspective, would certainly be considered a strict tradition. In Islam there are dietary restrictions, and many women wear a headscarf, a veil, or a hijab covering their entire body. Many men also wear what could be considered distinctive Islamic clothing. Muslim men are expected to pray five times a day at designated times regardless of where they are. A Muslim man may have an increased sense of well-being due to the benefits accrued through his religious participation and engagement with other committed individuals. However, as the US is not a predominantly Muslim society, this is not a given. Of course, it should be understood that Islam, like all religions, contains adherents that practice the decrees of the religion to varying extents. Not all Muslims strictly adhere to doctrinal decree.

Given that religious distinctiveness in general is a prominent marker of organizational boundaries; the historical and contemporary dominance of Christianity in the African American community; and the strictness of the Islam, it's reasonable to assume that active members of niche organizations, such as Islam in the African American community, might feel less integrated into the broader community. As Kanter (1972) stated "the community's distinctiveness and social isolation may be lost when boundaries are relatively permeable" (p. 152). The strictness of Islam contributes to not only certain "cost" for membership, but theoretically this strictness also should contribute to a lack of permeability of organizational boundaries, for its strictness certainly helps to maintain the religion's distinctiveness.

The degree of strictness to which one is to participate in religious activities also varies by gender. Islam is more demanding of men than of women. While women

50

certainly can attend Friday prayer, they are not required to do so. In Islam, concern for well-being for those in the community is thought to be the responsibility of men.

Masculinity

Men in Islam hold particularly prominent roles. The effects of conversion to such a religion by men, or the effects of assuming such an identity among converts is not known. The potential effects, however, could be far reaching as the role of the male is central in the Islamic community. The following section will examine masculinity and suggest how masculinity in Islam may affect the lives of converts.

Masculinity is a socially constructed concept. The biological sex of a person is largely fixed, however masculinity, largely a concept of gender identity, is not. Furthermore, the ways in which masculinity is constructed has ramifications for both men and women. Gender studies have recognized power differential between men and women and this knowledge is important for understanding the structural order of gender. In fact, in the current gender order, hegemonic masculinity and the behaviors that maintain it are legitimized as masculine, and meanings not associated with this legitimating process are often either suppressed or marginalized (Bird, 1996).

A variety of meanings, which may or may not be consistent with hegemonic masculinity, may be incorporated into one's gender identity (Connell, 1987; Messner 1992). Individuals understand gender norms either by interiorizing (acknowledgement and understanding of the norms in relation to one's self) or internalizing (making them central to one's sense of self) them. Irrespective of which way one gains knowledge of these norms, males come to understand shared notions of masculinity in their society.

Through the process of learning hegemonic meanings, a base is created that allows one to have shared meanings which facilitate interactions; this internalization process also acts to suppress expressions of masculinity not consistent with hegemony. Presumption of only one type of masculinity as legitimate helps to reify hegemonic norms (Bird, 1996).

Johnson (1988) argued that men seek out other men to display "non-femaleness." Group interactions among men provide feedback as to the effectiveness of one's developed sense of masculinity. These displays of "non-femaleness" often center around competition; competition hence becomes a recognized part of one's self-conceptualization. Through these processes, hegemonic masculinity is thought to be created and sustained (Bird, 1996; Johnson, 1988). In a society where notions of hegemonic masculinity prevail, if an individual does not share commonly held beliefs, at least he recognizes and acknowledges commonly held beliefs as being typical or expectations of a particular gender role (Bird, 1996).

Learned socialized roles can seem fixed and unchangeable, but the concepts we hold are actually the products of human actions. In other words, these concepts, such as masculinity, have been created by humans and therefore can be changed by humans (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Socialization in general first occurs through one's parents. The parents are the first teacher of the child. Through one's parents, all sorts of concepts are learned, including the concepts of religion and masculinity. A male's first imbibed notion of masculinity is likely received from his father or another older man during his youth. Later his peers engage in the interactions necessary for the maintenance of constructed concepts. Social constructionism holds that our understanding of the world and the meanings we ascribe to it are the result of ongoing interactions with others. Thus,

one of the ways in which our understandings of these social constructs may change is through new interactions that occur in the context of religious conversion.

In general, religious converts may change not only their dress or dietary habits, but also their beliefs about the world and how they fit into it. It is possible that some men who have converted to Islam felt little respect from others prior to their conversion and now enjoy new found respect as both pillars in their respective Muslim communities, and from some in the larger society as they belong to what may be perceived to be a dangerous group. Regardless of the consequences, a re-conceptualization of one's place in the social world could certainly impact perceptions of one's gender identity; therefore the meanings that individuals attribute to their gender identities could change.

The traditional view in Islam is that the male serves as the head of the household (Dix-Richardson, 2002). This certainly seems to be consistent with common notions of Islamic tradition, where women are not even required to attend weekly prayers at the mosque. During mosque services men and women are separated. Women generally do not hold spiritual leadership roles. Outside of the arena of the mosque, male conversion to Islam could potentially affect the family structure as well by impacting gender roles.

To fully understand the nature of gender roles in the African American family, one must consider the history of patriarchy and racism that has been prevalent in American society. The US has largely been a patriarchal society. Men dominate positions of power and authority in practically every realm of society. Patriarchy not only refers to the larger social order and how power is distributed within it but also includes power dynamics within family structures (Lawrence-Webb, Littlefield, & Okundaye, 2004).

African American families tend to be fairly egalitarian (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000; Hill-Collins, 2000). The history of discrimination and marginalization of African Americans has, in part, produced more egalitarian gender roles within African American families; this history of discrimination has both decreased males' ability to act as heads of households and at the same time increased women's role in providing for the economic wellbeing of their families (Abreu et al., 2000). Nevertheless, gender roles do exist in these families. The extent to which these roles are manifested however, are somewhat muted; the boundaries separating the roles between men and women are relatively diffuse (Hill, 1999).

Islam tends to reinforce patriarchal gender roles. Male Muslim converts may then find that their new faith influences how they interact with their families. The new converts may assume more stereotypical gender roles in their families, and the family structure may become less egalitarian. What this means for the male converts and how they perceive these changes affecting their families however is not known. Given the unique role of men in Islam and that the majority of male African American Muslims are converts, this study focuses on how male converts view their roles as men in respect to their new faith, and how these new roles, and corresponding notions of masculinity, may have impacted integration into various aspects of communities.

Before concluding this chapter it is important to note an additional contextualizing factor, recent attitudes towards Islam in the US. The US presents an interesting environment in which to study Islamic converts on two fronts. First, Muslims in the US find themselves in a country where some figures in the government have continued to characterize Islam in ways that many Muslims feel derogatory and

inaccurate. Additionally, a poll of Americans conducted by the Pew Research Center

found that "fears of Islamic extremism are closely associated with worries about Muslim

minorities" (2005a, p. 1). They further found that there is widespread negative

perception that Islamic identity is growing stronger among Muslims in the US.

According to a 2004 poll by the same group, 46% of Americans believed that Islam was

more likely to encourage violence among its adherents compared to other religions; and

42% of Americans believed that a majority of Muslims around the world are anti-

American. The Pew Forum (2005b) found that "Despite the intensive coverage of the

religion in recent years, most Americans continue to say they do not know very much

about the Muslim religion, only 33% of the public claims to know "some" or "a great

deal" about Islam" (p. 5). These conditions provide a unique context in which to study

the effects of conversion to an already strict religion. One might be prone to think that

such anti-Islamic attitudes are limited to those from the Middle East. Read (2007) argued

that due to multiple terrorist attacks around the world carried out by Islamic

fundamentalist, a widespread belief has resulted that Islam, and being Muslim in general,

is synonymous with terrorism. Furthermore, Read (2007) noted that being Muslim

regardless of race or ethnicity, draws out suspicion on the part of some and outrage on the

part of others over the appropriateness of Muslim integration into American society.

Lastly, it should be remembered that in addition to these recent anti-Islamic views, many

non-Islamic Americans have long held negative views of African American Muslims,

having associated them with the anti-white rhetoric of the Nation of Islam. Many may

not have taken the time to learn the difference between the Nation of Islam, and more

orthodox Sunni Muslims; lumping them all together in one conglomeration of African

American Muslims. This is important because any understanding of African American Muslims will require knowledge about the social context in which they exist, including an understanding of the conditions present in America which have led African American Muslims to perceive themselves as they do.

Summary, Implications, and Research Question

Active and passive perspectives on religious conversion are the two dominant views presented in the scholarly literature. These views need not be mutually exclusive and indeed some theories include elements from both perspectives. The passive perspective posits that the convert is acted upon by forces external to the individual while the active perspective acknowledges the role of human agency in the conversion process.

Religious conversion does not happen in a vacuum. Thus, to understand the implications of religious conversion on community integration one needs to consider the environment in which one is situated. A proper understanding of environmental factors is necessary for the proper contextualization of the conversion process. More recent theories of conversion, active perspectives, have pointed to the importance of individuals' interactions with their environment in conversion processes. This can be better understood by examining the way in which societies, or social worlds, are created.

Every individual is situated in a particular social world. One's perspective on society is maintained through face to face interactions with others in daily life. These microinteractions not only allow one to understand society but to also create a sense of self. A person's sense of self is then created through one's understanding of how others perceive him or her. The base level at which to understand society then focuses on

56

individuals, or rather interactions between two individuals. In thinking about society one often thinks of larger structures, but it should not be forgotten that groups are essentially aggregates of individuals. The meaning of actions and language attributed by individuals to others can often change. Thus, the nature of perceived relationships between individuals changes over time. It is for this reason that the creation and maintenance of the social world is thought to be an ongoing process.

One of the ways in which aggregates of individuals have received scholarly attention is through the study of community. Communities can be thought of in more than one way. Perhaps the most common notion of community references a geographical location. This need not be the case as communities, such as the Black community, often are not confined to any geographical location. The key element for defining community as used in this study is a sense of belonging, a sense of "we," among community members. This element of belonging allows for multiple groupings; for instance an individual may have feelings of belonging in regards to one's family as well as one's place of employment. Community then becomes a sort of middle ground. It may be rooted in a geographical location but more importantly, community acts to bridge the multiple domains of primary and secondary groupings in one's life.

Integration refers to the degree to which a person feels solidarity, or inclination to affiliate or disaffiliate, within the various groups that are a part of one's community. This includes primary groups such as one's family (family of origin, extended family, fictive kinships) and secondary groups, such as religious or work groupings. To fully understand how individuals are integrated into the social world, into this complex web of ongoing processes, one must consider the ecological configuration of groups to which

57

individuals belong. Considering the prominence of religious groupings is important for an examination of the effects of religious conversion. The religious market of the African American community largely operates under the conditions of a monopoly. Upon examining religion in the African American community, one notices a large majority of individuals practicing Christianity. It is not surprising that Christianity has dominated the religious market in the African American community given the religion's historical role in buttressing African Americans' attempts to live lives of dignity and address inequality in the US.

Islam by comparison is a niche organization. Not only that, but Islam is a strict religion in that it requires adherents to observe practices or norms, such as manner of dress, that allow others to visibly identify practitioners as Muslims. Of course, not everyone adheres to the decrees of the religion to the same degree; nevertheless, the mandate is there. Participation in a strict niche organization like Islam could then not only disrupt one's relationships in primary groups, but in groups beyond those and could potentially impact all arenas of life.

The majority of converts to Sunni Islam in the US are African American males. The possibility exists that one's sense of masculinity may change as a result of one's conversion to Islam. As males have such an explicitly identified role and importance in Islam, a new sense of gender identity centering on masculinity could impact other arenas of the convert's life as well. The study of masculinity among African American Sunni Muslims has never occurred despite the fact that they are the largest group of US born converts to the religion. This study then represents a unique opportunity to address this gap in the literature.

58

Cooley introduced the concept of the primary group, and since then researchers have amounted considerable evidence on the adverse effects, such as poor health, of lacking primary group connections (Litwak & Messeri, 1989). Our connections with others allow us to lead normal lives, in part because with these social connections one gains understandings of typifications that allow one to live life without analyzing every situation. We assume that in our close connections there is a degree of reciprocity. One does not usually ask others about reciprocity, but the underlying assumption of human relationships, of connections between people, is that through our interactions individuals help others and when needed, help will also be provided. This is at the heart of the notion of mutual interdependence and reciprocity. Thus, through studying the ways in which religious conversion to a "fringe" or niche organization impacts individual members' integration into society, we gain increased understanding of the ways in which individuals go about ensuring that the structures, and supports, that individuals need to maintain their lives are present.

Religious conversion represents change. One may go from a position of being integrated into society, meaning one has established a network of supports and to a greater or lesser extent feels some sense of belonging, to a comparatively dis-integrated position and conversion may result in the weakening or severing of bonds. Therefore, information will likely be produced concerning how individuals in marginalized positions go about attempting to maintain or reestablish these former relationships after the introduction of new selves. It has been suggested that a process in which there is movement from conflict to accommodation is prevalent in all conversions (Anderson, 2000). This study will then in part provide knowledge which will help test the veracity of

this claim. It could be that such claims are supported or perhaps the particular environmental or social situation of African American male Sunni Muslims will allow for a new understanding.

Religious conversion may weaken, or even sever, social bonds and may affect the manner in which one is integrated into the community. Competition among religious organizations may have ramifications for the subjective states of its members; namely, that individuals' sense of integration in the broader community may differ depending upon the degree to which one belongs to an organization with dominant market share.

The theories and concepts presented in this section serve only as guideposts for inquiry. They are relevant to the extent they provide valuable frameworks for understanding this phenomenon. However, the objective of this study is not to "test" the applicability of theories. While the preceding paragraphs have discussed to some extent ideas of community and integration, this study seeks to unearth and understand the various domains of life that may have been affected by religious conversion from the perspective of individual converts themselves, in their own voices.

Post-conversion experiences have received scant scholarly attention. This study presents the opportunity to gain insight into understandings of how processes impact connections between domains of social life and religious conversion. Additionally, because the subjects of this study are African American male Muslims, this study's findings could potentially provide a deeper understanding and contribution to literature through illuminating how marginalized individuals, or members of niche organizations, are integrated-or reintegrated-into broader domains of social life following a significant transformation of self.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, understanding the various conflicts and disruptions to converts' lives post-conversion could be beneficial for those that are involved with providing direct services for this population. For example, it could be that conversion dramatically impacts one's relationship with his immediate family; this knowledge would be beneficial for social workers to have and understand. Likewise, understanding the nature of changes in relationships at converts' places of employment could be beneficial for social workers, and those who are interested in helping this population, by enabling them to better understand how to help converts adjust.

Given the previous discussions, this study will respond to the following research question: How do African American men who have become Sunni Muslims perceive the impact of their conversion on their lives, including:

(1). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships with their family (includes family of origin, extended family, and current partner and children)?

(2). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships with those in the broader African American community (includes African American Christians, and those in their neighborhoods)?

(3). How do they perceive the impact on their relationships at their places of employment, or the impact on their attempts to gain and retain employment?

(4). How does their conversion affect their perception of themselves as men?

(5). To what extent are the experiences of African American male converts to Islam shaped by racism and anti-Islamic feelings in the US?

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach

The primary purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the effects of conversion to Sunni Islam on African American males. In general, Muslims in America have garnered scant scholarly attention by social scientists. Among African American Islamic groups, one organization, Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, has received a fair amount of attention both in scholarly journals and in the popular press; however, the largest African American Muslim group, Sunnis, has, relatively speaking, received almost no attention and remain virtually unstudied.

The current study is qualitative in nature and in-depth interviews have been used to study this population. The nature of this study was exploratory as it was not known what relevant categories would emerge in examining the effects of conversion to Sunni Islam on African American men. While theoretical literature was outlined to inform the study, the approach used was inductive and therefore flexible in its ability to consider the emergence of unexpected themes. This structure allowed for a great deal of response in the form of narratives on the phenomenon under consideration (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This also allowed for gathering data on a wide range of phenomena that would be difficult to obtain using direct observation. In ethnographic studies the research question itself often emerges from one's immersion in the field. Data collection then is dependent upon the specific nature of the circumstances in which the researcher finds herself at a given moment. While this approach may be suited to some studies, it reduces the researcher's ability to gather data in a systematic, focused fashion. Thus, this study used

in-depth interviews to ensure consistency in the data collection process. The use of in-depth interviews is one of the foundational methods in qualitative studies.

Another hallmark of qualitative methodology is the idea of triangulation. Triangulation refers to the incorporation of multiple strategies in qualitative research as a means of assessing whether the findings obtained in different ways are consistent, divergent, unique, or complementary (Sands & Roer-Strier, 2006). One way in which triangulation may be done is through the use of multiple data sources (Padgett, 1998). Accordingly, this study has gathered data not only through interviewing male African American converts to Islam, but also through interviewing key informants, such as Imams, as a secondary source of data. These data will be important for contextualizing primary interview findings and through their unique perspective represent an opportunity to unearth additional findings regarding the effects of conversion among the study population.

Interview Tradition

Within the purview of qualitative methods are contained a variety of approaches and traditions. The method used in this study was in-depth open-ended interviews. This structure allowed for a great deal of response in the form of narratives on the phenomenon under consideration (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This allowed for gathering data on subjective understanding, or meanings, of a wide range of phenomena that could not be obtained using direct observation.

In order to better understand the tradition of in-depth interviewing, it is necessary to briefly review the nature and role of asking questions to gathering social information.

63

Conversation, and language in general, serves to relay information in everyday life. It is perhaps because of the informative nature of language in everyday life that it took until the twentieth century for a paradigm centering around interviewing to emerge as a tool in social research. Prior to the twentieth century surveys were used to gather information. However the information was gathered not from those in the population of interest, but rather from those thought to be informed individuals (Alasuutari, 1998). These individuals were thought to be in-the-know and this style of gathering information perhaps fit much more easily with the informative purposes of language that most individuals have historically been accustomed to.

During the twentieth century, a new method for gathering information emerged, the standardized survey interview. Individuals now began to provide information directly about their lives (Alasuutari, 1998). Riesman and Benney (1956) suggested that this transition from key informant to actually gathering data from participants was an outgrowth of "the modern temper" that provided an understanding of individuals as capable of providing valuable information about their own being. Individuals previously unaccustomed to providing information to strangers about their opinions, personal information, or experiences became accustomed to providing information that had no direct bearing on their everyday lives (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

Surveys compartmentalize data through response categories, the results of which can be used in statistical analysis. Alasuutari (1998) noted that researchers tend to treat survey responses "as if they were physical objects rather than linguistic constructs, and as if the data were not acquired through the use of natural language, by individuals giving answers" (p. 136). Furthermore, whether a survey is self-administered or is administered

by an actual interviewer, there is a perceived distance between the researcher and survey respondent. With survey data, complex statistical analysis can be conducted. This fact, among others, has created the perception, held by some, that survey research methods are more "scientific" and thus superior to other means of gathering data. There are certainly benefits to survey research. However, it should be noted that the human element in survey research can also create many problems, such as giving socially desirable answers, leading the respondent, and inconsistency in understanding questions across interviews. In theory these problems would be eliminated through various means, such as training interviewers to follow a protocol, ensuring that the protocols are being followed, using unbiased language in interview questions, etc. Alasuutari (1998) noted that "in actual practice one could not even in theory eliminate the elements of human interaction present in the filling of a questionnaire" (p. 137).

Alasuutari (1998) suggested that in part it was problems with survey research that led to the popularity of in-depth interviews in the 1960s. The idea was put forth that the restricted format of structured interview questions seemed unnatural and that in-depth interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of study subject experiences. Harre and Secord (1972) noted:

> At the heart of the explanation of social behavior is the identification of the meanings that underlie it. Part of the approach to discovering them involves the obtaining of accounts – the actor's own statements about why he performed the acts in question, what social meanings he gave to the actions of himself and others. (p. 9)

In-depth interviews allow one to gain clarification through follow-up questions. The open-ended aspect of in-depth interviews allows for considerable dialogue during the process, which facilitates better understandings of subjective meanings and perceptions.

Setting and Participant Criteria

The setting for this study is the city of Philadelphia, PA. Philadelphia is a large metropolitan area on the east coast, located half way between Washington, DC and New York City. Overall, Philadelphia has a population of approximately 1.5 million people. The median age is 35 and males comprise 47 % of the population. Racially, the city is 48% White, 45% Black, 6% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian (U. S. Census Bureau, 2007).

The history of Philadelphia is closely associated with the struggle for US independence. Philadelphia is the site of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, and it served as the nation's first capital. Philadelphia is often referred to as the "city of brotherly love," a meaning derived from the Greek origin of the word "Philadelphia." In 1681, William Penn was granted the charter for Pennsylvania from King Charles II of England. At that time in England Quakers were experiencing great persecution for religious nonconformity and Penn hoped the new colony would serve as an experiment in religious freedom (Weigley, 1982).

Historically, Philadelphia has been one of the nation's great industrial centers. In 1917, when the US entered World War I, and later in 1941, when the US entered World War II, great efforts were made in Philadelphia toward wartime production. Many factories were retooled to aid in the wartime effort, producing artillery shells, helmets, and even ships at the local shipyard. Ironically, the aftermath of this boon in production had a devastating effect on the city as many new immigrants to the city who had come to aid in wartime production were left without a job after production ceased. The economy

has since seen a resurgence based upon the opening of new restaurants, a commitment to promoting Philadelphia as the birthplace of the nation, and construction. The skyline of Philadelphia has undergone considerable transformation since the late 1970s due to construction for then emerging corporations (Weigley, 1982). Several Fortune 500 companies now have their headquarters in Philadelphia, including Comcast, Lincoln Financial Group, Sunoco, Aramark, Pep Boys, and GlaxoSmithKline, among others. The U.S. Mint and Federal Reserve Bank also have divisions in Philadelphia (Fortune 500).

There are many different areas of Philadelphia. The commercial hub of Philadelphia is located in the section of the city known as Center City. In the past few decades Center City has increasingly becoming home to numerous new residents as many suburbanites are infiltrating the area and surrounding neighborhoods. The neighborhoods of Philadelphia often reflect the unique character of the residents that have long lived there. For example, many Chinese immigrants settled in what is now known as Chinatown, German Mennonites and Quakers in what is now known as Germantown, Italians in South Philadelphia, and Puerto Ricans in North Kensington. In fact, in addition to being called the "City of Brotherly Love," Philadelphia, with over 200 neighborhoods, has been referred to as a "City of Neighborhoods." Of course, while some neighborhoods have retained the racial/ethnic characteristics of their settling, there are many others that are racially/ethnically diverse (Ross, 2005).

In this city, with its mosaic of racial and ethnic groups spread out in over 200 neighborhoods, and a history steeped in the ideal of religious freedom, one can also find many diverse opportunities for religious participation. The religious ecology of Philadelphia today contains over two thousand congregations spread out across the city

(Cnaan, 2006). There are Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches; Quaker meeting houses; Jewish synagogues; and Islamic mosques.

While Christian denominations have certainly dominated the religious landscape of Philadelphia, the practice of Islam also has a relatively long history in the Philadelphia area. Kahera (2002) identified Philadelphia as one of the main urban areas in which large Muslim populations have been found. In fact, most urban areas along the east coast have been identified as having large Muslim populations including New York, Newark, and Washington, DC (Kahera, 2002). According to Carter (2003) the practice of the Sunni tradition in the African American community in general can be traced back to at least 1938, with the establishment of Ad-deynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association (AAUAA). AAUAA was started in Newark NJ, but by the mid-1940s had moved its headquarters to Hammonton, NJ, outside of Philadelphia. Carter (2003) noted that the AAUAA was the source from which several subsequent Sunni groups sprang, some of which can be found in Philadelphia. Philadelphia, as one of the hubs of the African American Sunni population, was thus an ideally suited location for the proposed study.

<center>Data Collection Methods and Sources</center>

In-depth interviewing was the method used for data collection in this study. Interviews with African American male converts to Sunni Islam form the bulk of data collected for this study. Interviews with key informants, not from the study population, were also conducted to complement information gathered from the study population. In-depth interviews tend to be conversational in nature and differ considerably from the short responses typically elicited from closed-ended surveys. The in-depth interviews

began slowly. I started by explaining the study and giving the participant the opportunity to ask questions. The actual interviews began with a few icebreaker questions. These initial questions served the purpose of helping me build rapport with the participant before getting into questions that more directly address the research interest at hand. As interviews proceeded they often unexpectedly turned to other subjects. Most of the time these digressions were at least tangentially related and were quite productive in that participants often mentioned something topics I planned to bring up but had not yet done so or provided general information that was useful to have in pursuing this topic. I anticipated that these diversions would occur and thus remained flexible enough to depart from strict adherence to the prepared plan to let the interview assume a more natural flow. Of course, I was aware of when the interview delved into one of these tributaries and while being, as mentioned, flexible enough to learn unexpected information, I was always strove to remain cognizant enough to refocus the interview when necessary. The approach used for data collection in this study was systematic in that participants all responded to the same set of predetermined questions.

Inclusion Criteria

Considering the Muslim presence in Philadelphia, there is ample scope for numerous studies on Islam to be conducted. However, the substantive area of concern for this study delimited study participants to a great degree. All study participants were African American male converts to the Sunni tradition of Islam. Among converts in general, the spectrum ranges from those who have just taken their *shahada* to long-time converts. Each end of the spectrum has valuable insight to share on the effects of

69

conversion, given the context under which they converted as well as the conditions through which they have lived as Muslims. The relatively recent increase in anti-Muslim feelings in the US also presented another interesting dilemma regarding the selection of study participants. Recent converts have become Muslim under radically different circumstances than those who converted in the 1970s. Older Muslims may be more established in their faith and thus able to better reflect on the actual effects of their conversion. Newer Muslims may still be struggling to come to terms with their new identity and may not yet fully comprehend the true ramifications of their conversion. This study has aimed to garner participants from both ends of the spectrum, as well as those who are in-between. Study participants, even new converts, should be somewhat grounded in their faith and had to have demonstrated some degree of commitment to their new faith. It is for this reason that all study participants had to have been practicing Islam for at least two years.

As with any faith, adherents range in the degree to which they follow the tenets of the religion. To help ensure that potential participants were in fact engaged in their "new" faith, all participants were chosen among those who attend *Jum'ah* at least twice a month. Lastly, all participants interviewed had to be at least 18 years old.

Access and Sampling

Snowball sampling is a procedure whereby the researcher uses the networks at his disposal to make connections with members of the potential study population. It is best if the researcher already has a personal connection with someone in the proposed study population. He is then able to build upon previously established trust. If the researcher

70

does not know anyone in the study population he must rely on others, such as family or friends, to put him touch with a potential study participant. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested several ways in which a researcher might be able to make an initial contact with potential participants if he does not already have a contact. First, one should check with one's family and friends. Regardless of the study population, one may be surprised at the extent of contacts in one's personal network. Polsky (1969) mentioned an experiment he conducted with one of his classes in which he asked them to use their network to see if they knew someone that could introduce them to a career criminal. To the surprise of many in the class, he found that a third of her students had family or friends that could make such an introduction. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) also noted that involving oneself in the community of interest is another way to make contacts with potential study participants. This could involve frequenting local stores, attending public meetings, or even moving to the neighborhood. The third way noted to make an initial contact is to visit agencies or other organizations that serve the community of interest. This could include self-help groups, local religious congregations, day care centers, fraternal associations, or any number of other possibilities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Johnson (2002) noted that key informants are sometimes marginal to the setting or situation being studied; they can be "lay intellectuals" or know-it-alls, or even outsiders to that particular setting. However, the best key informants are likely those who have been thoroughly enculturated in the setting or community under study, those who have been recently active, have a willingness to help, and have the resources and time to aid the researcher. Often the best participants, and informants, are those able to provide "thick descriptions." Johnson (2002) further noted that "…interviewers should always

71

develop an awareness of such individuals and be ready to cultivate their trust and friendship for the purposes of gaining member knowledge" (p. 110). Having such a contact is only the beginning of developing a sample.

The key to snowball sampling is that once the researcher does make contact with a potential participant, then the researcher works to develop trust with that person with the hope that this person will be willing to introduce him to other potential study participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). There are a couple of ideas at work here. First is the idea that potential study participants will be willing to be a part of the study based upon their relationship with the person who referred the researcher. The initial participant, or key informant, is then using his or her influence, and the trust built up in his or her relationships, to vouch for the researcher. The second thing the researcher hopes will happen is that these new participants will be able to put him in touch with even more potential participants. Thus, this process goes on in a progressive fashion enabling the researcher to build a larger and larger sample of participants.

Often in qualitative research, it can be difficult to gain access to one's proposed field of study. When an outsider comes along and proposes to study a population, suspicions may arise regarding the intentions of the researcher. There may be a general feeling of distrust on the part of potential participants. These feelings of distrust can prove to be substantial barriers to accessing a study population. As mentioned above, one of the primary ways in which researchers have gained access to study sites and populations is through a personal contact, or the sponsorship of an insider. This insider vouches that the researcher is ok; essentially letting other potential participants know that the researcher does not have malevolent intentions. Sponsorship of this type gives the

researcher a license to be in the environment of potential participants and to contact additional potential study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Sponsorship may open the door but the researcher could still have work to do. Once one has gained access to a site or population through a contact, the researcher may find that he still has work to do in order to gain the trust of additional study participants. This may require time, patience and sensitivity to the dynamics of the population under study. The researcher must have some understanding of potential concerns of participants so that he may put their minds at ease. This additional work may or may not be necessary; what is important is that the researcher recognizes that additional work may be necessary and remain sensitive to the concerns of potential participants. Roer-Strier, Sands, and Bourjolly (2008) noted that many African American Muslims are hesitant to be interviewed in this post-9/11 environment, so sensitivity and building trust are of utmost importance in gaining accesses to potential participants among this population.

As this study sought to investigate the effects of conversion upon individual African American Muslim men, snowball sampling was used to identify potential subjects. Initial contacts were made through Muslim contacts already known to the investigator in Philadelphia. At each interview, participants were asked to recommend other Muslim males who might be willing to participate in the study. Snowball sampling has proved to be an effective method for gaining accesses to private settings, or difficult to access populations, but it should also be noted that snowball sampling can tend to limit the diversity among study participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). To address this possibility, attempts were made to recruit participants from different social networks. While the presence of Muslims in Philadelphia is pervasive, the city can be viewed as

73

having several sections of the city that are centers of Islamic activity. West Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and North Philadelphia each have large mosques that are surrounded by shops that provide goods desired by Muslims in the area. Some Muslims in Philadelphia tend to move around and fellowship at more than one mosque. Nevertheless, attempts were made to make independent connections or contacts with potential participants residing in different sections of the city. The aim of this endeavor to recruit participants from different social networks was to produce separate pathways of sampling and thus increase the overall diversity of the sample. I believe I was successful in this endeavor. One thing I learned is that to some extent the entire Philadelphia Muslim community is connected. Individuals may know, or at least know of, others at different masjids even though they themselves may have never attended that particular masjid. This sometimes occurred through mutual friends, family connections, or just word of mouth. The seemingly most prominent reason for overall familiarity with various masjids in Philadelphia on the part of Muslims is that it is not unusual for Muslims to attend several masjids. I found that they had one they considered "their" masjid but participants and other I spoke with mentioned that they would sometimes pray at various other masjids for convenience sake. Nevertheless, through spending times in masjids throughout the city, described below, I was able to establish independent pathways of participant recruitment.

Data Collection Procedures

The goal for collecting data was in part to generate rich narratives for the topics under consideration. To get the interviews to generate these narratives, I spent

considerable amounts of time visiting 8 masjids through the city. Almost every Friday

during the seven month data collection period I attended *Jum'ah* service at some masjid

in the city. It was through my attendance and the corresponding increased familiarity

with me that congregants thus gained that enabled me to recruit the majority of study

participants. Key informants were a big part of this process as they would often

introduce me to potential participants after *Jum'ah*. Attempted introductions by key

informants done through email and phone calls were not nearly as successful as in person

introductions. Though this study is not ethnographic, I did learn and see many things in

my various masjid visits that have undoubtedly informed by understanding of the

Philadelphia Muslim community and of the experiences of converts in this community.

Regarding meeting the participant for the actual interview, I would suggest to

potential participants that we meet somewhere near their place of residence, masjid, or

place of employment. Ultimately, interviews were conducted in a variety of settings

including park benches, coffee shops, and masjids. Upon meeting for an interview, all

participants were asked for permission to audiotape the interviews. All in-depth

qualitative interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by a professional

transcription company. These interviews lasted on average of 2 hours. Participants were

informed that the information collected would be de-identified and any final work

produced using interview data would not contain the participants' original name or any

identifying information. Pseudonyms have been used in the findings chapter in the

presentation of data. At the time of the interview, when participants signed their consent

form, it was made clear to them that all information given in the course of the interview

was confidential. At this time participants were given the opportunity to ask any question

that they regard any aspect of the study. Participants were informed that only the researcher would have access to the audio recordings and that these recording would be kept in a secure location and destroyed after the completion of the study.

Sample

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) notion of "saturation" served as the barometer for stopping data collection and ensured that data collection was not stopped prematurely. Saturation occurs when the researcher continually encounters the same themes repeatedly across interviews from a variety of people while no longer encountering new concepts. The study has 21 primary respondents and with this number of respondents saturation was achieved. All converts became Muslim after 1980. This was important because it was after the Nation of Islam's movement in 1975 to a more orthodox practice. All primary participants converted directly into Sunni Islam.

Table 1 below divides this study's primary participants between fundamentalist on one side, and liberal and moderate groups on the other. The fundamentalist groups in this study represent those who consider themselves Salafi. Study participants characterized Salafi in different ways, but overall, those who are Salafi interpret, and try to put into practice, the Qur'an and *hadiths* in a literal way. Those who are moderate are part of the longer tradition of the practice of orthodox Islam in Philadelphia. The liberal denominations are either those that are part of the Warith Deen Mohammad community or ones that split off from that community. Overall, the most noticeable difference is between those who were fundamentalist and those who were not, thus the groupings in the table on the following page.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

	Lib/Mod	Fundamentalist	Total
Age (mean years)	37.0	35.1	36.1
Age (range)	21-54	21-50	
20s (frequency)	3	3	
30s (frequency)	5	3	
40+ (frequency)	4	3	
Years converted (means)	11.5	17	14.3
Years converted (range)	2-23	6-27	
Conversion 5 years or less (frequency)	2	0	
Married	7 (58.3%)	7 (77.8%)	14 (66%)
Children:			
0	7 (58.3%)	2 (22.2%)	9 (42.8%)
1-2	0 (00.0%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (14.2%)
3-4	4 (33.3%)	2 (22.2%)	6 (28.5%)
5+	1 (08.0%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (14.2)
Education:			
Less than High School Degree	0 (00.0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (04.7%)
High School/GED	2 (16.6%)	7 (77.7%)	9 (04.2%)
Some College	1 (08.3%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (09.5%)
College	9 (75.0%)	0 (00.0%)	9 (04.2%)
Occupation:			
Unemployed	0 (00.0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (04.7%)
Blue Collar	4 (33.3%)	8 (88.8%)	12 (57.1%)
White Collar	8 (66.6%)	0 (00.0%)	8 (38.0%)
N	12 (57.1%)	9 (42.8%)	21 (100.0%)

Numbers in columns are presented in frequencies and percentages, where not otherwise noted, in reference to the total in their own category. Median calculations for age and length of time converted were not significantly different from the means presented above.

Study participants repeatedly iterated that they felt most young converts to Islam in Philadelphia belonged to fundamentalist (Salafi) groups. Indeed, from my own observations it did appear that most young converts in the city belonged to a masjid that considered itself Salafi. The overall age of those who attended *Jum'ah* at such masjids was noticeably younger. Additionally, those in the liberal and moderate groups appeared to have both older converts and more second generation Muslims. In table 1 above, 57% of study participants belonged to a liberal or moderate group. I do not think that this percentage is reflective of patterns in masjids throughout the city, rather I think it is indicative of problems recruiting participants from Salafi groups. I will discuss this further in the limitations section of this chapter, but suffice it to say for now that many participants from these groups were very reluctant to be interviewed. I think this reluctance on their part could also be impacting the overall similarity in the age differences, or rather lack of age differences, between the two groupings presented in table 1 above. The overall mean age of participants was 36, no significant age difference was found between denominations for study participants.

Thirteen study participants discussed recent converts to Islam in Philadelphia as being young. Participants expressed that they felt that the number of young Muslims had dramatically increased over the past couple of decades and that they felt that this increase was somehow a phenomena unique to Philadelphia. One key informant, Imam Saabir discussing recent converts to Islam had this to say:

> Most of them are young. The ones that came in, and most of the young were disenfranchised, didn't have any particular place or sense of belonging anywhere and just as the youth were attracted to the Nation of Islam because it offered them a different language, it offered them a uniform, and you know, something completely different and that uniform represented the most righteous person on

the planet. You put the bow tie on, the white shirt, the suit. You look clean. And you almost look like you're everything, but in reality you just have a surface appearance. What is attracting the youth in the eighties to Islam is what is a misnomer called Wahabism, or Salafi….And this is probably the biggest movement in the late eighties, nineties, two thousand and it's beginning to reach its point of diminishing returns now. But it attracted youth, and these youth here, again, they were, most of them for the main part are products of urban environments. They started in Newark and Philadelphia is probably the biggest situation here.

Here the imam noted that he believes most of these young converts are from

disenfranchised backgrounds and that these young converts are a major proportion of the

Islamic community in Philadelphia. The imam spoke of the phenomena of this increase

in young converts irrespective of denomination; however he also mentioned that he

believes most of these young converts are members of the Salafi movement. Imam

Saabir did discuss the ages of different groups of Muslims in the Philadelphia

community. He explained:

> And so the inmate population is generally—and you have a lot of youth under thirty in the prisons …of all African American males are coming to Islam who are under thirty years of age and most of them do that from prison and so you've got that demographic there….Now the other aspect or element of the community which is the moderate or the middle class, most of them are, to be moderate and middle class means that you've lived a while, so most of them are in their forties and their fifties.

In the context of discussing Muslims in prison, he mentioned that most of these young

converts (a portion of which convert in prison) are under thirty years of age. Further he

discussed what he considered to be moderate, or middle class, Muslims which he stated

are mostly in their forties and fifties. From my own observations, most of the Muslims

that I saw in fundamentalist masjids appeared to be in their twenties and thirties. My

own observations also coincide with the imam in that in moderate masjids the

participants overall did seem to be older, forty years of age and older. In addition to the average age of study participants being 36, thirteen study participants mentioned young Muslims as a prominent group. The prominence of young Muslims in Philadelphia often came up. Ghaazi, born and raised in another east coast city, described his reaction to encountering so many young African American Muslims in Philadelphia upon moving here:

> I liked it up here because I got involved in the community and the people and one thing in Philadelphia that I noticed that the people that were Muslim were young, African Americans and it was something that I don't want to say was odd but it was something that was normal, where so in the Washington/Maryland area it is not something that is normal for African American youth to jump into Islam.

Faud had this to say, "I notice that Islam attracts a lot of young African Americans more than any other race."

I think the fact that members of the fundamentalist groups have a much larger average length of time since conversion and a slightly younger mean age shows that many of these participants converted while still quite young and is probably representative of converts to Salafi groups in Philadelphia in general. Another key informant Imam Ameen interviewed for this study mentioned to me that "the Salafi movement in Philadelphia started as a youth movement." I think this large length of time since conversion reflects that.

The educational differences in the above table are striking. Converts in the liberal or moderate groups are considerably more educated than those who are fundamentalist. This is in keeping with information shared by study participants who noted that those

from fundamentalist groups have lower levels of formal education and work in more

blue-collar jobs. One participant from a fundamentalist masjid commented:

> … yeah the majority of the Muslims from Germantown, [one of the largest Salafi
> masjids in the city] and they are used to blue collar, middle to low income homes
> and this is one thing that you see, you have a majority working at labor jobs,
> SEPTA, things like that. You are dealing with a lower socio-economic class of
> people….Generally we are dealing with people who are oppressed, from adverse
> backgrounds and are kind of like hey, I will listen to you, I have nothing else to
> lose. It spreads so much amongst the poor African Americans and this is the rule
> of thumb with Islam even from the beginning, it spread amongst the poorer Arabs
> before the elite….But that is one thing that you notice in Philadelphia, you notice
> the middle to lower incomes are the ones who will go into Islam quicker than the
> rest.

This participant indicated he felt that the majority of Muslims from fundamentalist

groups are from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The lower educational levels and

blue collar status of study participants from fundamentalist groups are consistent with the

statement above. Imam Saabir noted that he believed most of those from moderate

masjids were middle class, as well as older. The high level of formal education (75%) of

those in the liberal or moderate group combined with their high percentage of white

collar occupations (66%) seems to support the imam's opinion. In order to classify study

participants as blue-collar or white-collar, I used scheme presented by Erikson and

Goldthorpe (1992) in their work *The Constant Flux*. I grouped Erikson and Goldthorpe's

service categories into white-collar and the remaining labor categories into blue-collar.

Second Data Source

Padgett (1998) noted that "The concept of triangulation in qualitative research

refers to the convergence of multiple perspectives that can provide greater confidence

that what is being targeted is being accurately captured" (p. 32). One of the ways in

which triangulation occurs is through the use of multiple data sources. In this study, this objective was achieved through interviewing key informants who, as mentioned, are not members of the primary interview sample but who have access to, and regular interaction with, African American male converts to the Sunni tradition. The collection of this second data source was to increase the rigor of the aforementioned methods proposed for this study.

In addition to these 21 primary interviews, 5 additional interviews were done with key informants who did not meet the inclusion criteria. Of these 5 interviews, 4 were conducted with imams. The one remaining interview in this category was conducted with a convert who had once upon a time been a very active member in the Nation of Islam. These respondents were chosen because of their in-depth knowledge of the study population and their contributions were invaluable for understanding the study population and how conversion impacted this population in a variety of ways. Indeed, as was the goal, this information was vital to ensuring the validity of the data. The information given by these informants not only confirmed what was received by those in the primary group, but they gave vital information for contextualizing these findings. Originally I planned to recruit, in addition to imams, shop keepers at local Islamic book stores or other local stores that Muslims in frequented. Initial contacts with shop owners led me to believe that this was not the best course of action as the knowledge of these shop keepers and their cultural reference points were too far removed from the study population to give reliable contextualizing information; thus the emphasis on interviews with imams for a second data source. Considering the distribution of the Islamic community in Philadelphia, with its ethno-religious enclaves spread out around the city, and the

knowledge of these key informants, I also sought to gain additional contacts for potential study participants from these key informants.

<p style="text-align:center">Data Management and Analysis</p>

Compared to quantitative analysis, coding qualitative data tends to be a much more labor-intensive process. The initial point prior to the coding process involves the verbatim transcription of interviews. All study participants' real names were replaced by pseudonyms.

The coding proceeded by sorting text from transcripts into emergent topics. The coding itself is in part a response to the organization of the topics discussed with participants as per the interview guide. The coding process is largely inductive. Although the codes emerged in part as a response to the structure of the interview guide, there were no predetermined patterns to which the data were expected to fit. In fact, qualitative analysis often results in the emergence of new constructs not anticipated. Patton (2002) noted that the process of inductive analysis consist of "discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data," in contrast with deductive analysis where the analytic categories are stipulated beforehand, "according to an existing framework" (p. 453). Ultimately, this analysis resulted in the organization of data along a set of themes. NVivo 7, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used for the coding and analysis of data.

Themes from the data were gathered through analysis of participants' narrative responses. The goal of the in-depth interviews was to generate as much rich data as possible. Thus, participants were encouraged to narrate events as they remembered them

occurring versus answering questions as to why they thought a particular event happened. At the same time, probing for the meanings of events for participants' lives was done.

The Researcher's Role

Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted that "in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 72). It is therefore necessary to take into account the role of the researcher in the study environment. The researcher enters the environment with a particular biography. Each researcher has his or her own frame of reference based upon his or her previous experiences. Differences in age, race, socio-economic status, etc. impact how observers interpret phenomena (Charmaz, 2005). Researchers do not enter research environments as blank slates and therefore cannot be completely impartial. Different researchers observing the same phenomenon could very well describe their observations in very different terms.

Many qualitative researchers understand the importance of the self in the research environment. Reflecting on one's views is now fairly normative in qualitative methods. While some might consider the approach of qualitative methods to introduce great bias into the research arena, many qualitative researchers believe that there is no such thing as an impartial researcher. We all bring our biographies to our research projects regardless of the methodologies we choose to use.

Examining the commonalities and differences between potential study participants and me, as the principal investigator, points out possible ways in which the study could both be facilitated and hampered. In terms of facilitation, one of the greatest challenges in qualitative research is gaining access to the study population.

In this study, both study participants and the principal investigator share a racial identification. I believe that this shared identification was beneficial in helping gain access to the study population in a couple of ways. First, I do think the shared identification made potential participants feel more at ease and for some it probably made them more likely to agree to a request for an interview. When attending masjids to meet potential participants, aside from my not having a beard and not praying while everyone else was, to a certain extent I was able to blend into the crowd. I say this to say that I do think race enabled my interactions with potential participants. Not only that, but this shared identification likely proved helpful in the interview itself by helping participants feel comfortable because of assumed shared understanding of what it means to be an African American male. Certainly in comparison to a white female trying to do the same study my race and gender proved very valuable.

Another way that I feel my race helped gain access to the study population is due to the high percentage of converts to Islam who are African American males. Thus, access was granted but the idea was there in some participant's mind that they are talking to a potential convert. I know this because they told me so. Numerous participants mentioned that I should convert and they also mentioned that a part of helping introduce me to other potential interviewees was to help this conversion process along. Quite explicitly some participants and key informants, whom I had developed good relationships with, said this to others. It was presented as a jest but there was truth in those words. I do believe my gender and race helped in this way. However, this might have then impacted the answers that were given to questions, as a participant might have been reluctant to share information that he thought might reflect negatively on his

experiences in Islam. When this view of me as a potential convert was present, my race and gender then, in some ways, became a two-edged sword helping gain access but potentially distorting responses. I knew this going into the study and I think I was able to create an environment in which participants opened up and shared their true experiences with me.

Another factor worth noting is that in sharing a common cultural background I believe there were perceptions of a shared understanding of certain aspects of the African American community, such as the presence of Christianity in the community, which helped to facilitate interactions during the interview. This shared understanding likely allowed me to better empathize with the participant, thus helping the participant feel more at ease and willing to be forthright about his experiences post-conversion.

One large difference between me and many potential participants was difference in educational attainment. It was known to potential participants that I was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. The fact that I was from an Ivy League university might have hampered the communication between potential or even actual study participants and me. This may have been a factor with potential participants where there was a great gap in our education levels but I do not feel it was overwhelmingly, if at all, a factor with actual study participants.

One last factor to keep in mind is related to both gender and race. Both the interviewer and interviewees were male and African American. On the surface this might not seem problematic. Indeed it may not have been, however, there are some possible ways in which these shared identities could have been problematic and must be kept in mind. Let's take gender for example. Every gender has a certain repertoire of behaviors

that are associated with that gender. At the societal level, there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to perform one's gender. Of course one's physical structure goes a long way in the representation of a gender identity, but behavioral aspects must also be considered. In particular, one must pay attention to "men's tendencies to exaggerate rationality, autonomy, and control as part of signifying a masculine self" (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002, p. 212). These problems can be exaggerated when men are interviewed by men about their masculinity and a researcher must be aware of this and be prepared to deal with it through the use of sensitive questioning, probing, and understanding that there may be some exaggerated claims and simply allowing them to be expressed first before delving deeper to uncover the reality behind them.   In the course of these interviews I tried to give participants space to talk about their own lived experiences. Because they are men, ideas related to masculinity often came up without my directing questioning being related to that topic. Some of the most insightful understanding of masculinity among the study population occurred in these moments. I did of course directly ask them about masculinity and in these moments I tried to probe for deeper understandings when I thought I was either being presented with an embellished account, which I felt was rare, or more likely when I was given a terse socially desirable answer bout masculinity.

Shared identities, in this case race and gender, did elicit some responses of "you know what I mean." This type of response is dangerous because the participant is relying upon unspoken and assumed shared understandings to convey meaning, and while the researcher may know what a participant means, he also may not (Schwalbe & Wolkomir,

2002). I tried to get participants to express what they meant when this occurred as I knew it was a possibility that his might happen going into the study.

Keeping in mind the need to remain self-reflexive, I attempted to do this through keeping a reflexive journal. Immediately after each interview, I would record any thoughts or feelings about the interview. It was my goal to note anything that stood out during the interview, or anything that I found unusual or significant. In general, the journal offers the researcher a systematic way to record feelings, reactions, and decisions made during the interview that could help the researcher understand any bias on his part that may be influencing the interviews one way or another. While I did record impressions after some interviews, there were few where I felt like there was anything unusual or particularly significant to note. When it did occur I noted it, and looking back through my notes was helpful in writing up my findings presented in the next chapter not because they shed light on my own bias, but rather because they helped me in some ways to better contextualize data from specific interviews.

Limitation in Data Collection

One point alluded to earlier should be discussed a bit here. Although participants repeatedly indicated that the majority of young converts today are members of Salafi masjids the number of study participants from this group was less than half. I noticed an extreme hesitance on the part of some to being interviewed and in fact, some seemed to not want to have anything to do with me. One imam I interviewed mentioned to me that when he told some of the members of his masjid that he was going to meet me for an interview they reacted strongly and verbalized that they would never do such a thing. He

mentioned that there is a certain amount of paranoia on the part of some Muslims

regarding the government and anything or anyone that appears to be "part of the system,"

meaning being connected to mainstream institutions that could by some be thought of as

systems of control and that represent a sort of mainstream authority.   While there may be

excessive paranoia on the part of some, there is apparently good cause for some amount

of paranoia as this imam indicated that he had been approached and interviewed by

members of the FBI. They apparently were interested in discussing connections between

Philadelphia masjids and overseas Islamic groups, a few of which some think to be

associated with terrorist groups. This imam mentioned that he had nothing to hide so he

spoke with the FBI and likewise he didn't mind talking to me. Perhaps then these types

of interactions have contributed to a sort of paranoia among some in the Philadelphia

African American Muslim community. This paranoia was not limited to fundamentalist

groups but was also found in the liberal and moderate groups. I scheduled many

interviews only to be stood up with no prior contact. Furthermore, after being stood up, I

could not get in touch with some of these potential interviewees. Not only from this

interaction with this imam, but I also observed what I believe to be paranoia on the part

of some of the potential interviewees I approached.

   This has certainly influenced the sample I was ultimately able to get. I think the

average age of converts, particularly in the fundamentalist group, may be older than the

average member of those masjids. While I was fortunate enough to have young

respondents, in general older respondent seemed more open to being interviewed and this

also has likely influenced the findings I was able to gather.   I do not think this problem

has distorted the findings presented in this study. Had I been able to interview more

younger converts I think I would have found more of the same for I did indeed interview

a number of young converts and I think what they conveyed was consistent with that

given by older converts in both talking about their own experiences and in reflecting

upon those of younger converts. This attitude on the part of some then ultimately proved

to prolong data collection but I do not believe them to have hampered study results,

which I present in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

This chapter will present a model which will enable the reader to conceptualize post-conversion experiences of African American men in Philadelphia who have converted to Islam. This model is based upon responses given by study participants and was inductively derived from the data. This model, as presented here, is not intended to facilitate any statistical analysis or other empirical examination of data to predict specific post-conversion experiences. Rather, this model provides readers one way in which to understand how the lived experiences of converts to Islam can be understood in relation to their investment in faith post-conversion.

Findings relevant to the research question will be presented in the context of this model throughout the chapter. Within this chapter the following topics and themes will be discussed: overview of theoretical model; commitment takes time; family, neighborhood, and city connections; work environments; masculinity; and anti-Islamic aggression.

Theoretical Model Overview

Figure 1: Theoretical Model
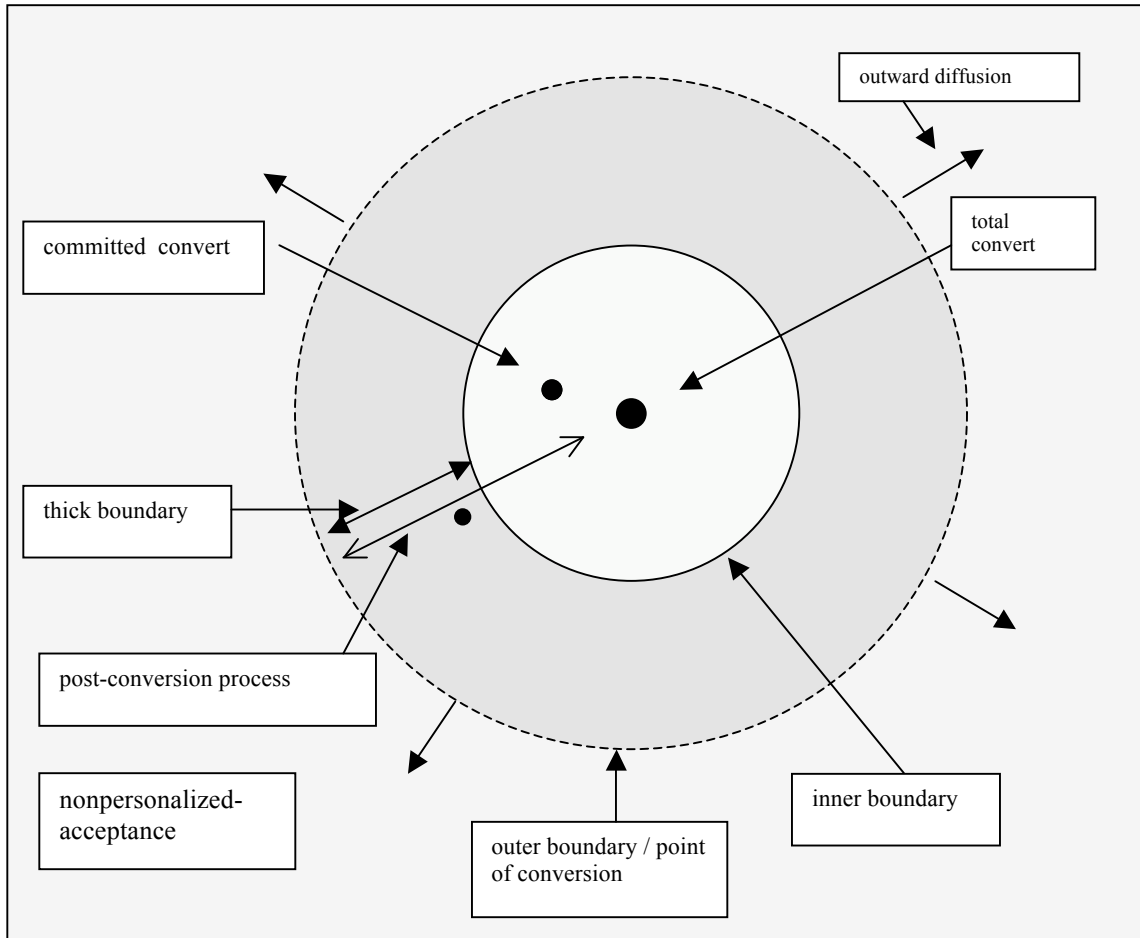
The preceding theoretical model will be discussed throughout this chapter. The

outer boundary is conceived of as the point of conversion, the point at which an

individual takes his *shahada* and begins moving towards the center of the above figure;

the center of the above figure, being a total convert, is a theoretical position representing

a complete absorption and incorporation of all the tenets of Islam. This process of

movement is thought of as process of religious intensification during which an individual increasingly learns about the tenets of his religion and becomes increasingly committed to his faith. As one moves towards becoming a total convert, one becomes increasingly invested in his faith. In the process one has to first cross a "thick" boundary. Thickness is conceived of as the degree of distance that a convert must traverse to become a committed convert. There are two elements to distance. The first is that distance is associated with tension with the outside world (the non-Muslim community); this is a sort of social distance and is largely associated with how those outside the religion are perceived to view those in the religion. This aspect of distance includes considerations of cost, which must be addressed as converts increasingly become invested in their faith. Secondly, from the perspective of those in the faith, distance refers to actions aimed at reducing associations with non-adherents. Additionally thickness is also associated with permeability; the ticker the boundary of a religion, the less permeable it is thought to be. If the process of investment in religion, and religious intensification, continues, one becomes a committed convert. Here a committed convert is associated with what Lofland and Stark (1965) called a deployable agent. This represents a degree of commitment at which the convert is able to represent the faith in interactions with non-adherents. The inner boundary represents the point at which one begins to really orient one's life according to the teachings of the faith and is the point at which one becomes a committed convert. A convert at any point inside the inner boundary is a committed convert irrespective of his specific location within the inner boundary. Outward diffusion represents a one way process though which certain elements associated with the faith become accepted by the broader community in which the convert lives. Finally,

nonpersonalized-acceptance, which is viewed as a perceived acceptance of the physical

presence of Muslims by non-Muslims is thought to impact the preceding elements of the

model; it is represented by thee shaded area that lies outside the outer boundary.

Commitment Takes Time

In Islam, an individual becomes a Muslim by taking his or her *shahada* (Elias,

1999). Nevertheless, after this initial step there are many additional beliefs and practices

that the convert needs to learn and imbibe to become a knowledgeable and committed

convert. Both the converts and imams who were interviewed for this study made

comments that support the conclusion that it takes time to become a committed convert to

Islam. Seven study interviewees indicated a change over time in their understanding of

their faith and their level of commitment. They spoke about how this process takes time

while also acknowledging the specific moment during which one takes his *shahada*. Key

informant, Imam Saabir noted:

> It's a gradual change and again, it's probably analogous to someone going in the
> military. The training and the discipline is something that you gradually go
> through.…you have to change the way you eat. You of course, you should begin
> to pray five times a day, so the schedule of your day revolves around the prayer.
> And you know, again, it's a way of life and you don't just change overnight. You
> don't change overnight and it be something significant or meaningful, or you just
> make a few changes, so I think you'll see the change gradually because what may
> have occurred in a twenty year old won't be enough for a thirty year old, so you
> have to keep growing.

Here the imam is clearly drawing a distinction between a superficial engagement with

Islam and a more considered engagement with the religion. Another study participant put

it like this, "People think that they can become a Muslim from outside in. They can grow

94

their beard, get a thobe, and automatically they're Muslim. It doesn't work like that. This is a spiritual thing. It starts from within. You have to work your way to it." Again, from the above quotes we see that commitment is not something that occurs in a moment; rather, it is a process that extends over a prolonged period of time; it is something one has to grow into. It is important that this fact be taken into account when examining religious phenomena concerning converts in general and more so when considering post-conversion experiences.

This particular study focuses on converts to Islam, which is a strict religion. Iannaccone (1994) noted that "religious commodities are collectively produced…this implies that individual members benefit both from their own religious participation and from that of others" (p. 1185). Fourteen participants in this study mentioned brotherhood as a benefit of participation. One participant, Kaamil, described how he came to understand the bonds of brotherhood:

> I kind of got, it got me to understand how strong the sense of the brotherhood that Islam puts on a person or group of individuals. I really started to see that there is a certain way that you deal with people when you, like if I have a friend that is Muslim here and a friend that is non-Muslim here, it is a stronger bond when you really understand and really study and know the type of brotherhood that even the prophet and his companions "Peace be upon him and his companions" and the type of love that they had for each other. When you really get to understand it and know that is what helped me to understand how serious it was…

Here Kaamil describes feelings of brotherhood, or mutual love and support combining to produce a sense of group solidarity, was accompanied by a serious commitment. Participants also discussed the behaviors they said they engaged in, post-*shahada*, before becoming committed to their faith.

Outer Boundary

Ten study participants retrospectively described being engaged in a number of activities which went against the teachings of their faith. One study participant, Omar, stated:

> But a lot of the males from, you know, like how our neighborhood are, come up getting into certain things….Islam tells a man [how] to carry themselves, it attracts them but they have a hard time letting go of these certain things that they are indulging in so, they are like flip flopping between both of them and they may not be ready to let go of as far as being into different things that have no place in Islam, I struggled with it for a long time. Islam was my religion, but this is my way of life. And I can't separate either one of them.

The preceding quote shows how this participant recreated a sense of self in which he took elements from his aforementioned way of life and reincorporated them into a post-conversion sense of self. Omar discussed his own struggle, and noted he felt many other individuals from neighborhoods similar to his experienced similar struggles. In this struggle it appears that individuals choose to orient their lives in some ways according to the teachings of their new faith and yet also retain certain elements from their pre-conversion orientations. From Omar's perspective, this struggle is something that a lot of men go through. Another study participant, Muntasir similarly expressed:

> Because Islam made me concentrate on how I deal with people, you know how I deal with people, how I speak to people, I am real conscious about how people view me. I wasn't conscious about how people viewed me back in the day coming up, it didn't matter…. I went back to the streets you know, it was like as we call it, "*Jum'ah* Muslim" I was just going to Jum'ah but then after *Jum'ah*, I was out there in the world. I wasn't getting high but for that year I "shuckled in the game" as we call it.

Here Muntasir talks about going to the masjid for *Jum'ah* on Friday and hustling (or shuckling) the rest of the week. This shows that at that time in his life, and in his post-

conversion process, he had made choices about how his life combined elements from

both the religion and from his former life. Kaamil recalled:

there is a saying of old that "men are judged by the truth and the truth is not judged by
men," meaning they were Muslim and they held to the beliefs that Islam obligates on us
but some of the acts they neglected. Like staying away from indulging in various
different criminal acts like carrying illegal fire arms and selling drugs and things like that,
they were still doing things like that had no place in the religion. Most people see Islam
as a gang or a click, especially among the young men today, they look at Islam as people
enter into the religion just to whatever and they still indulge in different things as far as
like the street life is concerned, they try to carry the street life into the religion. That is
what I saw in the beginning until I started to get a better understanding as to what the
religion was about.

Kaamil reflecting back upon when he was getting acquainted with the religion of Islam

said he noticed individuals becoming Muslims and still indulging in things against the

teachings of their new religion. He noted that he thought this was the case "especially

among the young men." Here we see another example of reflections upon behaviors of

new converts in conflict with the teachings of the Islam. Again, this behavior is

indicative of a stage, a level of commitment, that I have termed the outer boundary.

Nonpersonalized-acceptance: Family, Neighborhood, and City Connections

Sixteen study participants indicated that they thought Philadelphia unique in that its longstanding Muslim community has gained a certain level of acceptance by non-Muslims in the city. Indeed, Carter (2003) noted that orthodox forms of Islam (Sunni), based in the African American community, have existed in the city for over half a century. One convert, Abdul-Baari put it this way:

> If you were in Dallas/Fort Worth and a Muslim woman walked into a supermarket with a *niqab* [face veil] what do you think would be some of those people's first thoughts?....Who is she? What does she represent? And why don't you take that mess off. That would be the mindset if they could say it to her without it being any repercussions; if they could speak freely that's what they would say. Here in Philadelphia it's totally the opposite.

While it appears that many in the general public still do not understand much about Islam, converts that were interviewed view non-Muslims as having accepted Muslims as part of the physical landscape of the city of Philadelphia. Perhaps in cities in other parts of the country, a Muslim getting on a bus or a plane dressed in Islamic garb might garner considerable attention; however, such occurrences in Philadelphia were described as commonplace. As one participant, Aadil put it:

> With Philly it's interesting because Philly had a large visible longstanding Muslim community. We're not in the Midwest. We're not in some areas of the country where people might not even see a Muslim, where the only image of a Muslim is what they see on the news or in a Hollywood movie. Islam is more familiar in this city.

For members of the African American community, this history of contact has been even more intimate. Not only have orthodox forms of Islam been in Philadelphia for over fifty years but the Nation of Islam also has had a long presence. For many in the African

American community, their familiarity with Islam began through contact with members of the Nation of Islam. Though the presence of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia today is rather meager, Philadelphia was once a very prominent center for NOI activities. Noted NOI spokesman, Malcolm X, even spent some time here helping establish mosque number twelve (Marsh, 1996).

Families

Six of the twenty-one study participants grew up attending religious services. Of the twenty-one study participants, four grew up in cities other than Philadelphia. Considering only the participants that grew up in Philadelphia, fifteen out of seventeen study participants, 76%, reported either not attending any religious services as a child or having done so only nominally. Although six study participants did grow up going to church, there was only one, Muneer, who grew up in what one would consider to be a tight-knit religious community. Everyone in his neighborhood knew each other and they all attended the same local church. It should be noted that this one convert grew up in a suburb of another major east coast metropolitan city, not Philadelphia. He had this to say about his conversion:

> I mean, to be honest I was so scared. I just remember being so scared about people finding out that I was Muslim. I was quiet for a long time after I became a Muslim. I didn't say anything. I really didn't want to say anything because I knew people were going to confront me, argue with me about it, and I really didn't have any argument at the time; and I just didn't want to sit there. For the longest time I just didn't tell them. People kept asking about me. Slowly I would see people from the congregation and people would ask me. I guess people put two and two together and said, "Well, he's not here anymore. He's studying Islam. He must be Muslim now. He hasn't come back." It never really happened. I thought it would be this huge battle, but it never happened.

99

Interestingly, Muneer, who did grow up in a tight-knit community where everyone knew each other and went to the same church did not experience any strong negative reaction to his conversion from family, friends, or neighbors. His neighborhood was what one might call strong working class. A couple of converts' parents initially made a negative or disparaging comment about their son's conversion but such comments were in the definite minority. Additionally, those same parents soon stopped their comments. In other words, their negative comments were limited to an initial one time reaction. No parent continually expressed disapproval.

The one area in which there were some elements of friction concerned the celebration of holidays. Three participants noted that it took some time for their families to adjust to the fact that they no longer celebrated the traditional holidays (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, birthdays, etc.). These three participants reported these problems with their parents; two of the three reported problems with aunts and uncles. No participants reported any problems centering on holidays or anything else with siblings. Regarding holiday celebrations, one participant recalling a conversation he had with his mother noted:

> … then we had the Christmas. So, can we buy you anything? No. Don't buy me anything for Christmas. I am not going to buy you anything for Christmas, not in that way. This is a holiday that we do not celebrate because of the reasons that we don't believe in are the reasons for the holiday, so I went down that road with her. So, she understood, but still said that you could come by. I don't understand. I said because then I am celebrating just by me coming because you've asked me to come….Family gatherings is where the friction, if you will, at least when I first became Muslim was an area.

These participants reported that mostly with time families just accepted that their sons would be no longer celebrating these occasions. One participant, Masoud, noted that his attitude towards the holidays is changing as he ages. He stated:

> I have children who never have celebrated their birthdays, nor Easter, no holidays outside of Islam. It doesn't bother them, but I have changed some of my views and thinking, we still don't celebrate these holidays but I recognize their birthdays and I am getting a little older, they recognize my birthday but we don't make a big thing out of it. We might get a cake or something. So when we get cakes we say Happy Anniversary of life or happy anniversary of birth. We might sing happy birthday, we don't make a big thing out of it, we just say today is the anniversary of your birth….I will say that even when holidays came I would go to my grandmother's house and eat with her. I never looked at Thanksgivings as a holiday because it was a time to go to grandmoms get a sweet potato pie and grub and my wife would grub and my kids would grub. I didn't go on Christmas, but Thanksgiving, Easter, New Years Eve. It was a tradition to go to grandmoms and my cousins and aunts and watch Dick Clark and watch the ball drop, even being a Muslim, I never changed those things and wouldn't change it.

Of the 21 respondents, only Masoud expressed this type of approach to the holidays. An additional three participants indicated that they've heard that some new Muslims experience problems with their families and the celebration of holidays. Masoud is the only study participant to do anything that some might consider to be celebrating a holiday. Muntasir, while not celebrating holidays himself, mentioned that some Muslims do:

> …nowhere in the statements of the companions of the prophet, there is nowhere in the Prophet's Sunna that says that you should be allowed to celebrate Christmas and yet you still you have Muslims today that do, likewise, there is nowhere in Islam that says that you should celebrate Thanksgiving, [yet] people are still doing it today in Islam. They buy turkeys; they try to buy it the day before or the day after, no. Because Islam says, the Prophets statement says [*speaking Arabic*] he says every action based upon intentions…So just because you got that turkey on Wednesday you [know] that you really were getting it to celebrate Thanksgiving. If you got it on that Friday and you didn't get it on Thursday, you are celebrating Thanksgiving, if you bought your kids toys on the

24th or the 25th, you are celebrating Christmas. Mother's Day is another one. None of these [are] holidays that you have in Islam…

The non-celebration of holidays together was a minor hurdle that families were viewed as quickly adjusting to. Overall, the majority of converts reported that their families were neutral to happy at their relatives conversion. As Kaamil stated:

Because I was like, I was kind of a knuckle head for lack of a better word, I was really out there, I was really, really, really reckless. So now that they see the change, they would rather have me be Muslim and have some type of stability and live my life better as opposed to be non-Muslim and running around and doing some of the things I was doing before.

Aadil similarly stated:

My mom was happy also because it got me off the streets. I didn't know that my mom was so upset. She didn't tell me how upset she was for me being on the street, that I was hustling all the time. I had a problem with that. I didn't know that she had a problem with that. I wasn't home enough to realize that. I would just come through when there's a problem.

Reflecting back, Aadil now feels that at that time in his life, he didn't understand how upset his mother was at his activities but he noticed a change in her after his conversion.

Shihab recalled his mother's reaction to his conversion, "She basically told me whatever you choose to do that's—that's what you choose to do. My main concern is you stay positive and stay out of trouble."

Former Neighborhoods

Two study participants indicated that they still reside in the neighborhoods in which they grew up and lived in when they converted to Islam. One of these participants, Abaan, stated that he experienced no negative reaction from neighbors to his conversion. He suggested that this might be because he grew up in an area in which there were a lot

102

of Muslims. He stated "People on the block were Muslim. We lived near a real popular street, Fifty-Second Street. There are a lot of Muslims that are on Fifty-Second Street doing different things." Najeeb is the other convert that was still residing in his old neighborhood. He also didn't recall any negative reactions from neighbors to his conversion. He grew up in an area in which he did not see any Muslims as a child but in his early teenage years a masjid was established near his home. He has this to say:

> See, I grew up in this area, so that masjid, the mosque that's on Germantown and Seymour, I always lived in this vicinity, so sometimes I would walk past there and I would see them. [That masjid is] maybe sixteen or seventeen years old. So it used to be a boys' group home. It burned down, and eventually, the Muslims purchased the building and they converted it into a masjid.

Recalling his childhood, Najeeb stated "it was rare. I hardly saw any Muslims." The remaining 19 participants indicated that they either moved around a lot and therefore didn't have a lot of interaction with neighbors or that they were for a variety of reasons (work, school, etc) living away from their former neighborhoods. As previously mentioned, only two participants were residing in their former neighborhoods at the time of this study; none of the remaining 19 participants reestablished a residence in their former neighborhoods. Both Abaan and Aadil's statements below reflect this transitory condition which may have prevented them from establishing connections with neighbors.

Abaan stated:

> Even though I was born in this part of Philly I never really had any friends around here, I never hung around here or anything like that, I was mainly in North Philly so a lot of people around here, some individuals I know, some I don't, some are Muslims now and they see me but nobody really I guess....

Recalling Aadil's statement from the prior section:

> My mom was happy also because it got me off the streets. I didn't know that my mom was so upset. She didn't tell me how upset she was for me being on the

street, that I was hustling all the time. I had a problem with that. I didn't know that she had a problem with that. I wasn't home enough to realize that. I would just come through when there's a problem.

Marriage

All study participants were single at the time of their introduction to Islam. Fifteen study participants were married when interviewed, one of which was then going through a divorce. All study participants were married to Muslim women. All study participants who were not married at the time of our interview indicated a desire to have a union with a Muslim woman, though they noted that it was permissible for them to marry any woman "of the book," meaning any Christian or Jewish woman in addition to Muslim women. Those who were married, and those who desired to be married, both indicated that connections for marriage were largely made either though their Muslim friends or through the masjids that they attended. Multiple study respondents mentioned that dating, as thought of in Western terms, is not supported in Islam. A Muslim man and women should not be alone, but rather should get to know one another in the presence of a third party, whose presence is to ensure nothing improper happens. This chaperone role is to be assumed by a male Muslim. This person is known as a *wali* and it is his job to serve as a guardian for the woman until she is married (Renard, 1996). It was not unusual that when a connection was made through married friends, the married couple would introduce individuals at a social gathering at their house. For example, a couple might plan a dinner party and invite both individuals. In cases where an introduction was being made through friends, the married couple would act collectively as chaperones.

104

Four study participants indicated that they met their wives through such arrangements. In this case "dating" is a prelude to marriage, not simply to pass the time. The other way in which individuals would meet their potential partners would be through a committee at their masjid designed for this purpose.

Muslim marriage did not guarantee success; particularly when individuals who remained close to the outside boundaries of the faith attempted to mesh Muslim beliefs and practices with societal beliefs and practices. Of the fifteen participants married, five of them had previously been divorced, three from Muslim women and two from non-Muslim women to whom they were married before they converted to Islam. Additionally, among the six single study participants, three were previously married to and divorced from Muslim women. One participant, Shihab, stated:

> Well actually, I am going through a divorce right now. I actually got married like right after I came home and me and my wife, we are not divorced, we are just separated. She is young, she has never been married before and she entered into the religion when she was young, she hasn't been Muslim that long so a lot of the beliefs, she is not really ready to grasp them all the way…..our problems are basically, that she has a child that is by somebody else, somebody that she met before me. That wasn't an issue early on and it really isn't but she has to understand that her dealings with him are restricted. Meaning that she can't really deal with him the way that she would deal with him if she was still single and not Muslim and when I try explaining it to her, she told me that her child's father is a certain type of person and she doesn't want to go through [someone]…because he is a certain type of person. But like I said, she thinks that I pay more attention to her child's father than I do her because we had a lot of arguments about her dealings with him and just a lot of crazy stuff…. Her main thing was she was afraid that if she tells him that she is married, he is going to basically put his child off on me.

In this instance the husband has been a Muslim for far longer than his wife. It appears that the husband, in terms of internalizing the faith, is in some ways closer to the inner boundary of the faith while his wife is closer to the outer boundary. His insistence on

105

handling things according to the teachings of Islam and her insistence that she deal with her child's father in ways outside the boundaries of what is acceptable in Islam have caused some frictions in their marriage. Shihab further indicated that though he and his wife are separated, he believes they will get divorced as this is their second time being separated. Men who desired that their marriages, or the arrangement for marriage, be in accordance with the teachings of Islam could be said to be closer to the inner boundary of the Islamic faith. Apparently, not all Muslim men have such ambitions.

All study participants indicated that according to their understandings of Islam men are to be the heads of households and are to be providers for their families, and that women are to care for the children and look after the household. The male's role as provider entails ensuring not only that the family has enough money to survive, but also to ensure the overall physical and spiritual well-being of wives and children. Khaleel discussed gender roles in Islam:

> …the man is supposed to be the man of the house, protect the family, provide for the family, food, clothing, shelter and those things. In Islam, the woman has a lot of rights and the husband, her role is to more or less, in terms of marriage, …the husband is obligated to do everything else in terms of providing, preparing the food, finding something for the wife to wash clothes and do the things she does. The wife doesn't have to wash her husband's clothes. She doesn't [have to] do those things. There are different rights in which the Muslim woman and the Muslim [men] now has…. I don't think women are looked down upon or [that] they are lesser people because they're women. They have certain obligations that they must perform and us men have certain obligations. If we don't do those things then we're a sinful for that. So, that is what keeps us in terms of being focused on doing the things that we are supposed to do.

Khaleel stated that the differences in gender roles are based upon the teachings of Islam and that failure, on the part of either sex, to follow these rules is sinful. It could be

argued that these roles are supportive of male privilege in Islam and are similar to male privilege as expressed through other patriarchal settings. As previously stated, men in Islam do have prominent positions in Islam not only in their roles as heads of households but also as religious leaders of their communities (Renard, 1996). Some however, have argued that interpretations of various scriptures have been used to create and maintain male privilege, or male superiority in Islam (Elias, 1999).

In many ways, the behaviors of male Muslims closer to the outer boundary may not differ significantly from non-Muslims, particularly when instances of what may be considered taking advantage of male privilege occur. Another key informant, Imam Wajeeh, had this to say:

> …it is the man's duty; he is the one that's charged with the leadership of the household; he's the one who's responsible for it. I think that creates a consciousness and puts a positive pressure on him. I've seen cases, unfortunately, where men haven't been mindful of that. They've gone off and gotten married to these sisters. It's like a cliché, almost. You have some of these unemployed or underemployed men who marry sisters who don't know the *deen*, don't know the religion very well. Sometimes the women will be getting money from welfare. He might marry one or two or three. We haven't even touched on polygamy yet. He might try to marry a couple of different ones or he might be a serial monogamist; but all the time, never once, have some of these men taken on the responsibility seriously of maintaining these households.

Here the imam is describing behavior of Muslim men that he believes do not know, or at least are not practicing, the teachings of Islam. As previously mentioned with outer boundary behavior an individual may selectively choose which elements of the religion to practice. Above the imam describes individuals who use the privilege of their position as men to enter into marriages without meeting the obligations that these men are to uphold once they are married. This is in contrast to the behavior that one would expect to see of

107

an individual closer to the inner boundary of Islam in which his behavior should be more in line with the teachings of Islam. Masoud offered a somewhat similar perspective in regard to Muslim men taking advantage of what might be considered their male privilege, in this instance apparently to maintain the status quo:

> …I am all for women being educated. My wife is a school teacher, working on being a principal. I am for women working, if she desires to go out and work, she should be allowed to go out to work and to achieve a higher education rather that sitting at home collecting a welfare check. This is what a lot of Muslim men do and it is swept under the rug and they use certain teachings of the religion to keep her at home, [saying] it is better for her. Yeah, it is better for her considering the society that we live in…It is a double edge sword; it is safer for her to be at home, …[but] don't use that as a crutch because you want to keep her down, and you have that among Muslim men who have not finished high school, or went to college. They may have an attitude that it is better for a Muslim woman to remain at home because he is inferior about her getting an education and becoming better than him because he did not have that coming up. That is very prevalent among African American Muslims. They don't see a desire for higher education so they are content with their woman staying at home and they don't push her to get a higher education because if she gets a higher education, he might find himself out on the curb.

In the preceding quote, the restrictions on education appear to be in contradiction to the teachings of Islam. Study participant Khaleel stated that women do not have to work but they can choose to work; likewise women can pursue higher education if they choose to, as long as such a pursuit does not interfere with their ability to meet their Islamic duties to maintain the household. Behavior then that may result from what some would consider to be an abuse of male privilege, behavior that either direct contradicts or restricts other in the family not based upon Islamic teachings, can be considered to be outer boundary behavior.

Children

Twelve study participants had children at the time of their interview. These men indicated that their faith, strengthening their faith, in some ways reoriented their thinking regarding their children. As mentioned in the previous section, all study participants indicated that in Islam it is the husband's responsibility to be a breadwinner and the wife's responsibility to raise the children. Thus, a strengthening of faith accompanied an attitude that the rearing of the children is something in that the wife is to do. As Omar stated:

> Islamic beliefs, that men are responsible for the women and their family. Men are the ones who should work and be the breadwinners and bring back to their family. Women can work and aid and assist, but they have to….The husband still has to be the breadwinner of the family. That's Islam….[men are responsible for] being the provider and the maintain—provider of his children. She's the one who takes care of the children. She's the one who takes care of the household. She's the one—he can help, aid and assist as some men do, but it's her role.

Of course, these participants did interact with their children, though they did not emphasize it. Particularly those more invested in their faith tended to note that they tried to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad and his interaction with his family in their interactions with their own children. Najeeb highlighted the importance of a father's having patience and encouraging religious and secular education:

> …when I look at the way my parents raised me, my upbringing—my family were disciplinarians, you could say, and they were always constantly spanking, and it just showed me that there are other methods of disciplining your children besides spanking. With children, you've got to have that patience. And how the man should be the provider for his family and his family is dependent upon the provider…I would say it had a good effect on me as a man. You have to take care of your children and make sure they're educated; make sure they're learning about their religion. It's also important to learn secular knowledge, like in school.

109

So you encourage them to learn computers and encourage them to learn anything that's going to help them when they get older…It just showed me—I mean, reading about Islam and reading about Prophet Muhammad, how he interacted with his children how he interacted with his wives, where you see in the … community in general… a lot of people yell at their children and scream at their children. They scream; they curse; they use profanity. It really doesn't have a good effect on the children when you're screaming at them all the time; you're yelling at them; you're cursing at them; you're teaching them a lot of bad habits. So it taught me that you've got to have a lot of patience with children.

Like Najeeb many men indicated a desire to make sure that their children knew and followed the teachings of Islam. This was the dominant theme in participants' comments on their interaction with their children. Ghaazi stated:

The tranquility, the feeling after praying… it forces you to take time to think about your creator….once you hit the age of puberty, then you are in the stage where okay, this is upon you. Like my son, my son is eleven; he is at the stage where he understands that he has to pray at certain times. It is not fully on him yet but he understands it. Five o'clock in the morning, everybody is up, the little ones are sleep, wash pray, go back to bed, and go to the Masjid. So when the kids see that and they are able to implement it in their lives and they understand that each part of the day, I have to take this time and give thanks to God and give him his rights, it is mandatory on you. A total of five minutes a day.

So men who were married with children were keen on ensuring that their children knew their responsibilities in regards to their faith. Having spent some time in various masjids over a seven month period I observed men bring their sons with them to *Jum'ah* and lining them up in the ranks for prayers on a regular basis. They would take time to show their sons the proper prayer positions and correct them when they did something wrong. Also, while men would say it is the wife's responsibility to care for the children, it was not at all unusual to observe small children, daughters, with their fathers at *Jum'ah*, either sitting on their laps during the *kutba* [the lecture or sermon given during *Jum'ah*] or running around the masjid. So obviously, as the participant above stated, men can and do assist in the care of their children. These, however, are children born into a Muslim

110

family. One convert who had a daughter prior to his conversion and his subsequent

Muslim marriage had this to say about maintaining regular interaction with his daughter:

> I had a child before Islam, I have a daughter that is sixteen years old and she is not Muslim….. My oldest daughter, my Muslim children joke with her. But when she comes over, if we go to the mosque, she goes with us, she respects our customs. We call her "Mushcrit," she is half Muslim, half Christian. Meaning she is Muslim when she is with us and a Christian when she is with her mother. I raised my children to understand that this is what I am into; this is what I believe.

Here the convert encouraged his daughter to have respect for Islam. His daughter from a

previous relationship was being raised by her Christian mother and though he

understands that she is a Christian, he tries to encourage her to understand and participate

in Islamic activities when she visits him. He noted that it was important to him that all of

his children, including his daughter, understand the teachings of Islam.

Nonpersonalized-acceptance

Twelve study participants mentioned that they think many members of the

African American community in Philadelphia have relatives who are Muslim. Faud--a

study participant and having converted 25 years ago, a long-term member of the

Philadelphia Muslim community--said:

> Today most African American families have a Muslim in the immediate family or a Muslim who's related to the family in some sense. Islam has become part of the American dynamic among African Americans. It's part of the public sphere already. I know when I first came with Islam, for years my family—not ridiculed in any significant way but they always question and wondered.

This convert noted the general acceptance of Islam in the African American community.

He further noted his own family's acceptance of his decision to alter his faith. Study

participants indicated that they felt that prior contact by some family members with Islam

helped ease the acceptance of their own conversions and of others in similar positions.

Even those without immediate family members who were involved in some form of

Islam know of others in their communities that had become Muslim. Thus, in the African

American community--by far the largest racial group of native born converts to Islam

(Pew Research Center, 2007)--the presence of Muslims appears to have been, even to a

greater extent than in the city as a whole, accepted. Ghaazi is another study participant

that talked about this exposure to and acceptance of Islam in Philadelphia:

> I don't see it as much in Philadelphia because Philadelphia has a rich Islamic
> history, and it is a long and deep Islamic history. The thing with the African
> American Christian community, there might be some issues in terms of
> compatibility from the theological side of course but in general, I see some
> respect for it. Because for example, at any one of these churches around here
> someone somewhere has someone in their family that is Muslim, if it is not their
> son, it is their husband, if it is not their husband, it is their brother-in-law or their
> granddaughter so it is not something that is foreign here. Now in Maryland you
> might go to a church and there is no one in anybody's family that is Muslim at all,
> not at all.

Despite this familiarity, participants felt that non-Muslims still to a certain extent

distanced themselves from the religion, and from those who practiced it. In Philadelphia

many, particularly those in the African American community, might have ties to

members of the Muslim community; these connections could be neighbors, coworkers,

family, or friends. A personal connection at some level serves to inoculate one from

strong reactions to that which others might find disconcerting. Overall, the interviews

indicate that in converts' extended families, in the African American community, and in

the city in general, there appears to be a type of acceptance of the presence of Islam.

Having not interviewed non-Muslims this perceived acceptance cannot be taken as fact;

nevertheless, based upon interview data, I refer to this as *nonpersonalized-acceptance*.

112

Connections with Friends

Eleven study participants stated that they made decisions to distance themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, from pre-conversion social ties. Participants indicated that one reason they don't have contact with a lot of pre-convert social connections is due to the natural separation that comes between friends as they get older and start families. However, these eleven participants also reported that Islam has several restrictions that constrain the social environments that adherents can be in. As Abaan put it:

> But I think because I've completely devoted myself to practicing Islam we live polar opposite lifestyles. It just doesn't even clash. I mean Muslims don't even allow… If you were sitting here with a drink technically I'm not even supposed to be sitting here with you…. We're not even supposed to be in the environment. If you were a woman I couldn't sit in this room with you like this because the Qur'ān says don't even come near fornication. So even the things that put into that environment… You're not even supposed to deal with stuff that puts into that environment or could possibly entice you to do some of these things. That's more the reason why we don't really do anything together. Some of my old friends are so much into what they used to do that I can't pull them to the side and say, "Hey, man, why don't you come do this or do that?" They don't want to do it. If they're going to do it they're going to do it under their terms and it's just not going to work.

Abaan discussed how differences in interest and the desire to adhere to the teachings of his religion have caused him to stop hanging out with old friends. Kaamil put it this way:

> a few of them I do but from the time I was away, a lot of them have gotten older, they have their own families, they got jobs now, and they really don't have time for the things that we did when we were younger. When I go through the old neighborhood I might see them but I am in and out like that. The majority of the people that I hang around now are at Germantown Masjid that is where I really spend the majority of my time; we are already on the same page anyway.

Converts did mention that they would sometime see old friends in passing and the relationships have largely remained cordial though far less intimate. Like the previous

113

two participants, Masoud noted that he did not hang out a lot with old friends that

predated his conversion:

> Well we don't hang now because a lot of them are not married and if a person is not married, there is not a whole lot that I can do with you. I need to be reminded that I cannot go to the club, I have never been to a club really but because there is going to be naked women in there, booty shaking and drinking and alcohol. If you are a lackadaisical practicing Muslim that is going to be okay going down South street or Delaware Avenue, it is going to be okay, but for me it is not okay because you are going against the principles of Christianity, you are going against the principles of Islam because you are going to indulge in stuff that goes against the principles of the teachings. So I don't have a lot of friends from back in the day, I mean if I see them we speak, it's cool, but that's it.

Here Masoud described the behavior of some Muslims who may not be strictly

adhering to the guidelines of their religion regarding appropriate social environments.

This intermingling with old friends in an environment deemed inappropriate according to

the teachings of Islam is consistent with outer boundary behavior. Additionally, six

converts reported that they still have some association with old friends. They reported

occasionally hanging out with old associates in a non-party atmosphere. Khaleel

described some of his interactions with old friends.

> If they go to the club or something, I'll say, "You all know that I am not going. I am not going."…. So, those things changed and some of my friends still kept going out. I said that I wasn't going. I am not going to do it. I know that I am not going so don't even ask me….No, I don't go out. No. We may talk on the phone. They may come over my house and hang out. I may go over their house and hang out. A good friend of mine whose name is Steve. He lives in the Pittsburgh. I may go out there sometimes and just stay the weekend.

As this example shows, even where friends have maintained some connection,

boundaries are drawn between what they can do together and what they cannot. Thus,

the nature of the friendships has changed as many common interests are no longer held.

It may be that the physical presence of Muslims in Philadelphia as part of the everyday

scene has created an environment that allows former social contact to remain cordial with converts even though the former closeness of the bonds has disappeared.

Work Environment

There are a variety of perspectives on how one is to operate in the economic arena. Not surprisingly, one's ideas seemed to be related to both one's denominational affiliation and one's location along the continuum of internalizing one's faith. Based on the interviewees' reports, conversion seems to have had little to no detrimental impact on employment opportunities. Twelve study participants worked in blue collar jobs. For these individuals, conspicuous displays of faith reportedly did not impact their employment status. It should be noted that participants did not hold the kinds of jobs that required close regulation of clothing worn by employees.

Additionally, some participants expressed that idea that whatever one does in the economic sphere should be for the benefit of Islam. Muntasir put it this way:

> …if my wife, if we produce some more doctors, then we produce some more doctors because she earns a good living. But the ultimate goal is that she would produce some more doctors is so that my wife can go in front of Muslim women [doctors], so [Muslim women] won't be ashamed; this is why she is producing them. Now if we can, the ultimate goal should be preached for the betterment of Islam. So if you want to be a nurse you should be a nurse, if you want to help society and have a good living, but at the top of that list should be that because it is going to help Islam. Now when you go to college you don't go and say I am going to college so I can make all this money, you go and the objective still has to be the benefit of Islam.

If one were to be doctor then, it should not be for the prestige associated with the position, nor should it to be for the financial reward that one might get. Rather, it should be to serve as a physician in the Muslim community. Participants indicated that many

Muslims prefer to deal with other Muslims. Thus, if one were to go see a doctor, it is

best to see one that understands what is appropriate in light of your faith. It is thought

that such a doctor would be thinking about faith in relation to the practice of medicine

and how that understanding would be used to benefit the patient. Thus it is more than

understanding a few basics about the religion; it is about a doctor with a pervasive

approach that is in harmony with the teachings of Islam. As one desires to be in harmony

with the teachings of Islam, it is best for Muslims to see such a doctor, such a teacher,

such a lawyer, etc. This is one of the reasons that participants indicated Muslims prefer

to interact with other Muslims in the economic sphere, and in all other spheres.

Similarly, one participant, Ali, indicated that it is beneficial to work with other

Muslims. Ali worked for another Muslim that painted houses and reported that this

Muslim employed other Muslims as well. Ali thought this situation ideal in that when it

is time to pray, everyone stops to pray. Not only that, but as everyone is praying

collectively, Ali reported that these men believe they get additional benefit. Furthermore,

there are no restrictions on the dress of people in this environment. Two study

participants noted that they do not wear extensive Muslim clothing[3] when they engage in

manual labor, however if an employee wanted to wear any item of Islamic garb in their

work environments participants reported it would be perfectly acceptable to do so. Four

of the study participants with blue color jobs indicated that they desired to always wear

such clothing. These participants also noted that it was not against the teaching of

---

[3] Some participants indicated that this clothing is not actually Islamic but rather is indicative of the general style of dress in certain Middle Eastern countries. In congruence with the language of participants I use the terms Islamic dress/garb to refer to such clothing.

Muhammad to wear whatever is deemed appropriate clothing for a particular work environment.

Two participants expressed a desire for self-employment. Nabhan had this to say regarding self-employment:

> I'm not in that work field. I'm not in that type of work field. I favor working for myself. I favor working for myself to avoid all of that type of discriminatory risk and fears. I like to be self--. It is probably better for a Muslim to be self-employed anyway. I lean toward self-employment. I've had my own autonomy and my own freedom and stuff like that. I don't have to really have those types of fears…. a lot of them [Muslims] work for themselves…that is the best thing. It is the best thing for Muslim nowadays to get as much education as they can, even in secular studies so that they can have some independence, some freedom.

These participants felt that they should not be in a situation where they are dependent upon non-Muslims to provide for their families. If one is able to work for oneself, then one is able to establish a quality of life that can be continued through one's own means. This will help to ensure that there are no conflicts between what is required for a particular job and the dictates of one's faith. These participants gave this as the reason that they, and other Muslims, attempt to work for themselves through a variety of what would be considered small scale businesses, including street vending. The possibility remains, of course, that this could just be a way to rationalize their economic situation. Overall, study participants working in blue collar jobs had relatively low levels of formal education (1 of the 12 participants with blue collar jobs had a college education, 2 had some college, and the rest had high school diplomas or general equivalency diplomas-GEDs), which limit the types of jobs that these participants could get regardless of their employment philosophies.

Given the low overall levels of educational attainment for these study participants, the overall effect of conversion on employment prospects might be positive. One study participant recalled a conversation he had with another Muslim about getting a job.

> …we have a big network. Especially here in Philly when you're Muslim, even though there are so many Muslims, somebody knows somebody, especially among the people who are second and third generation Muslims. Everybody knows somebody. I was just talking to a brother and I said, "I want a job [at this particular place]." He said, "Well, my son-in-law works…" Somebody knows somebody always. It's a really good network.

Through conversion this participant, and perhaps others, gained access to an employment network that they would not have had otherwise. For Muslims with low levels of formal education, these may not be high paying jobs, but they nevertheless represent work that these individuals may not have otherwise had. This network consists not only of Muslims working for other Muslims, but through word of mouth about opportunities, or through actual openings, at the places of employment at which some Muslims worked.

Six study participants indicated that they felt many African Americans in the Philadelphia Muslim community give great importance to wearing Islamic clothing, or clothing from the Middle East. Zaafir, speaking about discrimination in the job market, noted:

> It partly depends on your presentation of yourself as a Muslim. If I were to go to certain jobs and I was dressed with a long *Jum'ah* robe, if I had a full—or some people call it a Suna—beard, maybe some henna [red coloring usually worn in the beard] hair, if I wore a kufi [small Muslim hat], if I was visibly Muslim that might cause some problems for me in some stores, in some places. I know for a fact that security guards, people who work in jobs where they have to have uniforms, oftentimes the men are told, "You have to shave off your beard." For some that's a religious issue; not for all because some don't consider it obligatory, but some take it as a very serious issue. To the extent that the person is visibly Muslim they trigger in people's heads all kinds of notions and stereotypes about what that means. Will they be militant? Will they be belligerent? Will they not want to

take authority? Will they want to do things their way and not be cooperative?
Will I have to watch what I say around them? That kind of thing.

One participant mentioned that he wears a thobe [a one-piece full body garment worn by

men that covers their arms and goes down to their ankles] or some form of Islamic

clothing every day because he desired to "look like the Muslims." He expressed ideas

similar to those stated above:

> I think certain employers, when I walk into an interview or to fill out an
> application and they might see me with a kufi on or they might see me with a
> thobe on, or my Islamic dress or anything like that, it clicks in their mind that they
> might not want to hire me because they might already have a certain idea or view
> that Muslims maybe have these extremist beliefs or extremist ideologies and they
> don't want to take the time out to get to find out if what they believe is right or
> wrong.

Although six study participants expressed some opposition to what is thought of

as Islamic clothing (these six participants did sometimes wear Islamic garb), overall the

participants--especially those who were young converts-expressed a strong preference for

dressing Islamically. The insistence however, upon wearing such clothing everyday,

including while at work, varied. While study participants indicated that the majority of

contemporary male converts to Islam in Philadelphia are young and from comparatively

speaking modest economic backgrounds, there are middle class converts to Islam. These

include individuals working with computers, teachers, and college students among others.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are in Islam, as there are in any religion,

various groups or denominations to which one belongs. In the Philadelphia Muslim

community, those partitions can basically be thought of in terms of two groupings, liberal

and conservative (or fundamentalist). Those from middle class backgrounds also wore

Islamic clothing but did not have as strong a conviction that such clothing should be worn

everywhere and particularly in one's work environment. Umar stated, "Yeah, I'm not

wearing Muslim clothes to work. Unless you sit down and talk to me, had a conversation with me, or were around me you wouldn't…there's nothing really to distinguish me from anybody else."

All the middle class participants from the study sample were in liberal to moderate groups. These groups of Muslims have interpreted scripture and writings in ways that have allowed for a more mainstream presentation of self. For example, while at work the clothing of these individuals is no different from any other employee. Ten study participants indicated that it is desirable or mandatory to wear a full beard. This belief appeared to be less strongly held by those in more middle class occupations or occupational tracks. Among participants with white collar jobs, six had either a closely cropped beard or no beard at all, and two had full beards. Overall, eighteen study participants expressed a strong desire to share the teachings of Islam and while participants with white collar jobs also shared that passion, they appear to refrain from such discussions in the occupational arena. This refrain on their part is suggestive that these participants are distancing themselves from others in their work environments. Shihab, who worked in management consulting, had this to say:

> For me, because my work environment is business casual, so you have to wear your slacks, dress shirt, sweater or what have you. My grandfather used to say before, and I think my mom told me before, that there are three things that you don't conversate about with people. It is religion, politics and money…..At work, I really don't get into those conversations with them. If they say something that I feel is wrong and they make a bias statement, which I haven't heard anything, then I would speak on it….I have my things and those who I want to know my personal business, like my team members from before, I will share with them. Those who don't, when I went away to Mecca, I said that I am going away to Mecca. You figure it out why I am going. I don't have to tell you. Those people know. I don't have to tell them. They'll say, okay, and make a face, not a bad face but like 'oh, okay. Wow, that is interesting! Why?' Because I'm going there

to do some things that I am obligated to do. It is not, in my sense, to protect myself against the barriers and stereotypes and things. I don't think it is their place to really know, but I'll give them hints for them to figure out.

These individuals certainly did not hide their faith; they did not advertise it but they would happily answer any questions that an individual had regarding their faith. In general, these Muslims reported that their colleagues who knew about these participants' Muslim faith had no problem with it at all. At the same time, these white collar participants also displayed a certain caution concerning discussing or expressing their religion at work. As Khaleel explained:

> Because you start going down that path and again they get that perception of 'oh, he believes this….but okay, really, who is this guy?' I don't want that to affect what I am trying to do from a work perspective because we all want to,…we want to do the things that we can do to increase our earning potential for other things, various reasons to have to pay off loans, to live comfortably, to invest and to provide for family. Those are the same things that I want to do. I also want to have ways to give back to…Muslims in a way that those who maybe don't have as well a paying job as I have or other things.

> Overall, while these individuals expressed a strong desire to follow all the teachings of Islam, they were not overly zealous in their approach to the teachings.

Participants with white collar jobs reported that they sought out places to pray in their work environments. Umar told me:

> I go somewhere quietly. They know I go to prayers. They'll ask me Islamic questions, random questions. That's all. The really good thing is that there was another Muslim guy at my job who has been there for years. He has a very good reputation. He's very good at what he does. So when I said, "I'm Muslim," "Oh," such and such, "is Muslim." It was fine for them because they knew somebody that was…He blazed a trail for me and it made it so easy when I walked through the door… It was such a blessing because I didn't really have to explain anything.

> It should be noted that I did encounter several Muslims with white collar jobs in the more fundamentalist sect during the time I spent in the field, but none of these

individuals were converts; rather, they were second generation Muslims. Unfortunately, I

can give no comparative information on how they manage their work environments.

Among the members of that particular masjid, this individual appears to be an anomaly in

that the vast majority of individuals at that particular masjid appear to not have similar

educational levels or occupational positions.

Masculinity

Masculinity as a construct to understand the characteristics of "males" is

meaningless in the absence of a social context. It is important for one to understand to

what end masculinity has been, and continues to be, used as a means through which to

structure the social world. Carroll (2003) noted:

> Perhaps the primary lesson of masculinity studies as applied to U.S. history is that
> because American history (like all history) has been fundamentally about relations
> of power (e.g., political, economic, social, cultural), it has also been
> fundamentally about the social and cultural constructions of gender and
> masculinity used to support or seek power. (p. 2)

Masculinity, and power itself, has always been associated with autonomy (Van Gundy,

2002). Autonomy has to do with the freedom to define oneself and one's worth in the

construction of a meaningful existence free from outside imposition. In the conversion

process, one has the opportunity to refashion oneself in a way that an individual feels is

more conducive to producing that sense of wholeness. Manhood, and its concomitant

autonomy, was something difficult for study participants to express. As Abdul-Baari

stated, "Islam…it really made me a man, it made me know that, it is kind of hard to

explain, it is certain things that you may have to see to understand as opposed to just

hearing." Zaafir stated, "It's less abstract when you see it. One reason Malcolm was so

attractive is because you could look at Malcolm and you could say, 'Yeah, there is it...'"

Manhood then, in some ways, is more a state of being, than any description. It is again, about having the autonomy to refuse to be imposed upon and about being in control of one's life and directing it as one sees fit. For many African American men, this autonomy has historically been curtailed. Kimmel and Messner (1995) noted that institutionalized racism, particularly in the economic arena, has constrained choices and life-style options of black men. Masculinity among black men cannot be separated from race in that racism experienced by black men, in its ability to shape the social parameters within which black men must live and the ways in which it has devalued black men historically, is in direct contrast to the desired end of masculinity, which is autonomy. Thus, to understand masculinity among black men, one must attend to the structural conditions that have created environments whereby men's desires for autonomy have been limited. Furthermore, one must understand that it is in this environment, and under these conditions, that men act to create their sense of selves, including their masculine identities.

Masculinity as a concept in Islam bears scrutiny as gender has significant implications for the organization and operation of Islamic communities. As previously mentioned, men hold prominent positions in the Islamic faith in regard to the actual practice of the faith, where men serve as religious leaders, and in regard to family life. In the religion of Islam, men are the keepers of the faith and masters of the household (Elias, 1999).

There are two representations of masculinity emerged from interviews with study participants that correspond to different stages of their movement across the boundary of

Islam. The first is a type of hyper-masculinity while the second is a type of benevolent patriarch. To many in the western world, these gender roles may not appear unusual; they can be said to be in keeping with patriarchal views and roles ascribed to men throughout history, and indeed both representations are supported by previously articulated notions of masculinity present in the general discourse of society (Kimmel & Messner, 1995).

Study participants indicated that they feel many young converts to Islam are from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. One conceptualization of masculinity prevalent in poor urban areas and supported by a variety of media images is the hyper-masculine male. Masculinity itself being associated with aggressiveness, power, and domination, the hyper-masculine male is then associated with all of these qualities in an exaggerated form (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988).

In the world today, and particularly in the US, there is a popular myth that all men stand on equal ground and that a man rises or falls according to the merits of his efforts. This myth feeds into a mentality of individualism, where each person is responsible for his successes and failures. This myth is a strong part of the American dream, that everyone has equal opportunity for access to success. In the US the attainments of money, power, and material possessions are the markers of having achieved success (Frank, 1995).

Being successful is equated with being valuable. As a society, we hold successful individuals in high esteem. We live in a winner take all society and the idea is propagated that individuals should strive to become, in their own way, captains of their respective

industries. By striving to achieve that American ideal of success, materially defined, one

seeks to be valued (Frank, 1995).

Outer Boundary Masculinity

One conception of masculinity held by young men near the outer boundary of

their faith is connected to the idea of hyper-masculinity. This type of masculinity

however has an added element as it is intricately tied to an Islamic identity.   As a new

convert starts his journey, this idea of Muslim masculinity may not only be a loose idea

in his mind, but an ideal. One study participant, Aadil, noted:

> Usually you go to the corner and there's like, corner guys are corner guys and
> Muslim are Muslims. Now [these days], who are the corner guys? Muslims. I
> mean, it's crazy man! I mean in every era, in a point in society, the bad guys are
> embellished and they're bigged up. And for a person to use as an adjective how
> bad they can be, they'll give they nickname, they'll say that their nickname is that
> bad guy in a particular time, that particular era. There was a time when Russians
> were the bad guys. Rap guys used to refer to themselves as this or that, Scarface,
> on and on and on. Now, guys, he'll say he's Al Capone, Noriega. And it's rap
> group called Noriega. Then you have, now it's bin Laden. There's a guy walking
> around that I know that was in prison, and he said, yeah you know, they call me
> bin Laden. [He's like] I'm wild like that. He's just a street boy……And nobody is
> saying that we're protecting him or supporting him or anything like that. We want
> him to be caught. We hope they catch him. He's caused the Muslims tremendous
> harm. He has nothing to do with us. He has nothing to do with Islam and Islam
> has nothing to do with him. Islam has nothing to do with terrorism and terrorism
> has nothing to do with Islam. That is critical, critical, critical! We want to make
> that clear each and every time we can. But again, this is what's happening. So,
> that's attractive to people, it's sexy to them. They're like yeah that' right, yeah,
> yeah. You know like, [because] people are always attracted to the bad guy.

While this participant noted the appeal of the bad guy image, particularly among

those on the outer boundary of Islam, he stressed--as did many participants--that Islam

does not support terrorism or any of the other criminal activities for which Muslims have

been in the newspaper for as of late. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the very real pull of image of the Muslim as a "bad guy" not to "messed with."

Aadil was not alone in expressing this sentiment. Eleven study participants indicated that they felt there was a general perception in society and in the streets in particular that Muslims are not to be "messed with." Participants indicated that they thought this idea started with the Nation of Islam and is still prevalent today. As Abaan put it:

> Then you have, in the past, the Muslims in Philly, the reputation that we have. Like, in the past, in the Nation of Islam if somebody was speaking against Elijah Muhammad, the people from Philly were the ones that would be at your front door trying to ask you clarify your statements. They weren't to be played with! So with them having their reputation already… Like my grandmother always told me, Muslims ain't nobody to play with, don't be fighting with no Muslim!

The reputation of the members of the NOI was well known in Abaan's community. The thought was prevalent that if someone were to "mess with" one Muslim, they'd then have to deal with other Muslims because the Muslims looked out for one another like that. The NOI preached a message of empowerment and personal responsibility that in some ways mirrored societal norms of respectability; this could be seen in the formal dress of its male members who always wore a suit and tie. They combined elements of showing strength (autonomy) and respectability to create an image of masculinity that many young men in the African American community found appealing. This same show of strength however apparently made some leery of the Nation of Islam. Key informant Imam Ameen put it this way:

> With the Nation of Islam, it's almost like I guess the democrats in Mobile Alabama and the democrats in New York City. Especially in the sixties and seventies they would have a very different perspective on things. But see in

126

Philadelphia, the Nation of Islam had a very—unfortunately there were a lot of criminal element.

Perhaps it was this reputation of the NOI that influenced perceptions among some in the wider society that African American male Muslims were dangerous. The Muslims were seen as gangsters and this negative perception long preceded any public perception of a connection between Islam and terrorism. It is possible that this perception of members of the NOI, or what were then known as Black Muslims, came to influence perceptions of orthodox Muslims today by non-Muslims as well. With the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975 and the transition of the NOI to an orthodox practice, many of these men brought this same sense of masculinity with them. This idea of masculinity undoubtedly has influenced perceptions of masculinity prevalent among many young African American male Muslims converts today who reside near the outer boundary of Islam. There are likely other influences as well. Regardless of the origins, just as the life of a "gangsta" is appealing to some, so are ideas of masculinity steeped in street culture to some near the outer boundary of the African American Muslim community.

It should be noted that three study participants mentioned that any young man from an inner city urban area could become involved in some form of illicit activity regardless of his religious affiliation. Furthermore, there are no statistics on this but considering that nationwide 85% of African American are Christian (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008) the majority of young men involved in illicit activity in the city are probably not Muslims. The distinction between street ideas of masculinity by non-Muslims and street ideas of masculinity among Muslims is that Islamic identity is an integral part of the masculine concept among Muslim males.

Inner Boundary Masculinity

As new converts progress further along their path, their concept of masculinity may change. Once participants' commitments strengthened they began to view masculinity in relationship to meeting family obligations. Participants readily told me what they believe the Qur'an states regarding a man's duty to his family to be a protector and provider. The idea of masculinity present as one's commitment strengthens is in direct contrast to that present along the outer boundary. Inside the inner boundary one sees a type of masculinity grounded in a family-based perspective, where one's masculinity is defined in relation to one's ability to meet one's religion-centered obligations. This outlook was certainly prevalent among all study participants, irrespective of their denominational affiliation.

However, when examining those belonging to the more liberal denominations, particularly those who converted in the 1980s and early 1990s, one must add another element, a sense of communal well-being. A part of the communal outlook is a desire to address negative stereotypes attributed to those in the community. This outlook contains elements of resistance in that not only does one not want himself to be marginalized or denigrated, but one wants to struggle against perceptions, and those who would offer such perceptions, of negativity aimed at one's community. Imam Saabir stated:

> I think that's a part that scares people. I think people think Muslim men are
> aggressive and assertive, and vaguely dangerous, black Muslim men, because of
> that. I think that Muslim men have a tendency not to Uncle Tom, not to shuffle,
> not to kowtow to authority in quite the same way. I don't think it's an attempt to
> be belligerent, but I think it is a consciousness process that a lot of people who
> become Muslim go through where we are more sensitive to attempts to try to
> control our thinking and behavior as a people…

128

This shows a communal perspective where one is actively engaged in thinking about resisting negative influences upon one's community. Imam Ameen further noted that one doesn't have to be Muslim to be a man, that others have also had a communal outlook:

> Marcus Garvey, there's another one. These are people who said, "I will be responsible for maintaining the condition of my community." Marcus Garvey said, when he was still a young man—he looked around—"I wonder where the black man's army is. Where is his navy? Where are his big businessmen? Where are his Carnegies? Where are his men of big affairs? I looked around and I don't see them. I will build them." That's a man. The Qur'ān takes it one step farther. I think the Qur'ān gives a tool that perhaps Garvey or some of the black nationalists, like the Panthers, didn't have. It actually gives you hierarchy of order of how to holistically meet those needs so that you're balanced.

Marcus Garvey was a black nationalist who sought to address problems in the black community by advocating a philosophy of Pan-Africanism; while he struggled against the racial injustices of his day, he thought the ultimate solution to the problems of blacks in the US was to return to African (Martin, 1976). Imam Ameen noted that the struggle that Garvey engaged in was indicative of a man and that one may be a man without Islam, but having Islam gives one balance through proper guidance that one does not get without it. At the top of that hierarchal order would be submission to Allah. Perhaps this type manhood was best exemplified by Malcolm X who served as a role model for many converts in Philadelphia. As Ossie Davis noted in his eulogy for Malcolm X, he had come to symbolize "…manhood, our living, black manhood!" (X, 1964, p. 462). One study participant, Zaafir described it like this:

> But there's a certain baseline integrity that requires you to be different if you have convictions or beliefs about what it is to be a man, especially a man who's surrendered to God's Will. You will be tested. You will be tested and challenged by the values of the dominant culture: how to treat women; what constitutes a good time; what constitutes having fun. It's on many, many levels. What's the ultimate value in life? What should you be working for? What kind of goals should you have? All these things are defined and shaped for man by the vision

129

of the Qur'ān when He descries the role of Caliph [Islamic leader]….In concentric circles your environment starts with your own household. Is your house in order? Are you taking care of meeting all your responsibilities? Then you can't be selfish. You have to think about the larger community. You have responsibilities to them. This is the Caliph. The Caliph also, in his vision, is in the whole earth. But practically we're talking about taking care of yourself, our families, our community; and taking care of them spiritually, intellectually, physically. These are some of the responsibilities of manhood. It's less abstract when you see it. One reason Malcolm was so attractive is because you could look at Malcolm and you could say, "Yeah, there is it. That's the kind of man that is Caliph."

In this description of manhood, in addition to mentioning that Malcolm X represented this ideal of manhood, Zaafir speaks about having a responsibility that extends beyond one's own individual self to the community. We also see a distinction being made between being a man and a man guided by God's will. It is this feeling of guidance by God, Allah, that distinguishes this form of manhood from wider patriarchal perceptions of manhood prevalent in the society and in the African American community. Speaking about the importance of God in one's conception of manhood, one participant had this to say:

So God made man from the dust of the earth, just like in the Genesis. He made man from the earth. He breathed into to him of His *ruh*, His Spirit; and that was enough. That was enough to make a man. A man is not just flesh and blood or the dust to the earth part, but he has a *ruh*. He has divine consciousness in him. That's why I say it [manhood] has to be rooted in God's conscience. It has to be rooted in a civilized divinely envisioned picture of what man should look like.

This representation of manhood, one where individuals are not only concerned about their own well-being and that of their families, but also of the well-being of their neighbors and fellow African Americans, was shared by all participants in liberal/moderate groups. Overall however, more recent converts have found another way

to address racism, and issues related to race, and this is in the very perspective they use to view race itself.

Race

Thirteen study participants denied the importance of race as a concept. These men do recognize that race exists and they identify as black men, yet they do not consider race to be the key marker of their identity. This position was advanced by liberal and moderate Muslims as well as fundamentalist. However, all nine fundamentalist participants advanced this perspective whereas among liberal and moderate Muslims it was only held by younger participants. It should be noted that these young participants from liberal and moderate groups still expressed communal concern for those in the African American community, though they did not appear to give race the same level of significance given to it by older Muslim men in their respective masjids. Abaan, himself a young convert from a moderate group, had this to say:

> There was a Muslim who actually said, "I'm not black, man, I'm Muslim." He basically cut himself off. Some people have that type of mindset: that race doesn't matter, that it doesn't matter that we're this or we're that and we live here. It's not about the community; it's just about us being Muslims; and we need to make everybody Muslim. That's kind of like their political ideology.

Abaan's friend's statement shows a belief that one's Islamic faith should be the key marker of identity. Abaan himself subscribed to this perspective that race should not be the central marker of one's identity, yet he differed from his friend in that he did not deny his racial identity. Zaafir put it this way:

> Then you have the Muslims, some of this new kind of African-American Muslims, who are, like, "Oh, don't bring me that black stuff. I'm only interested in… It isn't addressing black and white. The only thing that matters is whether

you're a disbeliever or a believer. Are you a *kuffa* or a *kafir*, or a disbeliever, or are you a believer? That's the only distinction I recognize."

Implicit in these comments is a comparison between older perspectives and contemporary attitudes held by these thirteen study participants. Zaafir acknowledged this position though he did not hold it himself. Young converts that had adopted this philosophy did give some Islamic reasoning to support their position. One participant, Muntasir, noted:

> The Prophet said that whoever acknowledges his nationalism, racism, sexism, is not from us. So he, the epitome of not being a part of any geographical place, race has no place in Islam. However different societies of people, be you African American, be you Jamaican, be you Arab or non-Arab, whatever, people still have that stigma and in that stigma it prevents them, it may even hamper them, or may cause them some sin, from going all the way into Islam.

Muntasir then expressed the idea that focus upon one's race or culture could be a hindrance to one's practice of Islam; not only that, he stated that it could actually be a detriment to one's spiritual well-being. Most participants from the Salafi sect expressed great admiration for Muslims from the Middle East. As one participant, Nabhan, said:

> Our scholars are their scholars. We don't ascribe to that type of separation and stuff like that. Their scholars are our scholars. We don't think that there are some feebleminded old Arab scholars where all they know how to do is teach how to say the prayers and stuff like that. No, we go to them for advice on all types of stuff. We go to them to study. When we want to study, if we want the top education in Islam, we go there.

The most common thought in regard to racial or cultural biases hindering the practice of Islam centered on problems with African Americans and their practice of the religion. However, for some, this thought existed in regard to not only African American Muslims, but also Muslims of other races and ethnicities, including Muslims from the Middle East. Talking about Muslims from the Middle East, one participant had this to say:

> Islam it came to the Arabs and they still have some prejudices within them….Meaning that I can't walk up and say I want to marry an Arab

132

woman….Yeah, they are not going to accept that. Likewise Indian Muslims, they marry their cousins before they let her be married to me....they stick to their culture, and they stick to their ideas, so I think this same type of thing has hampered [them]

So while some young African American Muslims looked to scholars from the Middle East for guidance, some also criticized cultural influences in Islam among these same Middle Easterners. These Muslims have then attempted to apply their reasoning evenly across all Muslim groups, that neither race nor culture should have any place in the practice of Islam. These participants stated that race should have no place in one's understanding of self if one is to be a Muslim, for considering racial and ethnic distinctions are against the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

As one participant indicated, it is likely that many immigrant Muslim communities, regardless of how active or inactive individuals are in their faith, maintain an Islamic identity because it no doubt gives them access to a political voice. Middle Eastern Muslims here in the US may engage in many activities which go against the teachings of Islam but never do they consider themselves "outside the faith." Islam is a very important part of their cultural identity. Key informant Imam Marwan stated:

> With their teaching of Islam they also brought their culture. They never saw the need to delink their culture from their religion. You ask any one of them, "Are you a Muslim?" "Yes." "What's your nationality?" "Oh, I'm Egyptian." "Oh, I'm Pakistani." "Oh, I'm Kashmir." They never felt for one minute that they had to give up their national identity to embrace this universal Islam, but the African American is schizophrenic about this….They don't want to embrace an African-American identity….. So all they're left with is this sort of nebulous Islamic identity that comes in with other cultural influences.

However, as previously stated, young African American converts to Islam appear to feel a need to differentiate between culture and religion. As Imam Marwan stated, race has been decoupled from culture as a marker of identity among many younger converts. In

133

part, this decoupling between race and culture is a reactionary movement away from the teaching of the Nation of Islam. Repeatedly, participants mentioned to me that the NOI did not represent true Islam. As Nabhan stated:

> …anyone that really paid close attention to the nation would see different than that. They would see other than that. The one they claimed was God was a white looking God. He looked like Adolf Hitler. He looked like Adolf Hitler, Master Farad, and they called him God. They are non-Muslims.

Salah takes us a step further and explicitly stated the need to make a conscious effort to breaking the link in peoples thinking about race and Islam. He stated:

> …if people don't make the effort to note the distinction, they will only continue to go on with their misconceptions unless they make a real effort to see that it [Islam] has nothing to do with blackness at all…Again, we believe it's from God. This is our answer. As simple as it sounds, this is an act of God.

The fervor with which young participants from liberal and moderate groups and all participants from fundamentalist groups address this topic does appear to be, as Salah stated, due to a conscious desire to delink race from their religious practice. There may be other factors also influencing this decoupling.

Islam is Cool

Muslims in Philadelphia have benefited not only from the growth of Islam in recent decades but also from the perceived growth of acceptance of certain elements of Islamic culture in the city as whole. The spread of these elements, these styles, bring with them a greater exposure to Islam in the city, which serves to reinforce the normative presence of Islam in Philadelphia. Fifteen study participants suggested that some individuals have tenuously claimed an Islamic identity because Islam has become "cool" among many young African American males. Muneer has said: "Not only that, but in

Philadelphia Islam has become symbol. It's almost like a fad, I would say, here. I think

that's why the population of Muslims is so numerous here." This sentiment was echoed

over and over again by respondents. Another respondent, Diyaa Udeen, similarly stated

"Like I said it's part of a fad now. It's in fashion. Everybody wants to be a part of

something." Abdul-Baari also commenting along these lines stated this:

> And I mean, me personally I think it's due to the fact of most African Americans come up in that single parent household so they're missing that male figure in the household. They're missing somebody to actually take them by the hand and show them what's right and wrong and be an example for them. So what you have is you have these young guys who come up in these neighborhoods and nine times out of ten you look up to the local drug dealers, or whoever this guy—9 times out of 10 it's always the dishonest role model. So I think a lot of young African Americans coming up in that type of household, they're looking to be a part of something…….you'll see different guys on the street and they may happen to be a Muslim and they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing…so it's kind of like, I don't know they look at it like wow, these cool people are Muslims. …a lot of people that a lot of these guys look up to are Muslims so that's kind of like a motivating force for them. Kind of like now you know a lot of things are just like it's all the bad things are like the coolest things to do…Because you're seeing that they've got some of these big figureheads that people look up to and people take their styles from in most cases, that's their belief, so that's cool. Just like a couple of summers ago, you had the—remember the Capri pants, the jeans? They just came out of nowhere and became the style but in actuality a Muslim man, he should wear his garment above his ankles so it was kind of like they saw like guys wearing these and it became a fad out of nowhere. Just like with the beard. You know. So I think like now is more of like the cool guys are doing it so it's kind of like bringing more people you know it's making them more interested in doing it. But the problem is that a lot of the younger guys they're not changing their behavior.

Here Abdul-Baari discussed the appeal of a masculine image that some have associated

with Islam. Abdul-Baair expressed that he believes that out of a desire to emulate those

that some non-Muslims may look up to, they adopt certain markers of styles known to be

associated with Muslim, styles of clothing and facial hair for example. He indicated that

while these men may change their outward appearance, they sometimes fail to change

their behavior and beliefs. It's cool to adopt these styles and to associate, or at least for

one to say he associates, with Muslims. So what is adopted appears to be superficial

markers of the faith, rather than the faith itself.

Four participants pointed out that some of those whom young people in

Philadelphia look up to are local Islamic rappers that have grained acceptance on the

national stage. Ali stated:

> … the rap group, "The Youngsters"…it was a Philly group and they were rappers.
> They were Muslim, too. We got a lot of Muslim rappers. You don't realize that.
> I don't know if you knew that or not….Beanie Sigel, Freeway, State Property, that
> whole group, they're all Muslim.

Imam Marwan had this to say about rappers who are Muslim:

> A brilliant mind like these hip-hop moguls, they can create a whole world of
> artistic images for people to look at, but that's not their reality. They have one
> reality they're trying to move into over here and they're selling a dream over here
> that conflicts with that. They have contradictions, they have serious
> contradictions.

The dream he referred to was the glamorization of street culture. These rappers have

added a religious veneer to the street image that they present in their music, and in the

presentation of themselves. This seems consistent with typical representations of outer

boundary masculinity and it may be this type of masculinity that is appealing to many

non-Muslims who may be from neighborhood similar to Muslims who themselves remain

near the outer boundary of their faith.

This idea of Islam influencing what it means to be cool has certainly extended to

non-Muslims. As one respondent noted:

> …because in Philadelphia, Islam is able to influence the culture so much that
> people walk around with a beard, just like me, and won't be Muslim. At one
> point Muslims cut their pants for various reasons. They cut their pants because
> it's against our tradition to have our pants leg dragging. Because people back in

those times, they used to drag their garments out of pride. So it was against our tradition to drag our garments at all. I remember Muslims cutting their pants, but it was a whole bunch of non-Muslims who would cut their pants and buy short pants just as much as we did because it became the style. So it really has influenced the culture.

From the perspective of converts who were interviewed, serious Muslims--those Muslims who are closer to the inner boundary of Islam--also get a considerable amount of respect in the city. As one participant Umar put it:

I think a lot of people know that there are Muslims on the street who do this and do that, and then there are real good Muslims. What's even stranger about that is when you're not like the Muslims in the subgroup you tend to get even more respect…by people in general within this city; just people in general, not even Muslims.

Diyaa Udeen pointed out that while the level of respect still remains, he was concerned about the direction of public perception of Muslims in the city:

We're still looked upon—we starting to lose it, though—as a righteous group. That's the only thing I'm worried about. The love or respect that I get dealing with our folks on the street is no comparison to what other people have to deal with. That's because I am a Muslim. People will curse and then they'll say, "Excuse, brother." You know what I mean? We still get that, man. It's starting to go away because of the media and what they expose about us and people in general, but we still get that level of respect, which is a great plus for us. I don't know that that will continue because of what's been spun out there.

Diyaa Udeen mentioned the benefits or the "great plus" that Muslims get due to this respect. It directly benefits each member in that they get affirmation of their identity through the respect and admiration of non-Muslims throughout the city. This outward diffusion of Islamic elements into the broader culture of Philadelphia among non-Muslims may be beneficial to all Muslims in that greater acceptance of Muslim culture, even if only physical representations of that culture, increases non-Muslims familiarity

and exposure to representations of Islam. Outward diffusion is a one way process whereby Islamic elements may gain some level of acceptance among non-Muslims.

Nonpersonalized-acceptance may have created an environment that has allowed the possibility for the diffusion of Islamic elements into the greater society. Thus, it is possible that nonpersonalized-acceptance has changed the nature of the boundary around the Islam making it more permeable.

In Figure 1 we see that the outer boundary has become permeable allowing for the outward diffusion of Islamic elements. The outer boundary however still acts as a barrier preventing an influx of external elements. This consideration of how nonpersonalized-acceptance may be functioning to decrease distance between Muslim and non-Muslim and allow for the diffusion of Islamic elements makes sense when one considers that all religions start off as sects and at some point through some process must gain wider acceptance. Christianity, the dominant religion in the US today (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008) started off as a small obscure sect in the Roman Empire (Stark, 1996). Niebuhr (1929), in his famous *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, suggested a church-sect process whereby sects that originally served the needs of the lower-class masses grew to become accepted into mainstream culture. Niebuhr's main objective was to understand the fracture of American Protestantism into many denominations and in his theory he suggested that once these sects had grown and became fully accepted into mainstream society, and thus were churches, that dissatisfied congregants seeking to return to the original teaching would break away and thus form a new sect. Nonpersonalized-acceptance gives us a lens through which to think about this process of diffusion and growth. In Philadelphia Islam seems to have grown from being

unknown, to tolerated, to being accepted in the popular culture of youth in the city (at least among the African American youth) and this portends a greater acceptance of Islam in mainstream society in the future.

Anti-Islamic

Twenty study participants reported experiencing very little anti-Islamic aggression towards them in the post-9/11 era, although they said that they had heard of some people, but very few, having problems. The one participant who reported some negative interactions right after 9/11 wears Islamic garb often and in some ways phenotypically resembles people of Middle Eastern decent. He described his feelings this way:

> That is one thing I don't like, people judge people on how they look and they
> don't want to have a conversation with you or to get to know you. They just say
> 'Oh you look like an Arab, a Pakistani; we can't do anything for you without
> getting to know your character.'

This participant went on to say that negative interactions were only occasional, and mostly right after 9/11, and that he doesn't think he experiences any ongoing negative interaction based on his Islamic appearance. One participant described his thoughts about society's focus on Islam as having shifted to those of Middle Eastern descent.

> The funny thing is the public image and face of Islam has completely gone to the
> immigrant Muslims now if you look at the media. Black Americans who have
> been good Muslims and good Americans for years don't exist anymore. Now the
> entire attention is focused on the immigrant community.

As far as media attention is concerned, study participants felt that Middle Eastern Muslims were the ones who have come to occupy the spotlight, not African Americans. Masoud summed up the sentiments expressed by the twenty study participants this way:

Because I think that this society has a phobia of Muslims. As African American Muslims, we didn't have that problem after 9/11. White America didn't come down here around the corner and bother our mosques…It was the Pakistanis, the Indians who had the problems up in the suburbs, but we dealt with racism, my family, family ancestors and yours, we dealt with racism. That is in our DNA, they don't bother us *per se* when it comes to like after 9/11 oh you are a terrorist. I don't believe that in the African American community they see me an African American that was born in the hood with them as terrorist; but I believe they [White Americans] see some African American Muslim men as a threat and as [a] drug dealer or as a gun slinger, but not as a terrorist.

Masoud noted that this society still has a phobia of Muslims, as of late largely supported by a public discourse on terrorism. These twenty participants expressed that they felt African Americans have not been viewed by those in the general society as possible terrorist but are still seen as dangerous by some.

Muslims in this study expressed that they felt that society viewed them first and foremost as black men, regardless of their own self-definitions. Masoud further elaborated:

No I tell everyone, when Chuck the police officer pulls you over, you are going to be black first, not because you are a Muslim. If you and I are driving along at night coming from Staples or Pathmark, even though I have this little goatee, they will pull us over because we are Black.

In regard to how society views African American male Muslims, Faud had this to say:

The first challenge, realistically we still have a lot of people in America who are racist towards African Americans, and you have that obstacle, it's not really a major, major obstacle like it might have been for my grandparents and stuff like, that but you still run into racism as being an African American, and on top of that if you display an identity of a Muslim or you let people know that you're a Muslim on top of you being African American you are running into some scenarios where a person will treat you in a disrespectful manner. For myself, certain stores I can go in dressed like this and I may not have a problem, they'll be extra friendly with me and I may come in with my thobe on and it will be a different type of treatment by the same person and then you can go to certain stores and you notice that people that are Caucasian get better treatment than somebody who's African American. It's a reality. Some guys they look at it as two obstacles that you're going to run into in life where number one you're

140

African American, and you're a Muslim. You've got two types of discriminations that will come your way and it's true. But at the same time it shouldn't stop you from going and seeking out opportunities and it shouldn't cause you to act ignorant or in a negative manner if somebody treats you differently due to being an African American or being a Muslim or a combination of both.

Here Faud noted the order in which one is perceived by the greater society and the order in which he thought those identities would subject one to discriminatory behavior. Five study participants viewed themselves as double minorities with race being the primary marker through which they believed the greater society viewed them and their Islamic identity as secondary. Abaan had this to say:

You're persecuted for whether you're black or whether you're Muslim. It really doesn't make a difference. You'll be persecuted. When 9/11 happened it just gave you another thing to worry about. First you thought you might not get the job because you were black; now you might not get the job because you're black and you're Muslim. Or you might be pulled over because you're black or you might be pulled over and arrested because you're black and you're Muslim. Or you might be detained because you're Muslim or you might be not allowed to fly on a certain plane because you're a Muslim. If you had any type of paranoia before, you just have a little bit more paranoia now after September eleventh.

As Abaan noted above, in the past if one perceived that they had been discriminated against, it could have been due to race and/or religion. Today, the environment in which Muslims find themselves has helped to further a sense of paranoia on the part of some.

Summary

In this summary of findings, I present information in line with the original research questions asked of this study. Conversion to Islam did not reportedly negatively impact relationships with the family of origin. Participants largely came from non-religious to nominally religious families. The few participants that did come from fairly religious backgrounds did not experience severely negative reactions to their religious

141

conversion from family members. Some participants' families reacted positively to the conversion as they hoped it would give their sons the structure needed to give their life a positive direction. The one problematic area in which multiple respondents indicated some issues was regarding the celebration of popular holidays which Muslims do not celebrate. Adjustments were made and largely interactions with extended family members also remained positive.

Most converts were single at the time of their conversion, and thus this study was not able to provide insight into how the conversion process might have proved either disruptive or beneficial to existing marriages. The study did show that among those who remained single, conversion and intensification of one's faith did lead to changes in the orientation of one's attitudes and behaviors towards seeking a marriage partner. Those who married tried to incorporate Islam into their family lives. As one became more invested in one's religion, one increasingly guided one's behavior according to the dictates of the religion. Overall the impact of conversion on relationships in one's family was positive to neutral.

The impact on relationships with those in the broader African American community was also reported to be undisturbed by participants' conversion to Islam. Converts not only came from nominally to non-religious families, they expressed little to indicate that their neighborhoods were particularly tight-knit religious communities. Their neighbors then had little reaction. No respondents reported tensions with members of the broader African American community in general.

Friendships were another area where there were some disruptions to pre-conversion interactions. Converting to Islam did not seem to be the cause of any great

discord between friends, but rather the converts themselves largely decided to withdraw from former social connections. This seems to be the case regardless of the converts' denominational affiliation or social class.

Perhaps the greatest reported impact of conversion on employment was for middle-class converts. While there are undoubtedly many middle-class Muslims in Philadelphia, participants indicated most recent converts to Islam are not. Among those few that are, the greatest change was in how they regulated their interaction in their places of employment. Participants were careful to separate their personal religious life from their work environments. They would discuss their religion if it came up in a suitable environment in the work space but they largely stayed away from such discussions. If they chose not to eat certain foods or do certain things with colleagues they would simply let their colleagues know that they don't do that (e.g., eat pork or drink alcohol) without going into an explanation. These few respondents were somewhat leery of potential negative ramifications of highlighting their religion in their work environment due to concerns that others might react negatively to a faith they don't understand. Working-class participants did not indicate any negative reactions in their work environments. In fact, they suggested that the environments in which they were working were neutral to supportive of their religious obligations, and even the expression of their religious faith through personal appearance.

Converts spoke abut feeling that their sense of manhood was enhanced by Islam in a couple of ways. For some that did not deeply investigate or invest in their faith, as well as those with working-class backgrounds and a history of involvement in "hustling," Islam provided a way to enhance their masculine perceptions of self through the lens of

143

the Muslim male as a "tough guy" not to be "messed with." For those considerably more

invested in their faith, masculinity was guided by the teachings of the faith, with this

largely centered on being a provider for their families and strong heads of their

households. An interesting factor influencing self-perceptions of masculinity centered on

race. Some participants thought race should be excluded from one's sense of identity

overall and that religion should then be the primary marker of identity. Those in this

group did not express any connection between race and masculinity. For other

participants race was front and center in that part of being a man meant being concerned

about those in one's broader community (i.e., other African Americans).

Participants noted that, regardless of their own self-perceptions, society viewed

them as black men first and Muslims second. They overall thought they were much more

likely to experience discrimination from their race rather than their religion, though they

noted that their religious identification did add another dimension by which one could be

discriminated against. Participants noted that they felt that most of the negative

ramifications for discrimination in the post-9/11 environment were centered on Muslims

from the Middle East. Participants felt that they were much more likely to be

discriminated against from misperceptions of black Muslims being "dangerous" tied to

the legacy of the Nation of Islam and recent media descriptions of crimes committed by

African American Muslim men than due to any connection to terrorism. In the next

chapter I will discuss these findings further in regards to their theoretical and social

implications.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of post-conversion experiences of African

American men who had converted to Sunni Islam; emphasis was placed on exploring the

implications of conversion in the arenas of family life, neighborhood environments, the

broader African American community, places of employment, on their perceptions of

themselves as men, and on perceived racism or anti-Islamic encounters. In response to

data gathered using this approach, a model was devised that allowed for an understanding

of the nature of post-conversion in relation to converts' degree of religious investment.

This discussion will begin by exploring the ways in which the model presented in this

study builds upon previous theoretical work in the field.

Religious Economic Theory

An economic perspective has been used to examine religious phenomena since

Adam Smith published his now iconic *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 (Iannaccone,

1998). The fundamental aspects of an economic approach entail considerations of

rational choice, stable preferences, and market equilibrium (Becker, 1976). Perhaps most

prominent among contemporary approaches by scholars using an economic framework to

study religion is that advocated by Rodney Stark (Stark, 1980, 1998; Stark & Bainbridge,

1979; Stark & Finke, 2000; Stark & Iannaccone, 1993; Stark, Iannaccone, Finke, 1996;

Stark & McCann, 1993).

Religious economic theory considers different organizations (be they religions, denominations, or congregations) and the individuals within these groups and units for analysis. While religious economic theory is broadly discussed in regard to firms competing in a religious market place for clients, it should be understood that this perspective is built upon micro-sociological foundations (Stark & Finke, 2000). The foundational principle of this micro-sociological perspective lies in how individual make choices in the religious market place; it is a rational choice perspective in that individuals make decisions by weighing perceived cost against perceived benefits. It should be understood that rational choice is not based upon individual members consciously evaluating cost and benefits to arrive at a decision, but rather that religious behavior is rational when viewed though a cost-benefit framework. As Stark and Finke (2000) explained:

> In saying this, we do not suppose that religious behavior is the rational choice for every actor-which is why irreligiousness or at least religious indifference is rather common-nor do we propose that just any religious behavior justifies its costs. What we are saying is that religious behavior-to the degree that it occurs-is generally based on cost/benefit calculations and is therefore rational behavior in precisely the same sense that other human behavior is rational. (p. 56)

The costs that individuals pay to join any religious group are central to this framework. I In Iannaccone's (1994) examination of strict churches he provides a definition of strictness based on cost. Iannaccone cites a scale used on a survey used to rate denominations as "an excellent operational definition of strictness and cost" (p. 1190). It ask:

> Does the denomination emphasize maintaining a separate and distinctive life style or morality in personal and family life, in such areas as dress, diet, drinking,

146

entertainment, uses of time, marriage, sex, child rearing, and the like? Or does it affirm the current American mainline life styles in these respects? (Iannaccone, 1994, p. 1190)

Cost are then associated with things that most people in mainstream American life would likely seek to avoid; Iannaccone notes that these behaviors and requirements "deviate from "normal" behavior" (p. 1182). Iannaccone (1994) goes on to describe a number of restrictions and requirements of various religions as examples of the strict requirements for participating in some religions. He states:

> Mormons abstain from caffeine and alcohol, Seventh Day Adventists avoid eating meat, Krishnas shave their heads, wear robes, and chant in public, Moonies submit to arranged marriages, Jehovah's Witnesses refuel transfusions, orthodox Jews wear side curls and yarmulkes, conduct no business on the Sabbath, and observe numerous dietary restrictions, and monks take vows of celibacy, poverty, and silence (p. 1182).

In the model presented in the present study, one need not look at the motivations for individuals' behavior (cost and benefit in decision making); however, this model does consider the cost aspect of affiliations and its impact on community connections outside the Islamic community. This cost is considered both from the perspective of adhering to the specific requirement of the religion and in abstaining from the proscriptions of the religion. In the present model, this cost is a part of the thick boundary of Islam.

Stark and Finke (2000) make two statements implicitly related to boundaries. They first note that "All religious groups can be located along an axis of tension between the group and its sociocultural environment" (p. 143). They then state that "Tension refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the "outside" world" (p. 143). Stark and Finke (2000) define tension not only as distinctiveness and separation, but also as antagonism. It stands to reason that if a

147

group can exist in a state of tension with its environment there must be a boundary across which it can feel tension. This distinctiveness and separation is maintained by a boundary and feelings of antagonism exist across a boundary. Stark and Finke (2000) state that:

> Tension is equivalent to subcultual deviance…_[and that] To the degree that a religious organization sustains norms and values different from those of the surrounding culture, it is deviant. To the degree that a subculture is deviant, the more it will influence all aspects of the lives of its adherents. (p. 144)

In some ways, this present study's findings are in line with Stark and Finke (2000) in that as participants become increasingly more invested in their religion, they are--in their progression of increasing commitment towards the center of the inner sphere, the location of a total convert--they are essentially progressing to a state of greater "deviance," here considering deviance to be distinctiveness from mainstreams religious norms of a particular society. In line with Stark and Finke's (2000) proposition, as participants moved towards becoming a total convert, they reported that their lives were becoming more oriented by the teachings of their new faith. In this study's findings perhaps this was best exemplified by participants' efforts to organize their lives in the area of marriage and adhering to religious-based gender roles in the family. Participants reported that they refrained from dating, as is commonly though of, and sought a marriage partner either through their local masjid or through Muslim friends that were able to make an introduction. For those married, participants reported that men were responsible for providing for the sustenance of the family while women were responsible for childrearing and the maintenance of the house. While these gender roles in marriage may seem

normal to many readers, participants reported that within this context each participant has obligations to fulfill and that these duties were not in a hierarchy of superiority or inferiority, but in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

In the context of their discussion on religious economic theory, Stark and Finke (2000) did not explicitly consider cost in the evaluation of this distinctiveness. In the present study's model, cost is a part of the thick boundary that converts must cross to become committed members. The converts' assuming of these costs impacts their relationships with those outside the Muslim community as costs are described as such precisely because they deviate from "normal" modes of behavior and lifestyle. The consideration of cost then, in the progression towards become a committed member, enables one to begin to understand how the assumption of these religious requirements impacts one's post-conversion life, not only in the sense of physically assuming these responsibilities but in the potential ramifications of doing so in considering non-Muslim interactions. Distancing, as presented here in this study, is a one way to understand change in relationships between converts and non-Muslims. While a part of distancing involves the social distance at which converts perceive non-Muslims to hold them, perhaps more relevant here are the actions of the part of converts themselves to disassociate from pre-conversion social ties. This study's findings showed that among participants with white collar jobs distancing occurred in the work environment. To an even greater extent, among study participants from all groupings, distancing occurred in that many disassociated from pre-conversion social ties. The inclusion of these elements then enables one to use the religious economic framework presented by Stark and Finke (2000) to examine post-conversion changes in relationships for converts.

Additionally, it should be noted that in the model presented in this study, as converts begin to move towards becoming a total convert, they are becoming increasingly more invested in their faith, thus the cost of leaving their faith increases with their investment as leaving the faith means forfeiting that investment. This is congruent with the cost/benefit framework of religious economic theory as exemplified by the work of Iannaccone (1994).

Nonpersonalized-acceptance

Philadelphia has a unique history of Islam, relative to other US cities, in that orthodox Islamic groups have been prominent in the city for over half a century. Particularly in the African American community, but for the city as a whole, this presence has lead to what I call *nonpersonalized-acceptance*. This type of acceptance means the physical presence of Islam appears to have become normative. For some, personal contact with Muslims--on the part of family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers--has led to the general acceptance of Muslims in one's physical space. For others that have had no personal contacts whatsoever, the mere pervasiveness of members of the faith in the city landscape has lead to a type of inoculation against extreme reactions to Muslims. From either perspective, the physical presence of Muslims in Philadelphia has become a normative part of the cityscape to the extent that chance encounters with Muslims do not generally elicit strong reactions. This nonpersonalized-acceptance in combination with converts' largely emerging from non-religious to nominally religious neighborhoods has muted negative reactions to conversion on the part of family, friends, and neighbors. In fact, many coverts reported that their families actually had a positive

reaction to their sons' conversion in that they hoped it would provide structure and

discipline where they felt it had previously been lacking. As Starke and Finke (2000)

state:

> H. Richard Niebuhr wrote *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* in order to
> explain the "evils of denominationalism" (1929, 21). In recognizing the existence
> of a cyclical process by which sects are born, transformed, and born again, he
> made a most important (if grudging and often vituperative) contribution to social
> theory. Here we have attempted to take Niebuhr's parsimonious little model and
> embed it in a larger system wherein many additional processes and relationships
> can be seen and explained. Our expanded model reveals the "why" of many
> things we already knew as facts,… (p. 217)

Niebuhr (1929) argued that sects appeal and attract mostly lower class individuals. As

sects grow, they begin to attract a greater proportion of middle class members and the

nature of these groups change not only in their membership composition but in their style

of religious services as well. This change in the structure of the group causes

dissatisfaction on the part of the sect's original lower class members who eventually

defect to establish a new group with principles they believe in keeping with those of the

original sect.

Just as Starke and Finke (2000) suggest their theoretical perspectives enhance

Niebuhr's model and provides answers to the "whys" of the church-sect process, the

model I have presented in this study may enhance our understanding of "how" this

process occurs. Nonpersonalized-acceptance may be the catalyst for the growth in

acceptance of sects as they move towards mainstream acceptance, a crucial part of the

church-sect process. In the model, nonpersonalized-acceptance may cause an increase in

the degree of permeability of the boundary surrounding the religious group allowing for

the gradual diffusion of elements out from the religious group into the greater

community. With this greater acceptance of elements attached to the religion, the religious group may start to lose its distinctiveness and thus gain broader acceptance from mainstream individuals. Over time this could move the groups towards more mainstream positions thus encouraging a schism to occur.

As previously mentioned, Iannaccone (1994) discussed the benefits of belonging to a strict sect, there is no doubt that those benefits would be lost if sect membership were abandoned. However, the environment created by *nonpersonalized-acceptance* is likely to diminish negative ramifications from those in former social networks should any convert choose to leave Islam at any point in time.

Masculinity and Race

Self-perception of the converts themselves as men also changed as they traversed the Islamic boundary. Many young converts close to the outer boundary of Islam, particularly those associated with fundamentalist groups, had a conception of masculinity grounded in a "street" perception.   A connection between Islam in the African American community and respect in the streets may date back to the Nation of Islam. Participants reported that the Nation of Islam was known to be an organization not to be messed with. Participants reported that some non-Muslims view Muslim males as dangerous. It may be that non-Muslims may have a nebulous idea of members of the Nation of Islam as dangerous, based upon perceived criminal activities of a segment of its members (Gardell, 1996). This portrayal of the Nation of Islam then was in line with popular ideas surrounding masculinity in general such as autonomy, aggressiveness, and strength.

When the Nation of Islam transitioned to an orthodox practice in 1975 after the death of Elijah Muhammad (Marsh, 1996), the members did not transition as empty slates, rather they brought with them many preexisting ideas, including their conceptualizations of masculinity. Additionally, in contemporary times this image has likely been compounded by recent associations between Islam and terrorism. In interviews with members of the orthodox Sunni community in Philadelphia today, participants readily spoke about the incongruence between the teachings of Islam and terrorism. Despite these disavowals and the abandonment of Nation of Islam teachings by those now in the Philadelphia Sunni community, perceptions of Muslims as "tough guys" not to be messed with still appear to hold strong sway among Muslims near the outer boundary of Islam. This sort of street image of masculinity thus continues to be prevalent.

Black men have been labeled as an "other," historically by white men at the top of the US power structure. The origin of this categorization can be found in past efforts to dehumanize black men so that they could be used as inputs in a capitalist system based on slave labor. This dehumanization was a critical part of the legitimization of the US capitalistic system (Wilson, 1996). Black liberation struggles from that time onward have been about reclaiming, or rather affirming, ones' full humanity.

This idea of hyper-masculinity is not new. It fact, it is not only based upon normative patriarchal values present in the US; it is an extension of them (Ward, 2005). There can be little doubt that the same social forces that have circumscribed many black men, and black people in general, to lives in segregated areas with limited opportunities to lead a decent life, have operated to constrain the types of masculinity that black men

153

have been able to ascribe to from the antebellum period until today. Aggressive behavior has been seen as a sign of manhood, and among a population of men historically dehumanized and deprived of the power to define themselves, displaying aggression has been one of the few select pathways through which black men have been able to attempt to assert some control over their lives in a relatively unobstructed fashion.

Although it is important to understand the variety of structural barriers that exist which prevent many youth from inner city neighborhoods from realizing the type of economic achievements that most deem the markers of success, a detailed discussion of these structural barriers will be excluded from the present discussion. This in no way should be thought of as an indication of minimizing the significance of these structural barriers to the overall life chances of inner city youth. That aside, for many urban males from economically marginalized neighborhoods, a life of hustling on the streets appears to offer access to that American dream, of money and power.

Where disenfranchised black men could not reach this dream through legal means, the streets have been seen as a viable option, and its seduction lies in its promise of big money and through a means that is both accessible and that has been glamorized in a variety of forms in the popular media. A variety of representations have historically been used which have reinforced negative stereotypical views of black men: ranging from unintelligent brute and threat to the chastity of white women, to sinister street hustler and all-around lowlife (Clark, 2002). Characterizations have portrayed black men as followers and not leaders; and as men requiring the care of white patriarchy. Current representations of black men largely still reinforce these negative stereotypes (Harper,

154

1996). Additionally, even the so-called images of success that black men are exposed to as possible models are mired in negativity and destructive behaviors.

In the present era, "gangstas" (such as real life figures Al Capone and John Gotti, and fictional characters in movies such as *Scarface*, *The Godfather*, and *New Jack City*) have been glamorized, and young men from across the country have admired the images of masculinity represented in these personalities and movies (Spears, 1999). Young white men, particularly those from middle class and upper middle class backgrounds, have had access to legitimate avenues through which to strive for their success while poor African American men from urban areas often have not. The "gangsta" pathway then became a viable one through which individuals sought to achieve success; these images of masculinity became something to emulate and something thought to be viewed as worthy by the greater society. As Hooks (2004) noted, through the continuously reinforced images of black masculinity present in media, black men are primed to "find their manhood in the streets." Seeking your manhood in the streets is in part about seeking to affirm your value, by striving for success through one of few means thought to be accessible. In essence then, it is a struggle to affirm one's worth as a human being.

Those closer to or within the inner boundary of Islam hold a view of masculinity that can be thought of as a benevolent patriarch. They largely define themselves as men by their ability to care for their families. Being a strong head of household then is synonymous with being a man. Additionally, those belonging to more moderate and liberal groups among this segment of men considered masculinity to also entail a communal perspective. These men extend their conceptions of masculinity to beyond their ability to provide for their families and consider it mandatory that one consider the

155

well-being of one's broader community, be that neighborhood or the larger African American community.

Tied to both of the aforementioned conceptions of masculinity are considerations of race. Among all fundamentalist participants and among most young participants, irrespective of affiliation, there was a conscious effort to define identity in absence of any racial considerations. Those participants who adopted this position considered their primary identity to be that of a Muslim and not as an African American. These men acknowledged a racial identity but subsumed it to their religious identity. Participants indicated that they were bringing their identity in line with the teachings of Islam, in which race has no place; participants indicated that all men are considered equal *ummah* (community) of Islam.

Another possible explanation for these young converts' desire to exclude race as a central figure in their identity is that they simply do not feel that they are in any way benefited by continuing to identity with a category that has thus far brought them little benefit. In recreating themselves in race-neutral terms they get to create a sense of self that the larger society has denied them. Unlike African American Christians, for whom race is an important marker of community membership--not only in one's religious community but in one's neighborhood as well (Ellison & Sherkat, 1995a)--most study participants that conceptualized identity in race neutral terms indicated that they were not particularly well integrated in their neighborhoods of origin when they were younger as they tended to move around a lot. A number of these participants indicated that around the time of their conversion they were involved in illicit activities and were seldom home and had little contact with their neighbors. It appears that these individuals had little

vested interest in maintaining a system of status quo and it stands to reason that they thus

had little to lose by abandoning its markers. Participants indicated that accepting Islam

brought them a sense of brotherhood and respect. The disavowal of race then may have

served to allow for the creation of a valuable sense of self devoid of the negative

stereotypes associated with black men. This is a culturally interesting phenomenon to

consider in that, as previously mentioned, many Muslims from Middle Eastern countries

reportedly do not try to isolate race/culture from their Islamic identities. From either this

perspective, or from the purely religious reasons given by converts, this decoupling

allows for a recreation of self that fosters feelings of wholeness through the devaluation

of that which they may feel society has taught them to be of little value, their racial

identity. This decoupling of race then becomes part of a uniquely Islamic masculine

identity among participants in this study and maybe among African American male

converts in Philadelphia in general.

Social Work Implications

The implications of this study's findings relevant for social workers is first and

foremost about understanding the types of environments from which many young African

American converts in Philadelphia have emerged. All converts have a background which

influences their orientation towards life. Converts bring this orientation, to a greater or

lesser extent, with them into Islam. The challenge for social workers and those interested

in social work practice then is to consider the ways in which converts coming under the

157

rubric of Islam are affected regarding their social and personal outlook and in understanding the implications of that dynamic for social work practice.

A variety of scholars have noted the long-standing tradition in social worker to value teaching students about cultural sensitivity and awareness. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) both advocate the inclusion of training in cultural competence and such inclusion is mandatory for CSWE accreditation (Teasley, 2005). Among the variety of topics discussed under the umbrella of cultural competence, race is given additional emphasis due to dynamics that have emerged in US society as a result of its long history of racism towards a variety of populations. This emphasis on understanding racial differences appears to have been at least somewhat successful. Colvin-Burque, Davis-Maye, and Zugazaga (2007) noted that at one university where undergraduate social work students took an interdisciplinary minority groups course, statistically significant changes in racial attitudes, awareness of racial privilege, and blatant racial issues occurred. The authors further asserted that "Assisting students in applying the often abstract concepts of cultural and racial competence in an academic setting that requires accountability and measurement of achievement continues to challenge social work educators" (p. 233). Similarly, Phan, Woods, Vugia, Chus, Wright, and Jones (2009) noted the difficulty in translating and integrating this abstract concept into the training of social workers, noting that "Despite directions by the Council on Social Work Education to include content on racism and oppression in social work curricula, translating this into meaningful learning is complicated" (p. 325). Colvin-Burque and colleagues further asserted, "Although the mandates issued by CSWE and NASW are clear, little practical information exists to

158

assist social work educators to facilitate their students' development of cultural competence" (p. 224).

It appears that while cultural competence is highly valued among social work programs and some efforts have been made to include awareness of cultural differences, race and ethnicity being the most discussed concept (NASW Standards, 2001), teaching future social workers how to truly develop and integrate this type of competency into their professional practice remains incomplete.

Certainly an important point to consider for social workers' knowledge base for interacting with male Muslim clients (and a diversity of clients in general) is the training received by social workers. Schools of social work emphasize, to varying degrees, striving for development of cultural competence among social workers. This approach aims to increase the capacity of social workers to interact with a variety of diverse populations. This study's finding of the importance of religion as a central construct for orienting behavior highlights the strong need for consideration of religious cultural dynamics in social work settings. NASW (2001) has mentioned the importance of considering spiritual beliefs for developing cultural competence but it appears that to an even greater extent than the complexities of dealing with race/ethnicity that social work training has failed to adequately consider issues of religious difference. Dziegielewski (2001) had this to say:

> In terms of training professionals, in a recent study of 500 professional counselors the majority perceived themselves to be culturally competent yet they also reported that they found their multicultural training to be less than adequate (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). In a similar study with social workers, A. Kaplan and Dziegielewski (1999) examined attitudes of MSW students that directly addressed issues of spirituality and religion and the degree to which these

159

attitudes were incorporated into social work practice. In this survey, most graduate students stated that they valued the role of spirituality and religion in their personal and professional lives. These social workers, however, similar to the professional counselors, reported the lack of adequate training and preparation during graduate education to deal with issues such as culture supported by identification with spiritual or religious ties. (p. 39)

To truly achieve the goal of being a culturally competent social worker, a more in-depth consideration is needed. Practitioners need to be aware of the specific beliefs and practices of their clients in their respective contexts. In general then, social work needs to do a better job of preparing its practitioners to be culturally competent practitioners and, as this study highlights, a good place to begin would be consideration of the implications for religious differences. To date little efforts has been made to develop culturally competent services for Muslims in general, irrespective of race (Hodge & Nadir, 2008). I am suggesting that this is needed not only for competence with Muslims, but some understanding of religious difference implications is needed for at least the other major world religions as well, particularly when social workers will be working in urban settings with a variety of populations with a diversity of religious beliefs.

Regarding Islam broadly, and Islam as practiced among African American male Muslims in particular, consideration of basic factors should be emphasized. Irrespective of the wide range of in-group behavior among male Muslim converts discussed in this study, key elements (such as their view of non-Muslims in general, and in particular as parts of a system they often reject; and how they might feel about therapeutic approaches that do not directly take into consideration the teachings of Islam) transcend converts' location along the conversion spectrum and having some understanding of these factors would be an excellent place for starting to develop an orientation of cultural competence

with this population. The aforementioned dynamics created by converts' adherence to their belief system should be understood by social workers and this understanding should be imparted in their training, be it in their initial training as social workers or in continuing education once they have been placed in a site with a large Muslim population. At a minimum, this sort of training should occur in such field sites as NASW (2001) has recognized that "cultural competence is never fully recognized, achieved, or completed, but rather cultural competence is a lifelong process for social workers" (p. 11). Yes, social workers should of course be respectful of Islamic beliefs, but just as important and perhaps even more so, is how those beliefs operationalize themselves in altering dynamics between provider and client.

Training in cultural competence, when provided, has tended to emphasize the importance of an awareness of differences among a diversity of populations. Awareness of differences, and knowing the ways in which one may be different from clients, is not enough. As discussed, there are benefits to having this knowledge. However, additional benefits can be derived when social workers not only use this information to understand a member of a population but can also be a vital part of opening up the lines of communication between provider and client given that the social worker demonstrates to the client that he or she has said knowledge.

In addition to the reasons previously mentioned, it is important that this information is included in social work training as a means of provoking social workers to engage in ongoing reflexive processes about their own role in the service delivery process. The dynamics uncovered in this the study have highlighted the importance for social workers to really think about how differences impact dynamics and how those

161

dynamics could impact the social workers ability to be a productive provider of service. The reflexive process would of course necessitate that the social worker make adjustments in his or her approach when needed. This reflexivity has been acknowledged as an important trait for achieving cultural competence (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2004).

While the training of social workers to understand cultural implications for working with male Muslims is important, it is also important to increase outreach for inclusion of male Muslims to themselves be trained as service providers. Currently, most social workers are not minorities. Many social workers in urban areas serve minority clients, a sizeable portion of whom are African American. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of African American male social workers (Hodge & Nadir, 2008). Irrespective of religious affiliation, African American male social workers are underrepresented. Suffice it to say for now, it is important that this population be included as service providers. Additionally, the lack of African American male service providers is compounded when one thinks of the complexities that arise when thinking of service to male Muslims. African American male Muslim social workers would then likely greatly improve the provision of service to this population. This study's findings regarding the feelings of male Muslims towards those who are not Muslim, the additional problems created by perspectives on gender dynamics, in conjunction with the problems that they feel arise with those who are part of the system versus being in the *ummah* (community) of Islam all point to the need to train male Muslim social workers to service this population; while it is not necessary that all social workers have characteristics that match those of their clients, these study findings suggest that effective outreach to male Muslims may require similar service providers. The increasing prevalence of this population among young

162

African American youth in the city of Philadelphia in general also points to the increasing

importance of providing adequate social services to this population, and to that end,

efforts should be made for the inclusion of male Muslims in service provision training.

Limitations and Future Research

Like all studies, this one too had its limitations. The inclusion criteria for this

study ensured that participants attended their respective masjids on a regular basis. This

means that all participants were active Muslims. Study respondents reflected upon their

own journeys in Islam in the course of which they discussed the thoughts they had and

behaviors they engaged in earlier in their Islamic journey. The understandings presented

in this study of individuals near the outer boundary of Islam then are given by those now

thought to be removed from that location. Additional data collected from interviews with

imams was also used to contextualize primary data. Imams are individuals considerably

more invested in their faith than many other adherents. While I am confident that study

participants accurately represented the states of those at various points of transition in

their faith through their own histories and stories, the possibility remains that additional

insight not included in this study's findings would emerge if data were collected directly

from those currently near the outer boundary of their faith. Therefore, I recommend that

future studies focus on new converts. Additionally, it should be acknowledged is that the

size of the sample used in this study may not adequately capture the breadth of attitudes

on post-conversion experiences of other African American male converts to Islam in

Philadelphia. Additionally, studies should be done that track these converts over time.

This will help to enable researchers to better understand changes in the converts' lives over time and will help eliminate bias in participants' responses due to selective memory.

Like all studies that reply on interviews, the possibility remains that participants' words may differ from their actions. Ethnographic research is needed among this population to help eliminate such a discrepancy. Such ethnographic studies should involve field work in a variety of settings in Muslim communities outside of masjids. These ethnographies would also provide a level of insight and a rich description of participants' everyday lives not possible with interviews.

Additionally, a point that repeatedly came up in interviews suggested some tension between African American Muslims who largely reside in the city and immigrant Muslims from the Middle East that largely reside in the suburbs. A further exploration of this tension could yield additional insight into understanding the post-conversion experiences of African American Muslims as this tension to a certain extend has to impact the dynamics of the broader Muslim community in which African American Muslims reside. Further, this raises important questions about the role of culture in the practice of faith and how different populations in Philadelphia articulate different understandings of culture, be it racially or religiously based, and how these understandings impact the ability of these groups to relate to one another, effect positive change in their communities, and engage with non-Muslims in the broader society.

Also, it should be remembered that while African American males make up the largest group of indigenous converts to Islam in the US, there is also a considerable proportion of African American Muslims that is second generation and beyond. In Philadelphia, several masjids are dominated by these multi-generational Muslims. These

African American men have lived experiences that are likely to be in some ways similar to, and yet in other ways uniquely different from, African American converts. A more complete understanding of the Muslim community in Philadelphia would be generated by a study that included this population.

This study did not include female African American Muslims. Female Muslims are a large part of the Philadelphia Muslim community. When one asks any non-Muslim individual living in Philadelphia to think of an image of a person representing Islam, a likely image will be that of a woman in a *hijab*. These women have unique challenges in their family lives, social lives, in the realm of work, and in their integration into the Philadelphia Muslim community. Without a complementary exploration of this community, one cannot truly have a comprehensive view of the dynamics in the Philadelphia Muslim community. Additionally, a proper understanding of this population would allow for a more complete understanding of male Muslims, as female Muslims likely have a unique perspective and could give additional insights not gleaned from talking with men.

As previously mentioned, being a male researcher has likely benefited my ability to conduct this study, yet it also has limited the insights gained from this study in some ways. Thus, doing similar studies together with female researchers could provide new understandings. Similar studies should be done, not only with female researchers, but in different cities. Philadelphia has a unique history concerning Islam and the dynamics in other cities with large Muslim populations would also likely yield new findings.

Building upon this study, one area that deserves further consideration is the connection between African American male Muslims and their children. Participants in

165

this study mentioned their children but their conversations about these relationships were fairly limited. I do not think that is indicative of a lack of interaction but rather a result of the focus of this particular study. A more in-depth consideration of these relationships would likely yield additional insights.

Also, this study found that nonpersonalized-acceptance plays a role in affecting the permeability of the boundaries of Islam in Philadelphia. While one could certainly imagine that this would impact the ability of apostates to reintegrate themselves in their former communities, the degree to which this might happen is unknown. The voices of those who have left Islam are not present in this study. Future study of this population would provide further information on the role of nonpersonalized-acceptance and its impact on boundaries and would likely yield additional insight into the Philadelphia Muslim community through the unique perspectives of its apostates.

Additionally, this study found that relationships with friends do tend to change post-conversion. Of converts' own volition many choose to disassociate from pre-conversion social relationships. As individuals become more invested in their faith they internalize the teachings of their adopted religion and allow it to serve as a guide to managing the everyday occurrences of their lives. The sense of "we" associated with their religious organization increases and this element of community life becomes more prominent. Though it was beyond the scope of this study, this "sense of community" the "we" feeling that individuals have for what this study considered the respective domains of community life are important for various life outcomes. This study addressed how conversion changed converts sense of community meaning how it impacted relationships with others in the respective arenas of their lives. A logical next step, now that we have

some understanding of how conversion impacts one's sense of community, is to explore

further implications for these changes in perception of connections in these respective

areas. The sense of "we" which was the marker of community used in this study has

been shown to be "strongly associated with lower levels of mental, social, and health

disorders" (Hyde & Chavis, 2007, p. 179). The question then becomes how does change

post-conversion impact overall well-being. This is an important question to understand

not only in that it impacts individual well-being, but collective well-being as well.

Having a sense of areas in which there are deficiencies in the affective elements

associated with individual well-being is instructive in that social workers and others

concerned about individual and community well-being can begin to address these

deficiencies perhaps using group based strategies in ways which both seek to develop

strategies for improving outcomes where there are individual deficiencies and in

strengthening already strong social bonds in ways which act to increase their ability to

further serve as a buffer against deficiencies elsewhere. Considering the relative increase

in religious integration and intensification that occurs as one traverses the boundary of his

faith and the increased importance of corresponding religious social connections, group

based strategies could be a good starting place for addressing deficiencies in affective

elements associated with community among this population. Overall, this will help lead

to a strengthening of the social fabric that would likely provide additional benefits to

other individuals connected to these individuals and to the broader society as a whole.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

GENERAL

1. Tell me about your life growing up.
    Probe questions:
    What were you like as a child?
    How would you describe the family you grew up with?
    Tell me about the community where you grew up.
    How were you raised religiously?

2. Tell me about a typical day in your life, like yesterday. Tell me about yesterday.

3. How did you come to convert to Islam?
    Probe questions:
    -When did you converted to Islam? How old were you?
    - What was going on in your life around that time?
    -What attracted you to Islam?
    - How long did it take between the time you were first interested and the time you took the Shahadah?
    - Who, if anyone, influenced your decision to convert to Islam?
    -Tell me about how he/she or they influenced you.

4. How did you view yourself before you converted to Islam?

A. FAMILY

5. Who do you consider your family today? *

6. Around the time of your conversion, how did your family react? Specifically,
    -how did your parents react?
    -how did your siblings react?
    - how did others in the family react (including wife, children, grandparents, other extended family members)?

7. If there were difficulties, what were they? *

8. How does your family feel about your conversion now? (If they feel differently, how do you explain the change?)

9. How has your relationship with your family changed as a result of your conversion?

B. BROADER AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

10. Are you living in the same neighborhood in which you lived before you converted?

(If yes): Tell me about how the people in your neighborhood reacted to your conversion at the time of your conversion.

11 . Over time, since you converted, have the neighbors changed in the way they treat you? (If yes): tell me what they do that is different.

12. What about your friends? Have there been any changes in your friends since you converted? If yes, tell me about these changes.

13. The majority of African Americans are Christian. Have you practiced Christianity?

      a.   If so, what was your experience with Christianity like?

      b.   Since your conversion, have you noticed any change in your relationships with family members who are Christian? If so, what kinds of changes have you observed?

      c.   Since your conversion, have you noticed any change in your relationships with other African Americans who are Christian? If so, how?

C. EMPLOYMENT

   14. How has being an African American Muslim affected the way you interact with others at your place of work?

   15. Since September 11, 2001 a lot of people have started to pay more attention to Muslims. How do you feel that being an African American Muslim has affected your opportunities for advancement at work?

   16. Do you think that being an African American Muslim affects someone's chance for getting a good job? If so, how?

D. MEN

    17. I would be interested in hearing about the roles of men and women in Islam.

    18. Tell me about how you view yourself as a man.

    19. How, if at all, has becoming a Muslim changed how you see yourself as a man?

[If married before converting:]
    20. How do you feel that the way you see yourself as a Muslim man, compared to how you viewed yourself as a man before converting, has impacted the way you interact with your spouse/companion/partner and children?

    21. How do you feel that the way you see yourself as a Muslim man, compared to how you viewed yourself as a man before converting, has impacted the way you interact with your parents and siblings?

    22. How do you feel that the way you see yourself as a Muslim man, compared to how you viewed yourself as a man before converting, has impacted the way you interact with African Americans who are not family members (such as friends, people in your neighborhood, and co-workers)?

    23. In what other ways do you think your view of yourself as a man now, specifically how has that view changed the way you live your life, or the way you interact with others?

E. ANTI-ISLAMICISM AND RACISM

    24. How has the environment in the US after 9/11 impacted you as a male African American Muslim, if at all.?

    25. Some people feel that, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, being a Muslim was strongly tied to a racial identity. For you personally, how do you see the connection between your racial identity and your religious identity?

    26. Racism has shaped the lives of many African Americans, just as anti-Islamic feelings may be impacting the lives of many Muslims right now in the US. In what other ways do you think racist or anti-Islamic feelings have impacted your experience as Muslim male?

OTHER

27. What are the challenges of being a male African American Muslim in society today?

28. Are there some things that are part of the Muslim faith that you have not embraced, that you have thought about and decided that this thing, or part of the faith, is not for you? If so, what and why?

29. What do you like most about being Muslim?

30. Looking back, if you could step into the past and give yourself advice about problems you faced in your life right after you converted to Islam, what would you say?
    Probe question:
    - Is that something you wrestled with back then?

31. Is there anything else that you think I should know to understand how converting to Islam impacts African American men's lives?

32. How old are you? What is your highest level of education completed? What kind of work do you do?

* means I may not have to ask this question depending upon whether or not the answer has surfaced in a previous question.

APPENDIX B: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. In Philadelphia, there seems to be a large number of African Americans who have become Muslims. Why do you think that is?

2. Can you tell me about your (store, role in mosque, etc) and how you serve the Muslim population in Philadelphia?

3. Can you tell me a little about your background and how Islam came to be an important part of your life?

4. Do you recall any African American converts telling you stories about problems they had with their families after converting? If so, what stories did they tell you?

5. Have you heard any stories of African American men having problems at work, or problems finding a new job, because they are Muslim?

6. Have you heard any African American male converts talk about how they see themselves differently as men now that they are Muslim? Can you tell me more about that?

7. Some Muslims feel that people are paying more attention to Islam as a religion after September 11, 2001. Not all of this attention is thought to be good. Can you tell me of any instance in which you heard of an African American convert having a problem because of anti-Islamic feelings by non-Muslims?

8. From your experience, (and it can be a positive thing or a problem someone has had) in what other ways, have the day-to-day lives of African American men who convert to Islam been impacted?

REFERENCES

Abreu, J. M., Goodyear, R. K., Campos, A., & Newcomb, M. D. (2000). Ethnic

belonging and traditional masculinity ideology among African Americans,

European Americans, and Latinos. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 1*, 75-86.

Alasuutari, P. (1998). *An invitation to social research*. London, UK: Sage.

Anderson, E., & Massey, D. S. (2001). *Problem of the century: Racial stratification in

the United States*. New York: Russell Sage.

Anderson, T. L. (2000). Conversion and community: Reconstructing self and

relationships following religious conversion (Doctoral dissertation, University of

California, Los Angeles, 2000). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, A 61/06.

Bagby, I, Perl, P. M., & Froehle, B. T. (2001). *The mosque in America: A national

portrait.* Washington, DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Bainbridge, W. S. (1992). The sociology of conversion. In H. N. Maloney & S. Southard

(Eds.), *The handbook of religious conversion* (pp. 178-191) Birmingham, AL:

Religious Education Press.

Becker, G. (1976). *The economic approach to human behavior*. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press.

Belgrave, F. Z., & Allison, K. W. (2006). *African American psychology: From Africa to

America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bennett, L. (1993). *Before the Mayflower: A history of Black America*. New York:

Penguin.

Berger, P. L. (1967). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*.

Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.

Bird, S. R. (1996). Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. *Gender and Society, 10*, 120-132.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Calhoun-Brown, A. (2000). Upon this rock: The black church, nonviolence, and the civil rights movement. *Political Science and Politics, 33,* 169-174.

Carroll, B. E. (Ed.). (2003). *American masculinities: A historical encyclopedia*. New York: The Moschovitis Group, Inc.

Carsten, J. (2000). *Cultural relatedness: New approaches to the study of kinship*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carter, C. (2003). *A degree above: A study of translations of Qur'an 4:34; Exegesis on it, and its influence on the gender position of African American Muslim women* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. (AAT 3097678).

Central Intelligence Agency. (2007). *World fact book*. Retrieved January 26, 2008, from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research*, 3rd ed. (pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chaskin, R. J., & Richman, H. A. (1992). Concerns about school-lined services: Institution-based versus community-based models. *The Future of Children, 2*, 107-117.

Cho, D. (2002, Sep. 17). Evangelicals help pace U.S. growth in church attendance; Tally of Muslims rejected as low by Islamic groups. The Washington Post [Online}, Final ed. Lexis-Nexis Universe: General News Topics [2002, Sept. 17].

Clark, K. (2002). *Black manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Cnaan, R. A. (2006). *The other Philadelphia story: How local congregations support quality of life in urban America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Colvin-Burque, A., Davis-Maye, D., & Zugazaga, C. B. (2007). Can cultural competence be taught? Evaluating the impact of the soap model. *Journal of Social Work*, 43, 223-241.

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Conway, F., & Siegelman, J. (1978). *Snapping: America's epidemic of sudden personality change*. New York: Lippincott.

Cooley, C. H. (1909). *Social organization*. New York: Scribners.

Curtis, E. E. (2002). *Islam in Black America: Identity, liberation, and difference in African-American Islamic thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Dix-Richardson, F. (2002). Resistance to conversion to Islam among African American women inmates. In T. P. O'Connor, & N. J. Pallone (Eds.), *Religion, the*

community, and the rehabilitation of criminal offenders (pp. 109-126). New York: Haworth.

Dziegielewski, S. F. (2002). *DSM-IV-TR in action*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Elias, J. J. (1999). *Islam*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Ellison, C. G., & Gay, D. A. (1990). Region, religious commitment, and life satisfaction among Black Americans. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 31, 123-147.

Ellison, C.G, & Sherkat, D.E. (1995a). The "Semi-involuntary Institution" revisited: Regional variations in church participation among Black Americans. *Social Forces, 73*, 1415-1437.

Ellison, C. G., & Sherkat, D. E. (1995b). Is sociology the core discipline for the scientific study of religion? *Social Forces, 73*, 1255-1266.

Ellison, C. G., & Sherkat, D. E. (1999). Identifying the semi-involuntary institution: A clarification. *Social Forces*, 78, 793-802.

Enroth, R. (1977). *Youth, brainwashing and the extremist cults*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Erikson, R., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (1992). *The constant flux: a study of class mobility in industrial societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Esposito, J. L. (1988). *Islam: The straight path.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Fortune 500: Our Annual Ranking of America's largest corporations. (n.d.). Retrieved, October 28, 2008, from

http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2008/states/PA.html

Frank, R. H. (1995). *The winner-take-all-society: How more and more Americans compete for even fewer and bigger prizes, encouraging economic waste, income inequality, and an impoverished cultural life*. New York: Free Press.

Gardell, M. (1996). *In the name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Glenn, N. D. (1964). Negro religion and negro status in the United States. In L. Schneider (Ed.), *Religion, Culture, and Society* (pp. 623-639). New York: Wiley.

Glenn, N. D., & Gotard, E. (1977). The religion of blacks in the United States: Some recent trends and current characteristics. *American Journal of Sociology, 83,* 443-451.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78, 1360-1380.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2002). *Handbook of interview research: Context & method*. London: Sage.

Haddad, Y. Y., Smith, J. I., & Moore, K. M. (2006). *Muslim women in America: The challenge of Islamic identity today*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, J. (1977). The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology, 82*, 929-964.

Harper, P. B. (1996). *Are we not men?: Masculine anxiety and the problem of African-American identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harre, R., & Secord, P.F. (1972). *The explanation of social behaviour*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Hill, R. (1999). *The strengths of African American families: Twenty-five years later*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Hill-Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Hodge, D., & Nadir, A. (2008). Moving toward culturally competent practice with Muslims: Modifying Cognitive Therapy with Islamic tenets. *Social Work*, 53, 31-41.

Hooks, B. (2004). *We real cool: Black men and masculinity*. New York: Routledge.

Hunt, L. L., & Hunt, M. O. (1999). Regional patterns of African American church attendance: Revisiting the semi-involuntary thesis. *Social Forces, 78*, 779-791.

Hyde, M., & Chavis, D. (2007). Sense of community and community building. In R. A. Cnaan & C. Milofsky (Eds.), *Handbook of community movements and local organizations*. (pp. 179-192). New York: Springer.

Iannaccone, L. R. (1994). Why strict churches are strong. *The American Journal of Sociology, 99*, 1180-1211.

Iannaccone, L. R. (1998). Introduction to the economics of religion. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *36*, 1465-1496.

Jacobson, C. K., Heaton, T. B., & Dennis, R. M. (1990). Black-white differences in religiosity: Item analyses and a formal structural test. *Sociological Analysis, 51*, 257-270.

Jamal, A. (2005). The political participation and engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque involvement and group consciousness. *American Politics Research, 33*, 521-544.

Johnson, J. M. (2002). In-depth interviewing. . In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context & method* (pp. 103-120). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Johnson, M. (1988). *Strong mothers, weak wives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Kahera, A. I. (2002). Urban enclaves, Muslim identity and the urban mosque in America. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 22*, 369-380.

Kanter, R. M. (1972). *Commitment and community: Communes and utopias in sociological perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Karim, J. (2009). *American Muslim women: Negotiating race, class, and gender within the ummah*. New York: New York University Press.

Kilbourne, B., & Richardson, J. (1988). Paradigm conflict, types of conversion, and conversion theories. *Sociological Analysis, 50*, 1-21.

Kimmel, M. S., & Messner, M. A. (1995). *Men's lives*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Kosmin, B. A., Mayer, E., & Keysar A. (2001). *American religious identification survey*. Retrieved January 27, 2007, from City University of New York, Graduate Center Web site: http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris.pdf

Lawrence-Webb, C., Littlefield, M., & Okundaye, J. N. (2004). African American intergender relationships: A theoretical exploration of roles, patriarchy, and love. *Journal of Black Studies, 34*, 623-639.

Levin, J. S., Taylor, R. J., & Chatters, L. M. (1995). A multidimensional measure of

    religious involvement for African Americans. *The Sociological Quarterly, 36,*

    157-173.

Lincoln, E. C. (1994). *The Black Muslims in America*. Trenton, NJ: William B.

    Eerdmans.

Litwak, E. & Messeri, P. (1989). Organizational theory, social supports, and mortality

    rates. *American Sociological Review, 5*4, 49-66.

Lofland, J., & Stark, R. (1965). Becoming a world-saver: A theory of conversion to a

    deviant perspective. *American Sociological Review, 30*, 862-875.

Lofland, J., & Skonovd, N. (1981). Conversion motifs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of*

    Religion, 20, 373-385.

Long, T. E., & Hadden, J. K. (1983). Religious conversion and the concept of

    socialization: Integrating the brainwashing and drift models. *Journal for the*

    Scientific Study of Religion, 22, 1-14.

Lumumba, H. (2003). The impact of Al-Islam on the African American population.

    Counseling and Values, 47, 210-219.

Mamiya, L. H. (1982). From Black Muslim to Bilalian: The evolution of a movement.

    Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 21,138-152.

Marsh, C. E. (1984). *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The transition from separatism to*

    Islam, 1930-1980. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow.

Marsh, C. E. (1996). *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The resurrection, transformation,*

    and change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930-1995. Lanham,

    MD: Scarecrow.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Martin, T. (1976). *Race first: The ideological and organizational struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Marwell, G. (1996). We still don't know if strict churches are strong, much less why: Comment on Iannaccone. *The American Journal of Sociology, 101*, 1097-1103.

Mathew, J. (2001). *Contemporary religious conversions*. Delhi, India: Authors Press.

McCloud, A. B. (1995). *African American Islam*. New York: Routledge.

McGuire, M. B. (1997). *Religion: The social context*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

McPherson, M. (1983). An ecology of affiliation. *American Sociological Review, 48*, 519-532.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook. J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415-444.

Mead, G. H. (1962). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston: Beacon.

Moorish Science temple, Inc. *Temple Locator*. Retrieved February 14, 2007, from http://www.moorishsciencetempleofamericainc.com/TempleLocator.html

Mosher, D. L., & Tomkins, S. S. (1988). Scripting the macho man: Hypermasculine socialization and enculturation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 25, 60-84.

National Association of Social Workers. (2001). *Standards for cultural competence in social work practice*. Washington, DA: Author. Retrieved October 12, 2009,

from

http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWCulturalStandards.pdf

Niebuhr, R. H. (1929). *The social sources of denominationalism*. New York: Holt and
Company.

Omar, M. (1997). Reasoning in Islamic law: Part one. *Arab Law Quarterly*, *12*, 148-196.

Omi, H. & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to
the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.

Padgett, D. K. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and
rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand
Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Retrieved
May 1, 2008, from http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-
study-full.pdf

Pew Research Center (2004). *Views of Islam remain sharply divided*. Retrieved May 1,
2008, from http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/islam.pdf

Pew Research Center (2005a). *Islamic extremism: Common concern for Muslim and
western publics*. Retrieved May 1, 2008, from
http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf

Pew Research Center (2005b). *Views of Muslim-Americans hold steady after London
bombings*. Retrieved May 1, 2008, from
http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/muslims-survey-2005.pdf

Pew Research Center (2007). *Muslim Americans: Middle class and mostly mainstream*. Retrieved February 3, 2008, from http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf

Phan, P., Woods, D. R., Vugia, H., Chu, M., Wright, P., & Jones, T. (2009). A social work program's experience in teaching about race in the curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45, 325-333.

Polsky, N. (1969). *Hustlers, beats and others*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Rahman, F. (2002). *Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rambo, L. R. (2001). The psychology of conversion. In H. N. Malony & S. Southard (Eds.), *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (pp. 159-177). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Read, J. G. (2007). Introduction: The politics of veiling in comparative perspective. *Sociology of Religion, 68*, 231-236.

Renard, J. (1996). *Seven doors to Islam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Richardson, J. T. (1985). The active vs. passive convert: Paradigm conflict in conversion/recruitment research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 24*, 163-179.

Riseman, D., & Benney, M. (1956). Asking and answering. *Journal of Business of the University of Chicago, 29*, 225-236.

Robinson, N. (1999). *Islam: A concise introduction*. Cornwall, Great Britain: Curzon.

Roer-Strier, D., & Sands, R. G. (2001). The impact of religious intensification on family relations: A South African example. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*, 868-880.

183

Roer-Strier, D., Sands, R. G., & Bourjolly, J. (2009). Family reaction to religious change: The case of African American women who become Muslim. *Families in Society, 90*, 220-226.

Roof, W. C., & McKinney, W. C. (1987). *American Mainline Religion: Its changing shape and future*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ross, Z. (ed.). (2005). *Philadelphia: & surroundings*. Basingstoke, UK: APA Publications.

Rouse, C. M. (2004). *Engaged surrender: African American women and Islam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Sands, R. G., & Roer-Strier, D. (2004). Divided families: Impact of religious difference and geographic distance on intergenerational family continuity. *Family Relations, 53*(1), 102-110.

Sands, R. G., & Roer-Strier, D. (2006). Using data triangulation of mother and daughter interviews to enhance research about families. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, *5*(2), 237-260.

Schriver, J. M. (2001). *Human behavior and the social environment: Shifting paradigms in essential knowledge for social work practice*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Schwalbe, M. L., & Wolkomir, M. (2002). Interviewing men. In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context & method* (pp. 203-220). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Segal, E., Gerdes, K. E., & Steiner, S. (2004). *Social work: An introduction to the profession*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Sherkat, D.E. (2002). African-American religious affiliation in the late 20th century:

Cohort variations and patterns of switching, 1973-1998. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 41*, 485-493.

Singer, M. (1979). Coming out of the cults. *Psychology Today, 12(8)*, 72-82.

Smith, J. (1999). *Islam in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Spears, A. K. (1999). *Race and ideology: Language, symbolism, and popular culture*.

Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Stark, R. (1980). Networks of faith: Interpersonal bonds and recruitment to cults and

sects. *American Journal of Sociology, 85*, 1376-1395.

Stark, R. (1996). *The rise of Christianity: How the obscure, marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the western word in a few centuries*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stark, R. (1998). Rationality and the Religious Mind. *Economic Inquiry, 36*, 373-389.

Stark, R. & Bainbridge, W. S. (1979). Of churches, sects, and cults: Preliminary concepts

for a theory of religious movements. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 18*, 117-131.

Stark, R. & Finke, R. (2000). *Acts of faith: Explaining the human side of religion*.

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Stark, R., Iannaccone, L. R., & Finke, R. (1996). Religion, science and rationality.

American Economic Review, 86, 433-37.

Stark, R., & McCann, J. C. (1993). Market Forces and Catholic Commitment: Exploring

the New Paradigm. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 32*, 111-123.

Straus, R. A. (1979). Religious conversion as a personal and collective accomplishment. *Sociological Analysis, 40*, 158-165.

Taylor, R. J., Thornton, M. C., & Chatters, L. M. (1987). Black Americans' perceptions of the sociohistorical role of the church. *Journal of Black Studies, 18,* 123-138.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Teasley, M. L. (2005). Perceived levels of cultural competence through social work education and professional development for urban school social workers. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 41, 85-98.

Tonnies, F. (2001). *Community and civil society*. (J. Harris & M. Hollis, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1887)

U. S. Census Bureau. (2007). *American factfinder: Philadelphia county, PA*. Retrieved October 14, 2008, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-context=dt&-ds_name=PEP_2007_EST&-CONTEXT=dt&-mt_name=PEP_2007_EST_G2007_T003_2007&-tree_id=807&-redoLog=false&-all_geo_types=N&-geo_id=05000US42101&-search_results=01000US&-format=&-_lang=en

Van Gundy, K. (2002). Gender, the assertion of autonomy, and the stress process in young adulthood. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 65*(4), 346-363.

Ward, E. G. (2005). Homophobia, hypermasculinity and the US Black Church. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 7*, 493-504.

Weeks, J. R. (1988). The demography of Islamic nations. *Population Bulletin, 43*(4), 5-51.

Weeks, J. R. (2003). Estimating the Muslim population in the United States using census

    2000 data. *Espace Populations Societes, 2003*(i), 89-101.

Weigley, R. F. (ed.). (1982). *Philadelphia: A 300 year history*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Wilson, C. A. (1996). *Racism: From slavery to advanced capitalism*. Thousand Oaks,

    CA: Sage Publications.

X, M. (1964). *The autobiography of Malcolm X: With the assistance of Alex Haley*. New

    York: Ballantine Books.