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Growing Up Muslim in America:
Managing Multiple Cultures in Everyday Life

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

John O'Brien

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Growing Up Muslim in America:
Managing Multiple Cultures in Everyday Life

by

John O'Brien

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Stefan Timmermans, Chair

Drawing on over three and half years of ethnographic research on a group of immigrant Muslim young men growing up in an American city, this dissertation examines the subtle yet important ways that cultural minorities manage participation in diverse, and sometimes divergent, cultural systems in the course of everyday life.

Extensive ethnographic details illustrate three specific social processes through which my subjects – whom I call “the Legendz” after the name of their hip hop group – work to manage the tensions between the cultural systems of religious Islam and American youth culture at the level

of everyday life. First, as illustrated in Chapter Two, the Legendz consume cultural products associated with secular American youth culture – particularly hip hop songs, videos, and styles – in particular ways that express a religiously pious yet secularly cool identity. This is a process of *cultural reception* for the management of multiple cultures. Second, as Chapter Three demonstrates, the boys apply cultural schemas drawn from religious Islamic culture – particularly the faith-based commitment to pre-marital sexual abstinence – in order to manage ambiguities in American youth culture, specifically around dating practices. This is a process of *cultural importation* for the management of multiple cultures. Chapter Four shows how the Legendz – along with their religious leaders, parents, and Muslim peers – engage in repeated in-group rehearsals at the mosque to learn the “appropriate” presentation of Islamic cultural identity and practices when in public. This is a process of *backstage preparation* for the management of multiple cultures.

Together these processes – and the Legendz’ firsthand experience of them – produce for the boys a certain kind of multicultural life, one characterized by a continuing allegiance to their minority culture and community; a sense of themselves as effective multicultural actors; a tendency to work for the avoidance of cultural conflict; and the bringing of small cultural changes to their community. For the Legendz, this comprises a workable multicultural life, not least because it allows them to experience – and express – themselves as engaging in mainstream American youth culture while still hewing closely to local Islamic norms.

The dissertation of John O'Brien is approved.

Paul Lichterman

William Roy

Rogers Brubaker

Stefan Timmermans, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For Saba, Hamza, Shazia, Nailah and the Legendz

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balancing parenthood and academic work was invaluable. Perhaps most importantly, his enthusiasm for my project was infectious, even on days when I was not so enthusiastic myself.

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**JOHN O'BRIEN
VITA**

EDUCATION

- 2010 M.A. Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles
- 1996 B.A. American Civilization, Brown University

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

- Present Visiting Assistant Professor, Social Research and Public Policy
New York University, Abu Dhabi – United Arab Emirates

PUBLICATIONS

- 2011 “Spoiled Group Identities and Backstage Work: A Theory of Stigma
Management Rehearsals.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74(3):291-309.
- 2011 Mohamed, Besheer and John O’Brien (equal co-authorship). “Ground
Zero of Misunderstanding: How (Not) to Talk about Islam in America.”
Contexts 10(1):62–4.

PUBLICATIONS UNDER REVIEW AND IN PROGRESS

- 2012 O’Brien, John. “Muslim Youth and Secular Hip Hop: Manifesting ‘Cool
Piety’ Through Musical Practices,” Revise and Resubmit from *Poetics:
Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, Media, and the Arts*.
- **Recipient of the Robert J McNamara Best Student Paper Award
from the Association for the Sociology of Religion, 2012.
- 2012 O’Brien, John and Besheer Mohamed. “Using Sociology to Counter
Stereotypes: The Case of American Muslims,” forthcoming in *Sociologists
in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice, 2nd edition*, edited
by Shelley White, Kathleen Odell Korgen, and Jonathan White. Pine
Forge Press: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- 2012 O’Brien, John. *Growing Up Muslim in Post-9/11 America: Marked
Identities and Multiple Cultures*, book manuscript in preparation.

AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2012 Robert J McNamara Best Student Paper Award from the Association for the Sociology of Religion, for “Muslim Youth and Secular Hip Hop: Manifesting ‘Cool Piety’ Through Musical Practices.”
- 2010 UCLA Sociology Department Excellence in Teaching Award
- 2006-11 UCLA Graduate Fellowship
- 2009-10 UCLA Yearlong Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship
- 2007 UCLA Summer Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship
- 2007 Honorable mention, National Science Foundation graduate research fellowship

REFEREED CONFERENCE PAPERS

- 2011 “Keeping it *Halal*’: Muslim Dating and Everyday Cultural Experimentation.”
▪ Presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion Annual Meeting (Las Vegas, NV).
- 2010 “The Everyday Navigation of Conflicting Cultural Systems: Musical Practices of Muslim American Youth.”
▪ Presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting (Baltimore, MD), the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (Atlanta, GA), and the Association for the Sociology of Religion Annual Meeting (Atlanta, GA).
- 2008-9 “On the Management of Muslim Identity: Collective Stigma Response Work at an American Mosque.”
▪ Presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (San Francisco, CA), the Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meeting (San Francisco, CA), the Chicago Ethnography Conference (Chicago, IL), and the Stony Brook Ethnography Conference (New York, New York).

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Multicultural Lives

Prologue: Hanging at the Mosque

Sunday, January 14, 2008 11:05 AM

I pull my car into the mosque lot, park my car, and get out. I walk down the stairs, through the back entrance, and into the social hall. It's pretty bustling with the usual mix of Arab, African, East Asian, South Asian, and a few African American and white Muslim families mulling around. I pass through the social hall and into the front lobby. I walk towards the front desk; Thomas the receptionist is sitting behind it. I shake Thomas' hand and say, "*A salaam aleikum.*" He smiles and greets me in return. I walk up the stairway, to the second floor, and through the youth room doors. The chairs are set up in two rows in a semicircle facing the wall where the blackboard used to be. There are a good amount of kids here today – maybe about 35 or 40 – but I don't see any of the boys. I figure maybe they're late. I walk over to other side of the room and see Miriam and Sana sitting in the front row of chairs. They are both wearing black, intricately decorated *hijabs*. I say hello to them and they say hi back, but they seem to be involved in organizing something. I take a seat and wait for something to begin. I see the mosque's Religious Director, Omar, walk down the aisle and towards me. Omar turns towards me as he walks by and shakes my hand. "*A salaam aleikum,*" he says. I return the greeting, and add, "Happy New Year." Looking to my left I see Youth Group leader Farah. She walks towards the youth group office – a smaller room off of the main youth group room – and says something like, "Are they in there?" She opens the door and I catch a glimpse of Yusef and Muhammad sitting on the desk at the back of the room. Farah walks in the room and I slip in the door behind her. Yusef sees me and says, "What's up, John?" and the other boys follow suit.

Sitting on the back desk, in order from left to right are: Yusef, Awad, Muhammad, Abdul, and Yassir.¹ I walk over and take a seat on the desk to the right of Yassir. Now we're all facing Farah. "Are you guys ready?" she says. I piece together that they are supposed to be doing some sort of presentation. They are each holding copies of the small books of *hadith* [sayings of the Prophet Muhammad] that they have set aside for youth group members. Muhammad says, "We're just doing the five pillars – it's Sunday School stuff!" I say, "You guys have to do the five pillars²?" Yusef says, "Yeah, it's a *hadith* about the five pillars." They talk amongst themselves trying to figure out who will talk about which of the five pillars. Yusef tries to organize them: "OK, I'm doing *Shahadah*," he says. Awad says, "I'll do fasting. That's easy – Ramadan." "OK, Who's doing prayer?" Yusef says. Muhammad raises his hand: "I'll do it." Yusef says, "OK." Abdul says, "I'll do *hajj*." Yassir says, "I'll do *zakat*. That's easy. Just giving

¹ All names of people and places have been changed to protect anonymity.

² The "Five Pillars of Islam" are commonly understood by most Muslims to be the central religious obligations of the faithful, and include: the *shahadah*, or initial proclamation of faith; *salat*, prayer five times a day; *zakat*, the paying of alms to the poor; *sawm*, ritual fasting, especially during the month of Ramadan; and *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which includes a ritual walking around the *kaaba* – a cube shaped holy site – seven times.

money to the homeless. What is it, like 25 per cent?” “No,” I tell him. “It’s not 25 per cent. It’s lower, like 2 per cent.” “Oh,” he says. Farah looks at me with a smile and says, “OK, you’re in charge.” Then she leaves the room.

Yusef says, “OK, you guys. We gotta get this straight.” Yusef reads from his book, “These are the five pillars as recorded by Bu-kar-i.” He stumbles over the name a little. Yassir says, “Bacardi?” Abdul and Muhammad laugh. “Not Bacardi,” I say, half-jokingly. Yusef says, “Bukhari, Bukhari, OK.” He continues to read from the *hadith*. He finishes the introduction and says, “Then we can each read our own part and say a little more.” “Yeah,” I say. “You guys can add your own way of explaining the five pillars if you want.” Ali reads the part of the *hadith* about *shahadah* and says, “This is the declaration of faith. The beginning of everything.” Next Muhammad reads the part about prayer and says, “You should do this five times a day.” Yusef says, “You could say that if people say that it’s hard to pray five times a day that they should be thankful because it was going to be 50 times, but Prophet Muhammad went to the Prophet Mousa [Moses] and said, ‘My people can not pray 50 times.’ So it could have been fifty.” Muhammad says, “Man, you got that from Omar!” “So?” says Yusef. “It’s a good story so people understand that it’s not that hard to pray five times a day.” “Man, you’re like a baby Omar!” says Muhammad.

Awad reads the part about fasting and says, “This is what we do during Ramadan.” Abdul reads the part about *hajj* and says, “Hajj is a pilgrimage.” He doesn’t say anything else and people laugh. “That’s it?” says Awad. “Um, you walk round the box seven times.” Everyone laughs and makes disapproving sounds. “OK,” he says. “It’s a pilgrimage to the House of God....And you walk around the black box seven times....And I’m not talking about the cable box.” Everybody cracks up. “Come on, Abdul!” says Yusef. “OK,” he says. “You walk round the *Kaaba* seven times.” Yassir reads the part about *zakat* and says, “This is when you give money to the homeless...Or to me?” He smiles. Farah opens the door: “OK, you guys, it’s almost time to go. “OK, are we straight?” Yusef asks. He does some kind of dance move in the middle of the room and says, “It’s like the Jackson Five.” I say to Abdul, with sarcasm, “Around the box seven times...” Abdul says, “I’m gonna say that.” Awad says, “Yeah, yeah, you should really say that.” Yusef says, “No, come on you guys!” Muhammad says, “He’s like a little Omar.” Yusef is wearing a blue and white striped button down shirt and khaki pants. After Muhammad makes this comment, Yusef unbuttons his pants and begins to tuck his shirt deep into his pants, so that his pants are comically high: “Here we go,” he says. “Oh, no!” Muhammad and the other boys say, laughing. Muhammad says, “Yusef, I don’t understand. How are you an athlete, a math nerd, a rapper, a gangster, and an *imam* [religious leader]?” Yusef kind of shrugs.

The above passage represents a typical slice of everyday life spent in the company of the “Legendz” – the name I use for the friendship clique formed by five teenage, 1.5 generation immigrant Muslim boys growing up in a large American city. The Legendz are both highly religious Muslims and urban American teenagers, and as such their time spent together is

characterized by an intertwining of religious Islamic symbols and practices – attending the mosque, talking about the five pillars, referring to one of them as an “imam” – and cultural references and schemas associated with American pop and youth culture – the Jackson Five, the cable box, Bacardi rum. In the course of their daily lives, the Legendz move through settings and institutions associated with Islamic culture (the mosque, their families’ homes), American youth culture (public school hallways, malls, movie theaters), urban American culture (their neighborhood streets), or some combination of these (the Muslim youth group, their peer group). In addition, they are exposed to audio and visual media through computers, MP3 players, car radios, and television that represent American youth cultures, urban hip hop culture, American culture more broadly, Islamic religious culture, and the cultures associated with their parents’ home countries. Finally, they engage in daily practices that are linked with religious Islam (prayer, attending the mosque, talking about Allah³), American youth culture (skateboarding, playing video games, basketball), or some combination (writing hip hop songs about Islam). In these ways, defined by their everyday interactions, activities, and experiences, the Legendz are culturally both religious Muslims and urban American teenagers. For Yusef, Awad, Muhammad, Abdul, and Yassir, the question of whether they are *more* Muslim or American – a question that might be of concern to scholars of immigration or government officials – would simply not make sense.

While the Legendz do not experience life as Muslim American teenagers as a constant and stressful clash of cultures, they do understand firsthand that living and experiencing this mix of cultural settings, symbols, and influences is not without potential friction or tensions to be

³ “Allah” is the Arabic translation of the word “God.”

managed. The acknowledgment of some underlying effort on the part of the Legendz to make this multicultural life workable is suggested by Muhammad's half-joking question to Yusef above: "*How* are you an athlete, a math nerd, a rapper, a gangster, and an imam?" (emphasis mine). Indeed, the more time I spent with the Legendz, the more I began to notice the small yet important ways that the boys – occasionally with help from friends, parents, and religious leaders – worked to make the cultural systems of religious Islam and American youth culture part of the same life with a minimum of conflict. As I observed these patterns repeated over time and considered them in light of relevant sociological theories, this question became the core focus of my project – how do modern subjects manage participation in multiple cultural systems at the level of everyday life? In other words, I was asking a more intellectually framed version of Muhammad's question to Yusef. Like Muhammad, I wanted to understand the everyday *how* of multicultural subjectivity – to uncover, in the words of Steven Vertovec and Alisdair Rogers, the "mechanisms of multiplicity" (1998:6) that enable multicultural lives.

Ethnographic methodology – the sustained observation of a single group or phenomena over a significant length of time – is a particularly useful means of locating patterns of everyday interaction, intersubjective performance, and symbolic deployment that those just trying to "get on" (Giddens 1991) in daily life often lack the perspective to notice. By spending three and a half years in close observation of this single group of Muslim American friends, I was able to identify three discrete and repeated processes through which the Legendz, sometimes in conjunction with other friends, parents, and religious leaders, work to manage the multiple cultural systems in which they participated in everyday life. First, the Legendz consume cultural products associated with secular American youth culture – particularly hip hop songs, videos, and styles – in

particular ways that express a religiously pious yet secularly cool identity in interaction. This is a process of *cultural reception* for the management of multiple cultures. Second, the boys apply cultural schemas drawn from religious Islamic culture – particularly the faith-based commitment to pre-marital sexual abstinence – in order to manage ambiguities in mainstream American culture, specifically around dating practices. This is a process of *cultural importation* for the management of multiple cultures. Finally, the Legendz – along with their religious leaders, parents, and Muslim peers – engage in repeated in-group rehearsals at the mosque to learn the “appropriate” presentation of Islamic cultural identity and practices when in public. This is a process of *backstage preparation* for the management of multiple cultures. Together, these processes – in interaction with their broader social and institutional environment – facilitate a multicultural adolescent life for the Legendz which is characterized by a strong identification with both Islamic and American cultures; a sustained religious devotion experienced as creative and agentive; and a continuing – and externally reinforced – commitment to avoiding conflict between Islamic and other cultures.

In the pages that follow, I will draw on extensive ethnographic data to illustrate precisely how modern multicultural lives are constructed and sustained with the help of these three specific social processes – cultural reception for the production of bi-cultural identities in interaction, cultural importation for the patching of cultural system “holes,” and backstage preparation for the public presentation of cultural minority identities. In addition to analyzing these processes, this dissertation will demonstrate the specific consequences the use of such strategies can have for cultural minority youth and their communities regarding concurrent adolescent development processes of social identification and belonging, public presentation of identity, pop cultural

consumption, romantic involvement, and religious commitment. Understanding these dynamics will allow us to more fully grasp the particular ways that different kinds of adolescent multicultural lives come to be, and comprehend more accurately the social realities of Muslim American youth in particular, and cultural minority youth and their communities – sexual minorities, the disabled, ethnic and racial minorities, and immigrants, among others – more generally.⁴

Culture and Cultures in Social Life

As both William H. Sewell Jr. (1999) and Peggy Levitt (2005) have pointed out in different ways, the study of “culture” – a single, abstracted system of meaning which both shapes and is used by human actors – and “cultures” – multiple bounded sets of practices and symbols often linked with specific social identity groups – tend to be approached as separate tasks within the contemporary social sciences. As anthropologists and sociologists of culture focus on questions of the relationship between human actors and their “culture,” they almost always focus on a single, relatively coherent culture identified with a single, relatively coherent identity group (Geertz 1973, Swidler 2001). This approach has helpfully allowed analysts to demonstrate the immense diversity within and flexibility of even a single culture, but it leaves open the question of how everyday actors manage lives in which they participate in multiple cultural systems, a common situation among individuals in a globalized world (Giddens 1991, Ammerman 2003,

⁴ Those who work to manage participation in multiple cultures are often those who identify strongly with one minority culture (i.e. religion, immigrant nationality, sexuality, or disability) while desiring to – or needing to – participate in another, mainstream culture (i.e. American pop culture or American nationalism). While there are others who work to balance multiple cultural commitments in more subtle ways (see Gans 1979, Barth 1989, Sewell 1999, Swidler 2001), the situation of those who are situated firmly within one identifiable minority cultural system while maintaining or requiring some involvement in mainstream cultural systems is the most well documented and easily observed kind of everyday multicultural life. This is indeed the social situation of the Legendz, and therefore this specific kind of multicultural configuration is the most relevant to this work.

Brubaker et al 2006, McDermott 2006). Those who have attempted to investigate subjects who navigate multiple cultures – most commonly immigration scholars or post-colonial theorists – have often ended up treating cultures as bounded entities and characterizing multicultural subjects as individuals working to balance two relatively solid cultures (cf. Wolf 1997, Werbner 1999, Levitt 2005, Wimmer 2008), rather than taking into account the (limited) flexibility of cultures established by the cultural sociologists.

While the terms “culture” and “cultural system” are notoriously difficult to define, in keeping with my project’s emphasis on action at the level of everyday social life, I will define “culture” as a set of practices, schemas, behaviors, and symbols treated by everyday actors as having some level of coherence (Geertz 1973, Hannerz 1987, DiMaggio 1997, Lacy 2004). In this way, I hope to make clear that while I do not believe there is anything inherently coherent about the cultural elements that comprise the cultures of religious Islam or American youth culture per se, social processes, including the actions and attitudes of multicultural subjects, do work which clusters these elements into different, variously coherent “cultures” (Said 1978, DiMaggio 1997). Once these clusters of elements are understood to be bounded – and kept that way through organizations, institutions, and authorities – they are often, through not always, treated as coherent and bounded by everyday actors.

The tendency to approach the study of culture – or cultures – as either the analysis of a single overarching system of meaning or of multiple, internally coherent and bounded entities is understandable. To allow for flexibility both within and between cultural systems would threaten to produce an orderless and endlessly fluid confluence of cultures and cultural elements –

schemas, symbols, scripts, and practices – with little hope for systematic analysis. One solution to this dilemma – suggested by Sewell (1999) and applied in this dissertation – is to train attention on how everyday actors themselves work to segregate, mix, combine, or otherwise interact cultural elements in daily life, and to observe whether, how, and to what extent individuals treat these elements as associated with or tied to different settings, social identity groups, or power dynamics. If, as Sewell suggests, cultures are given fixity, fluidity, or some combination by social actors, then we should be able to witness such cultural management work taking place by observing those whose lives are impacted by multiple cultures⁵. Indeed, scholars drawn from various corners of sociology have done work, sometimes as a byproduct of their main research agenda, which has illuminated strategies utilized by social actors to manage participation in multiple, and sometimes competing, cultural systems. The findings of these scholars can be loosely grouped into three categories – everyday cultural segregation, institutional level cultural management, and everyday cultural mixing. Each of these processes has been documented in a variety of substantive studies, and each with differing levels of effectiveness. I will briefly outline their findings – and the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches – here, in an attempt to place my own study and its contributions in context.

⁵ I am aware that even by using the word “culture” to connote a loosely bounded set of schemas, practices, and symbols – i.e. religious Islam or American youth culture – I am in danger of attributing a kind of solidity to these cultures that I am working to counter. After considering multiple alternatives – “cultural systems” (Geertz 1979, Swidler 2001), cultural aggregations, clusterings, and pools – which I hoped would suggest the socially constructed nature of these symbol sets, I came to the conclusion they all sounded too clumsy or, in the case of “cultural system,” too complete. In the end, I decided to stick with “culture,” because the word seems to possess a combination of fluidity and solidity, and, I hope, using it in this way will eventually work against the tendency to reify. That being said, I will sometimes use “cultural system” for the sake of variety, or when I wish to emphasize the structured aspect of a given culture.

Everyday Cultural Segregation

One common way in which people manage participation in multiple and potentially competing cultural systems in daily life is by segregating behaviors associated with different cultural traditions to separate and distinct settings. This “region behavior” (Goffman 1959) – often aided by the establishment of social arenas related to specific kinds of cultural behavior (i.e. offices, churches, homes) – has been observed in the social lives of subjects as diverse as female airline stewardesses (Hochschild 1983), middle class African Americans (Lacy 2004), and gay suburbanites (Brekhus 2003). Indeed, Simmel (1955 [1922]) theorized that such a participation in multiple social spheres and roles requiring this regulation of differing behaviors was a defining aspect of modern social life (see also Coser 1975). Such a careful segregating of cultural engagements and practices has also been observed in cases closer to my own study, including Evangelical Christian youth who engage in significantly “un-Christian” behavior such as drinking and casual sex when safely out of sight of co-religionists (Smith and Denton 2005), and transnational Mexican immigrants to New York who engage in differing cultural practices regarding gender relations depending on whether they are in the US or Mexico (R. Smith 2006). As these studies have demonstrated, such segregating behavior does not necessarily involve the prioritization of one cultural allegiance over the other, although it may, but more immediately reflects a practical attempt by multicultural actors to manage participation in dual and differing cultural systems in their everyday lives.

These accounts of everyday cultural segregation are certainly accurate and draw attention what is probably the most commonly employed solution to issues of cultural tension in everyday social

life.⁶ Nevertheless, the emphasis on segregation that characterizes many previous works addressing the everyday management of cultures can overlook two important aspects of the social reality of the modern multicultural subject. First, despite continuing social efforts to keep them bounded and fixed, cultural elements demonstrate a high level of mobility and flexibility in the modern world (Hannerz 1987, Barth 1989, Sewell 1999, Swidler 2001). As a result, actors are rarely able to achieve a total segregation of cultural elements into separate spheres, and must instead sometimes manage the intersection or co-presence of such elements (Goffman 1974, Zerubavel 1993). Second, subjects who participate in what they understand to be multiple, divergent aggregations of cultural elements often desire experiences which allow these various cultures to be intertwined so that they might live out a multicultural simultaneity in their daily lives (Kibria 1997, Byrne 2003, Warikoo 2007). In cases such as this, the full segregation of cultural elements may not be desired. For both of these reasons – the desire for experiences of multicultural simultaneity and the impossibility of complete cultural segregation – multicultural actors sometimes find themselves in situations where the convergence of differing cultural elements or systems must be managed in a situation of everyday social interaction. These intercultural tension points can be overlooked if we pay attention only to segregating practices, and it is these everyday cultural dilemmas, and the ground-level responses to them, that this project intends to illuminate.

⁶ For other examples of everyday cultural segregation work, see Gibson (1988), Jacobsen (1998), Kurien (1998), Sarroub (2005), and O’Conner (2011) on religious minorities; Brubaker (2006) and Colombo (2010) on ethnic and racial minorities; Espiritu (2001), Zephir (2004), and Louie (2004) on immigrant youth; Danna-Lynch (2010) and Nippert-Eng (1995) on working mothers; Baumeister et al. (1985) on religious homosexuals; Sennett and Cobb (1993) on working class men; and Zerubavel (1991) on everyone else.

Institutional Level Cultural Management

Another means of managing multiple cultural allegiances in social life is by participating in organizations or consuming cultural products which make available novel arrangements of elements normally associated with divergent cultural systems. The well-established Christian Contemporary Music (CCM) industry, for example, creates musical products that simultaneously express symbols of popular youth music genres (i.e. rock, rap, heavy metal) and Christian religious devotion (i.e. God, Jesus, prayer). In offering these bi-cultural products to religious youth and their families, CCM companies and artists hope to satisfy what they assume is the desire of young American Christians to participate in the divergent cultural systems of Christian religiosity and American youth pop culture at the same time (Hendershot 2004, Howard and Streck 1999, Luhr 2009, Rossman 2009). Similarly, leaders within communities of immigrant or religious minorities frequently found organizations whose articulated purpose is to provide social spaces where members can both engage in and preserve practices associated with the minority culture while learning about and adopting practices associated with mainstream culture (Zhou and Bankston 1995, Sanchez-Walsh 2003, and Flory and Miller 2008). Significantly, one cultural lesson often learned in such organizations in the American context – and that shapes the establishment of such organizations in the US in the first place – is that part of an American cultural identity is the preservation of some kind of minority cultural heritage (Varenne 1977, Gans 1979, Kurien 2007, Wimmer 2008).

While research on institutional level approaches to managing multicultural lives are useful as accounts of the actions and intentions of institutions and leaders, their level of analysis leaves an

important aspect of these processes uninvestigated – the reception of and response to these proposed solutions by everyday actors (for an exception, see Kurien 2007). While organizations and products may be designed with the intention of producing a certain kind of multicultural experience, we cannot be certain of the way everyday actors make sense of or utilize these resources until we examine the level of everyday cultural reception (Griswold 1987, Peterson 2000). We have no reason to assume that simply because an organization, leader, or cultural product claims a certain “multicultural” character, that it is likely to be accepted or embraced by everyday multicultural actors⁷. In other words, like other lay actors, multicultural subjects should not be treated as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]), but their acceptance or other variable responses to multicultural projects and products must be empirically observed and assessed. In providing an account of the everyday lives and navigations of subjects whose social realities are proximate to and shaped by such multicultural institutions and products – particularly their mosque and Muslim youth program and producers of “Islamic hip hop” – this project will provide a valuable corrective to the existent accounts of institutional level solutions to the management of multiple cultural allegiances.

Everyday Cultural Mixing

The final type of cultural management identified in sociological accounts of multicultural subjects – what we can call “everyday cultural mixing” – is the process most relevant to the case of the Legendz. In this approach – previously addressed primarily in the fields of literary

⁷ Sociologists have documented the various ways that everyday actors creatively accept, reject, appropriate, or redeploy the offerings of culture-producing organizations and institutions (Hebdige 1979, Willis 1978). For examples of various responses to programs of “religious dating,” see Smith and Denton 2005, Irby 2011, Wagler 2011.

criticism, semiotics, film studies, performance studies, literature, and cultural studies, and only intermittently in the sociology of immigration – multicultural subjects work to facilitate and/or manage the coming together of elements formerly considered part of divergent cultural systems (Fabian 1978; Hebdige 1979, 1987; Graburn 1984; Bhabha 1990; Gilroy 1991,1993; Hall 1997; Kaya 2001). Scholars in this tradition, themselves inspired by the French poststructuralists Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, exerted an intellectual influence far beyond their disciplinary boundaries such that it became difficult – and remains challenging today – to discuss situations of cultural mixing in social life without resorting to one of the terms they made popular: hybridity, creolization, syncretism, third space, bricolage, and hyphenated, to name a few. While these scholars were correct in suggesting that actors socially located at the intersection of cultural systems often draw on and mix elements from divergent cultures in everyday life, the way in which the hybridity scholars theorized and investigated these questions is of little use to – and indeed poses two significant obstacles for – those wishing to understand multicultural life through empirically based sociological methodologies.

First, as has been indicated by others, the hybridity scholars' conception of cultural mixing in social life lacks a consideration of the crucial and consequential role of *social constraint* in all social action (Werbner 1997, Vertovec and Rogers 1998, Anthias 2001, Skrentny 2008). Perhaps due to their grounding in semiotically oriented fields which tended to analyze cultural products, or perhaps due to their alliance with political projects seeking to celebrate agency and resistance among marginalized groups, the hybridity scholars often portrayed the management of divergent cultural elements by social actors as an easily accomplished and personally liberating act, one which posed an important aesthetic challenge to political oppression (Hall and Jefferson 2006

[1975], Hebdige 1979, Bhabha 1990). While this experience of the transgressive nature of multicultural life may be true for some – and indeed, such experiences are present in the lives of my own subjects – the emphasis of this body of scholarship on agency places it in opposition to the sociological tradition of culture as constraining *and* agentive (Marx 1978[1852], Sewell 1992, Swidler 2001), and is therefore not of much use when seeking to understand the navigations of multicultural subjects grounded in everyday social contexts.

The second aspect of the hybridity tradition, and its occasional echoes in the sociology of immigration and cultural sociology, that sets it at odds with recent approaches to everyday identity and culture in sociology is an almost complete emphasis on a fixed or solid-seeming product – i.e. a new “identity,” “culture,” or “group” – at the expense of attention to *process*, to *how* these seemingly stable multi-cultural entities are formulated, reified, and continually sustained through social action (Drummond 1980, Hannerz 1987, Alba and Nee 2003). While treating an outcome of cultural mixing as a solid object may make sense when one is analyzing an artistic product, applying this tendency to studies of multicultural subjects such as immigrants and other cultural minorities can cause us to imbue the social constructions of “identity,” “culture” and “group” with a solidity and a permanence they do not possess.⁸ More importantly, this intellectual reification draws our attention away from the particular ways that such multicultural experiences and formations are created in the first place, and the causes and consequences of these processes of social construction (Brubaker 2004, Levitt 2005, Wolf 1997).

⁸ This was, in fact, how most analytically inclined people I spoke to would classify the case of the Legendz when presented with the data. After hearing a presentation on the group, one professor simply commented, “Oh, they are forming a new kind of identity.” Similarly, an adult who knew the Legendz from the mosque once told me, “We’re seeing an American Islam here that’s very modern.”

In taking on a similar substantive issue as the hybridity theorists but applying a sociological sensibility, I will utilize two specific analytical approaches, both of which have been informed by recent theoretical and empirical advances related to the management of cultures in social life. First, my analysis seeks to understand my subjects and their attempts to manage multicultural commitments *as they are situated within and shaped by their specific and immediate social contexts*. As young American Muslims who practice their religion, regularly attend a relatively liberal mosque and youth group, go to public school, and have parents from Arab, African, and South Asian countries, the Legendz inhabit a specific multicultural social landscape different from young American Muslims who attend a more conservative mosque, for example, or who do not attend a mosque at all. In other words, the particular multicultural nature of the Legendz' lives is not defined solely, or even primarily, by their identification as Muslims and American teenagers, but is rather shaped by the specific ways that these cultural systems are arrayed in their daily lives, as well as their own navigations through this multicultural ecology (cf. Sewell 1999, Brekhus 2003, Lacy 2004, R. Smith 2005, Carter 2006, Warikoo 2007). Maintaining a sense of the importance of settings, institutions, cultural authorities (such as religious leaders and parents), and peer groups – and the specific pressures these social formations exert as well as the actions they facilitate – will counter the tendency to portray multicultural subjects as freely agentive and without constraint (Anthias 2001). In this way, I will demonstrate that the living of a certain kind of multicultural life is conditioned by local institutions, power dynamics, cultural formations, and social actors in interaction with one another.

Secondly, I want to temper the tendency to focus on a newly produced multicultural entity – “identity” or “culture” – by training analytical attention on the *processes* of multicultural

navigation. As mentioned above, one reason to focus on process is that such an approach can illuminate the frequently overlooked means by which social actors manage a life characterized by multiple cultural systems (McGown 1999, Carter 2005, Levitt 2005, Lamphere 2007).

Another reason, though, and one consistent with this project's use of the ethnographic analytical method of "modified grounded theory" (Timmermans and Tavory 2007), is that a processual emphasis hews more closely to everyday life as it is lived by my subjects, and probably by most people. For the Legendz, moving through a young life inflected with both Islamic and American symbols and practices is never a finished product that somehow culminates in a frozen identity, culture, or state of assimilation. Rather, it is a relentlessly ongoing experience, a confluence of divergent cultures, settings, and actors to be continually considered, navigated, and managed.

This emphasis on motion does not mean that these process do not result in identifiable developments or consequences. As will be seen, the ways in which the Legendz manage multicultural situations, in interaction with their particular social environments, do produce novel ways of appearing bi-cultural, of blending Islamic and American cultural schemas, and of navigating cultural minority status in America. Yet, these productions are themselves new processes – performances, practices, and rituals – to be applied, guided, and experienced in the ongoing flow of everyday life.

The Social Concerns of Adolescence and Cultural Agency

Common conceptions of "adolescence" – at both an academic and everyday level – vacillate between a sociological constructivism and a psychological essentialism, sometimes within the same analysis. On one hand, social historians have argued, and most sociologists agree, that

adolescence, and the stages of the “life course” more generally, are historically and socially produced modes of organization, initially wrought by changes in the division of labor as part of the industrial revolution, and then reproduced by institutional embeddedness and generally accepted patterns of social interaction (Coleman 1962, Gillis 1975, Meyer 1986, Kohli 1986, Furstenberg 2000). At the same time, classic and still influential studies of adolescence from the disciplines of psychology and social psychology highlight the role of adolescence as a time of individual “identity development” (Erikson 1968: 23), “self-definition” (Friedenberg 1964: 9) and the accomplishment of specific “developmental tasks” (Havighurst 1952), assumptions that often shape the expectations of those who empirically study young people. More recent sociological approaches have sought to split the difference, maintaining a focus on “life transitions” and “identity explorations” of young people while simultaneously acknowledging that this life stage, and the normative expectations associated with it, are maintained and shaped ongoing processes of social construction at the macro and micro levels (Arnett 2004, Shanahan 2007).

This dissertation will utilize a revised version of this final theoretical approach, addressing salient social processes of adolescence not as they are predicted, and reinforced, by biological or psychological explanations, but as they are experienced and understood by my subjects. Taking this analytical perspective, there is some overlap between the social psychological expectations of adolescence and the central preoccupations of my youth subjects, at least in three areas – the maintenance of peer group relations, the development of romantic relationships, and engagement with music and cultural expression. As such, my project will not only observe the particular ways in which these normative processes take place and are experienced by a real group of youth

in their daily lives, but also to what extent their navigations of Islamic and American youth cultural systems interact with these processes.

The adolescent friendship group is a central focus of my study because, as in the ethnographic work of Paul Willis (1981[1977]), Gary Alan Fine (1987), and Jay MacLeod (1987), it is the arena in which a great deal of the significant social interaction between teenage subjects takes place. Adolescent friendship groups are often experienced by youth as important havens from the restrictions and dominant values of adult society, yet they also frequently serve as mechanisms of transmission for these very same norms and values (Ausubel et al 1977, Willis 1982 [1977], MacLeod 1987, Corsaro 1992). Despite this ultimately socially reproductive function, adolescent peer groups are differentiated from – and, more importantly, are *experienced* as differentiated from – adult society in three important ways. First, they are social settings in which status can be sought and gained on terms that appear distinct from those that dominate the spheres of school, family, or work. Within a peer group, members are granted status and importance based on local and indigenous criteria, which might include capacities in slang and certain kinds of jokes, particular forms of fashion, expertise in popular music, abilities in specific sports, etc. (Ausubel 1977, Fine 1979). Second, while certainly subject to their own dynamics, friendships in peer groups are less hierarchical than parent-child or adult-child relationships, and as a result peer groups serve as “arenas of comfort” (Simmons and Blyth 1987) for teenagers, places where a sense of acceptance and a focus on the present leads to high levels of trust and self-disclosure (Giordano 2000). Finally, because of the trust and insularity that characterizes them, peer groups are settings in which teenagers can openly reflect on, question, make fun of, and challenge the norms of the adult-led society they normally inhabit. Related to this is the frequent presence of

activities considered “play” within adolescent gatherings. Through these interactions, in which the usual rules of social engagement are bracketed to allow for role-playing, enacted fantasy, and embodied joking (Goffman 1974, Denzin 1975, Fine 1987), teenagers engage in playful reflexivity regarding their cultural and social locations (Swidler 2001). Observing the Legendz interaction at the level of daily life and over time allowed me to witness the particular ways that friendship group interactions serve to challenge and/or reinforce norms of proper “Islamic” or “teenage” behavior, and the interpersonal processes through which these negotiations take place.

Though the Legendz clique was in place prior to my entry into the field, the development of romantic relationships between group members and young women is something that took place during my time with the group. The engagement with dating is another area in which the behavior of the Legendz, the actions of most American teenagers, and the predictions of adolescent psychology find common ground. By the end of high school, nearly 75% of adolescents report having had a romantic relationship in the last 18 months (Smetana et al 2006). Romantic relationships are an exciting new territory for young people, with a heightened emotionality that makes them a source of daily and constant concern for teenagers involved in them (Larson and Asmussen 1991). Although becoming more familiar with members of the opposite (and in some cases same) sex is a social expectation of youth, aligned with their preparation for marriage and family, adolescents receive quite conflicting messages regarding the appropriateness of sexual activity during their teenage years. While most adults in the US, nearly 80%, believe that teenage sex is always wrong (Savin-Williams and Diamond 2004) and religious traditions condemn it, sex and young love are consistently celebrated and promoted in the mass media. The United States provides its youth with a striking lack of cultural clarity

regarding pathways to love, sex, and marriage (Arnett 2004). For American adolescents, then, initial romantic relationships are an exercise in experimentation, both sexual and emotional, and “figuring it out.” As will be seen, the Legendz work to navigate the cultural systems of religious Islam and American youth culture in their daily lives has specific consequences as it intersects with a desire to engage in teenage courtship.

A third area where social research on adolescence and the lives of the Legendz dovetail is the centrality of music and cultural expression. For what are probably intertwining social and psychological reasons, US adolescents are the primary consumers of items of American popular culture, particularly popular music. Since the end of the World War II, major entertainment companies, and especially record companies, in the United States have relied on America’s relatively prosperous teenagers – with their adequate spending money and leisure time – as a reliable market for popular culture products (Frith 1981). At the same time, the emotionality, cultural innovations, and shared experience of popular music conspire to make it a worthwhile investment for adolescents, who often understand themselves to be experiencing exciting new emotions, needing to express their individuality, and seeking a peer group. As a result, music is consistently reported by youth to be one of their most rewarding activities and comprises the largest portion of their media usage (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984; Roberts et al 2004). Given that the lives of adolescents are known to be suffused with music, it is not surprising that hip hop music is one of the major preoccupations of my teenage subjects. In the case of the Legendz, the particular ways that they listen to, talk about, and reference hip hop music and culture in interaction provides them with a means of manifesting a bi-cultural identity which eases their multicultural balancing act.

As noted by social historian John Gillis, adolescence is a life stage characterized by both freedom and control (1974). On the one hand, young people in most countries are constantly subject to the actions and controls of various social institutions with vested interests in their behavior, whereabouts, and disposable income, including their family, school, law enforcement, peer groups, and entertainment, media, and fashion corporations (Frith 1981). At the same time, adolescence is a period of liminality, where a social location at the intersection of competing institutions, paired with a temporal stage distinct from childhood but not quite overlapping with adulthood, allows teenagers some space and time to buffet these various cultural influences and work to find their own means of expression and performed identity. Like scholars of multicultural subjects, some analysts of youth culture have overemphasized the ability of young people to generate new and liberating “subcultures,” a tendency which can overlook the fact that these new forms of expression are often limited, enabled, and even reappropriated by more powerful social institutions (Hebdige 1979, Hall and Jefferson 2006 [1975], Frank and Weiland 1997). However, it is undeniable that young people, including my subjects, do often experience adolescence as a period of great cultural freedom and creative expression. How can these characterizations of adolescence as a time of both independence and social constraint be reconciled?

The work of Paul Willis (1981[1977]) on working class youth in England provides a powerful heuristic for thinking about the way that adolescents – and cultural minority adolescents in particular – can both feel agentive and remain constrained by social forces during their teen years and beyond. In detailing the ways that the “Lads” freely embrace working class cultural scripts

even as this contributes to their assignment to a life of physical and material hardship, Willis demonstrates how the *experience* of cultural agency – lived out as the manipulation of cultural elements in one’s daily life – can ease, and even facilitate, the acceptance of a largely structurally pre-determined social position. While Willis’ story of the Lads says something important about issues of economic class and the educational system within industrialized societies, it also makes a crucial but often overlooked point about adolescence as a life stage. It is precisely because young people are socially permitted, and even expected, to experiment with varying cultural identities, performances, and behaviors during adolescence that this period of the life course is so effective at facilitating eventual conformity and the reproduction of society. As others have argued, and as I demonstrate here, the socially conditioned ability for young people to engage in pop cultural and countercultural rituals in adolescence which express independence and autonomy often works to make more palatable their acceptance of paths originating in social structures of the adult world – religious commitment, racial or ethnic identification, working class jobs, political quiescence (Wicke 1990, Frank and Weiland 1997). While certainly less stark than Willis’ tale – here, the Legendz find much to actually appreciate about being Muslim – the way that experiences of multicultural agency make the acceptance of socially derived life paths *feel* voluntary is the same. The story of the Legendz highlights the ways that the kind of cultural agency permitted in adolescence can contribute to the willing acceptance of socially proscribed identifications and behaviors during the transition to adulthood.

Everyday Religion, Stigma Management, and Muslim American Youth

In addition to illuminating processes by which cultural minorities – and especially youth – manage participation in multiple cultural systems in everyday life, this project makes

contributions to three areas of concern within sociology – religion and everyday life, stigma management, and Muslim social identity in the West. Regarding the first area, this project adopts and works to expand upon an emerging approach within the sociological study of religion known as “everyday religion” (Bender 2003, Lichterman 2005, Ammerman 2007). This approach to understanding the workings of religion in society focuses on the particular ways that religious people experience or express religious meaning or practice in everyday life, rather than assuming that those who carry a religious social identification are always and everywhere being “religious” (Lichterman 2012). In taking this tack, and in keeping with recent theoretical approaches to everyday identity and culture in sociology more broadly, everyday religion scholars seek to understand precisely where, when, and how religious meaning is achieved in everyday interaction, rather than assuming that it is constantly or consistently consequential (Brubaker 2006, Giddens 1991, McDermott 2006).

My project adopts the ground-level approach of the everyday religion scholars, but adds a specific concern with how the variable nature of religious identity and practice in everyday life intersects with competing cultural concerns of American youth culture, and broader American culture more generally. In treating both religious Islam and American youth culture as competing “meaning systems” (Besecke 2005), I am able to observe when, how, and with what consequences schemas, symbols, and practices associated with these differing systems are managed by my subjects. Specifically, the case of the Legendz demonstrates that religious and secular symbols and identifications are often given meaning through the particular ways the coming together of such elements are managed by religious people in interaction. In other words, the current study highlights the importance of observing and analyzing everyday religiosity as it

interacts with the other particular identifications, symbols, and institutions relevant to a given social actor's specific context (Orsi 1985; McDannell 1995; Byrne 2003; Clark 2002, 2007; Loomis 2004; Kaufman 2005), rather than as evidence of a coherent guiding moral framework (Smith 2003, 2010; Vaisey 2009). As will be seen, it is in the interaction of these competing cultural systems – and the subject's particular actions to manage them – that a specific version of religious or partially religious meaning, action, and/or identity arises in social life.

Regarding the ongoing sociological concern with the management of stigmatized identities, this project sheds light on the often-overlooked intra-group aspect of managing spoiled identities. As had been well documented, individuals who participate in minority cultural systems are often, though not always, vulnerable to social stigma, as the practices, symbols, and behaviors in which they engage may be considered outside the realm of normal activity or even linked with negative stereotypes (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Corrigan, Markowitz, and Watson 2004). As such, individuals who participate in a cultural system linked with a minority identification – i.e. religion, race or ethnicity, ability status, or sexuality – frequently do work to manage their stigmatized social status (Goffman 1963). The most widely discussed and documented kind of stigma management work is that which takes place in public, when a person with a spoiled social identity encounters nonstigmatized others and, in response, employs one or another interactional strategy, with some help from the nonstigmatized “normals” in the interaction (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Major and O'Brien 2005). An equally important but less explicitly theorized kind of stigma management work takes place in private, when persons with a shared stigmatized identification discuss their marginal social status and potential stigma management approaches among themselves or with sympathetic allies (Goffman 1963; Schneider and Conrad

1980). Such ingroup interactions addressing stigma and stigma management response have been discussed to some degree within sociology and social psychology (for a review see Herman-Kinney 2003:716). In addition, some ethnographic studies of small groups of individuals sharing racial, economic, or medical stigmas describe the ways in which group members help one another learn about, prepare for, or rehearse stigma management strategies (e.g., Spradley 1970; Schneider and Conrad 1980; Miall 1986).

What has been missing from these approaches is an in-depth and fine-grained analysis of how these backstage stigma management rehearsals work as interactions and an explanation of what these ingroup encounters reveal about the local stigma management culture of different collectivities of cultural minorities. Observing the Legendz in interaction with other Muslim identified youth and adults repeatedly and over time allowed me to construct an analysis of how stigmatized cultural minorities work together in private, backstage space to practice the public presentation of their stigmatized social identities. This part of the project draws attention to the local power dynamics involved in the management of multicultural everyday life, as religious and youth group leaders work to promote one approach to presenting Muslim identity and managing stigma that it not necessarily embraced by all youth in the group. These findings reveal that the management of participation in multiple cultures is a site of contestation, with various parties vying to promote a range of approaches.

Finally, this project aims to present a fresh perspective on the social lives of Muslim American youth. The most prominent scholarly works produced on Muslim American youth focus on one, or both, of two themes. The first is the struggles faced by certain Muslim American youth and

their families in the face of increased government surveillance, law enforcement actions, travel restrictions, and media and everyday stereotyping in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Bayoumi 2008, Sirin and Fine 2008, Cainkar 2009, Maira 2009). While these works provide important accounts of the experiences of those directly impacted by a tightening, and often religiously profiling domestic security state⁹, they do not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of the potentially less spectacular or dramatic central concerns and daily preoccupations of Muslim American youth themselves (see Brekhus 1998). This targeted focus on political issues affecting Muslim youth and their families is both understandable and appreciated, but it should not be taken as a representation of daily life as it lived by most Muslim American teenagers. Indeed, any notions I had of finding a group of daily harassed and struggling youth was quickly dispelled by spending time in the presence of the Legendz and their friends, whose lives were suffused with everyday concerns of adolescence – music, friends, social status, romantic life, money, school, and parents. This is not to say that the Legendz or other Muslim American youth do not face harassment and discrimination at some times and in some situations, but rather to suggest that broadening our analytical focus from the “political” aspects of young Muslims’ lives to capture a wider scope of their social realities will allow for a more comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of these multi-faceted subjects.

The second theme that dominates scholarly works on Muslim American youth is more in line with my own focus, and compatible with what I identified as a primary and ongoing, if subtle, dimension of social action in the lives of my subjects – the management of multiple cultural affiliations (Sirin and Fine 2008, Ajrouch 1999, Eisenlohr 1999, Swanson 1996). As Sana Maira

⁹ See also Howell and Shryock (203) and Ibish (2008) on this point.

(2009: 162) points out, research on the daily cultural negotiations of Muslim American youth can sometimes overemphasize the “caught between two worlds” aspect of this life, and portray the cultures being balanced as solid, stable, and irreconcilable. I would add that these approaches – and the politically focused one outlined above – can conspire to portray young Muslim Americans as traumatized victims, constantly struggling in a world of cultural and political clashes. Others prioritizing the multicultural navigations of young Muslims have stayed closer to the everyday realities of these youth, and have therefore presented something more akin to what I provide here (Abu-Laban and Abu-Laban 1999, Sarroub 2005, Ali 2008, Maira 2009:128-189) – a depiction of the everyday lives of young American Muslims focused on the preoccupations and concerns that my young subjects themselves – rather than I – consider central and treat as consequential to daily social life (Tavory and Timmermans 2012). This approach does not advocate an intentional disregard of issues of political relevance, but rather seeks to place these issues and their local effects in the context of life as it is lived and experienced by Muslim youth themselves.

Subjects and Settings: The Legendz and their Social Worlds

Located near downtown, the City Mosque is one of the oldest and most well known mosques in the area, and was one of the first Islamic places of worship to be established in the state in the 1950’s. Since that time, and taking a more overt form in the 1970s, its leadership has intentionally worked to provide a mosque where members of various ethnicities, nationalities, and sects come together to worship; where engagement in the broader civic and political community is encouraged; where men and women can mix with relative ease; where interfaith

efforts are commonplace; and where the formation of a “Muslim American identity” is something to be intentionally undertaken. While these characteristics have contributed to the City Mosque’s reputation as a “liberal” mosque (which can be seen as either a positive or negative quality, depending on where you stand), it, and some of its members, still maintain certain “traditional” practices associated with Islam and Muslim cultures. For example, while men and women are permitted to mingle freely in the front lobby and social hall, and while women are not required to cover their hair with *hijab* while in the mosque, women are still required to pray in a segregated group behind the men, and women are at no time permitted to lead prayer. In another practice reflective of the particular version of Islamic practice imported to the United States primarily via immigrants from the Middle East, music (and certainly dancing) is not allowed within the mosque space. As well, the idea of young people engaging in “dating” or romantic relationships with one another, and the implicit suggestion of sex before marriage, is strongly discouraged by mosque leadership and many parents in the community. In other words, and certainly in relation to my young subjects, the City Mosque and its Muslim Youth Program are sites of the continued reification of – and attempted socialization of community members in – a religious Islamic culture (Cornell 1996, Sewell 1999, Brubaker 2004).

Attending the City Mosque, then, and being a practicing second-generation Muslim youth in general, frequently involves facing some restrictions on what is generally accepted as normal teenage behavior in American society. At the same time, youth who come to the mosque, and who participate in the mosque’s Muslim Youth Program (MYP), benefit greatly from having a social center, a place where they come regularly, and where they know others and others know them. This is especially important for members of the friendship group of young men at the

center of this study. Because the Legendz are working class youth growing up in a relatively dangerous urban neighborhood, having a space to congregate outside of school and home is of great importance. The mosque, and the Muslim Youth Group, serves as such a location for the Legendz, and some of them even credit it with helping to keep them away from gangs and drugs. Yusef, the oldest member of the group, who flirted with gang life in his early high school years but managed to pull things together enough to get into and succeed in a State college, says of the mosque, “It just feels safer and more fun here. People take care of each other and look out for each other...I call it my sanctuary.” At another level, the mosque and youth group provides a place where kids who share the experience of carrying a Muslim identification in the contemporary US can share stories and swap strategies for navigating cultures and dealing with occasional harassment. Aziz, a tangential member of the Legendz, says, “People here understand what you’re going through. Because they get called the same kind of names.” At a more basic level, though, the mosque serves as a vital space for recurring sociality, where, like Slim’s Table or Tally’s Corner, people come to see, check-in on, and hang out with one another, a crucible for the formation of social relations in the midst of the city.

The City Mosque is where the friendships that constitute the Legendz group were born, when two 1.5 generation African immigrant brothers and two 1.5 generation Arab immigrant brothers began attending *Qur’an* classes at Islamic Sunday School at the mosque. Although they spent a lot of time “skipping class and hiding in the bushes out by the basketball court,” one of each of the sets of brothers – older African brother Muhammad, whose parents immigrated to the City from Africa via Canada, and younger Arab brother Abdul, whose parents came from a Middle Eastern country via Saudi Arabia – became close friends. Both of the boys’ families are solidly

working class in the US, with their parents working as teachers, social workers, and cab drivers. Over time, the four brothers – Muhammad and Yassir, Yusef and Abdul – formed a tight friendship clique, which often included one or two additional members rotating in or out. For most of my tenure with the Legendz, the most consistent fifth member was Zaid, a South Asian youth, but the crew also occasionally included Hasan, another South Asian teen, or Awad, the bi-racial son of American converts. As predicted by adolescent psychology, the boys grew increasingly interested in young women over the period of my research – which spanned their transition from early to late adolescence (in the case of the younger boys) or from late adolescence to early young adulthood (in the case of the older ones). As such, time spent with the boys also became time spent with their female friends, some of whom I also came to know quite well.

As a result of growing up as practicing Muslims within a Muslim community and with regular access to a mosque, the Legendz regularly participate in rituals and behaviors associated with religious Islam and Muslim identification– from the more formalized and overt (daily praying, mosque attendance) to the institutionalized and generally unspoken (abstaining from alcohol, pork, and pre-marital sex) to the more subtle and fleeting (using Arabic phrases and greetings, joking about being called “terrorists”). As American teenagers, the Legendz spend time together engaged in and talking about a range of urban adolescent male preoccupations such as music (mostly hip-hop), skateboarding, basketball, dating, movies and TV, videos, friends, and other family and community members. The Legendz participated in this array of cultural practices – some overtly “Muslim” (prayer, fasting), some overtly “American youth” (skateboarding, hip hop), some neither – across a range of social spaces, some tagged as “Muslim” (the mosque),

some tagged as “youth culture” (hip hop performance space), some neither. Sometimes the practices engaged by the Legendz cleanly overlapped with the cultural identity of the space they were in (i.e. praying in the mosque), and sometimes they did not (i.e. praying at a public beach). The everyday experience of this wide range of cultural or multicultural configurations, and the attempt to move through them with a minimum of social friction, were defining characteristics of the Legendz’ daily lives.

The Legendz spent a significant amount of their time – probably 15-20 hours per week, on average – at the mosque, and their best and closest friends and family members are practicing Muslims. To this extent, a good portion of their daily lives is set within a Muslim “world” (Brubaker 2006). At the same time, the youth attend public high schools and colleges, which has exposed them to members of a wide range of ethnic, racial, and religious groups. One interesting result of this is that Abdul, the younger Palestinian brother, is proficient in Spanish and is often mistaken for a Latino. In another interethnic occurrence, two of the Legendz worked at a community recording studio intended for and run by second-generation Filipino immigrants, most of whom are Catholic. In addition, while Muslim may be the Legendz most often and deeply felt social identity, it is by no means their only one, and it cross-cuts with other identifications – their parents’ home countries, their gender, “people of color” more broadly, their neighborhood, and with different youth leisure cultures such as hip hop and skateboarding. In the end, though, Islam – as both a set of religious practices and meanings, and as a felt and socially structuring group identification – is a central and consequential presence in their lives.

Methods: Ethnographic Field Work and Analysis

My project uses participant observation, as well as informal and formal interviews, to collect data documenting the everyday interactions and broader perspectives of the five Muslim youth who comprise the Legendz clique, as well as their peers, parents, and religious leaders. I conducted three and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork with the Legendz, spending an average of 5-10 hours per week in their company. My fieldwork resulted in over 1500 pages of single-spaced typed field notes. I recorded field notes in one of two ways, depending on the setting. In cases of youth group meetings, I hand wrote field notes while at the site, as writing did not create a disturbance. I then typed up notes that evening or the following day. In more informal gatherings, where I felt that writing notes would create a barrier, I would simply observe while at the site. Immediately after returning, I would type up everything I could remember from my observations.

I first learned about the City Mosque through a friend of my wife, and I called the Religious Director of the mosque to ask him about volunteering, as well as conducting ethnographic research there. During this call I was able to mention the name of my wife's friend, which seemed to help smooth the interaction. He was friendly and responsive, and the next week I went to the mosque on a Sunday, the major day of activity there. I quickly found a role volunteering with the mosque's youth program. This position came easily to me because I have extensive experience working with middle- and high-school aged youth. There were other activities and groups within the mosque, each which may have made for an equally interesting project. There is

a weekly Intro to Islam Class, as well as meetings that gather and instruct new converts to Islam. There were many meetings and events focused on political and civil liberties concerns of Muslims in post-9/11 America. And, as with many community-based institutions, there were dynamic struggles between an older generation of leaders, and younger participants who wanted to bring reforms to the mosque. But my deepening connection with, and therefore increased access to, the Legendz, as well as the theoretically relevant issues that kept cropping up in their lives, led me to focus on these youth and their particular situations.

The project employed a modified grounded theory approach to ethnography (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Timmermans and Tavory 2007), in which the researcher chooses the site and enters the field with a general idea of, and familiarity with, the potential issues to be investigated. Then, through the research and analysis process, questions are sharpened and foci of investigation and analysis honed as prominent themes and salient patterns emerge from the data. I entered the field with an interest in whether and how practitioners of a minority religion engage with their faith, as well as a curiosity about the particular social location of American Muslims following the attacks of 9/11 and the US government response, both foreign and domestic. Over time, my focus narrowed to a specific group of young people, the Legendz, and I began to witness the particular ways that this group of friends – with other peers, parents, religious leaders, settings, and media influences – would work to manage participation in the various cultural systems that intersected in their everyday lives. During the early stages of my fieldwork, I conducted multiple rounds of data analysis to hone in on the guiding theme for the project, which became the identification of everyday processes for managing multiple cultural allegiances.

Informed by my narrowing analytical focus, and enabled by my increased closeness with the Legendz, I began to accompany the boys away from the mosque and youth group setting, and spent time with them in range of social spaces. After a few months of attending weekly Sunday youth group meetings at the mosque, I had become interested in seeing the Legendz' lives and interactions beyond the mosque walls. As a result, I first started to hang out with the boys outside of these official meetings in different parts of the mosque, in the back parking lot, and in out of the way corners where they would have private conversations, make jokes, and engage in play. I began to notice that the Legendz and their friends would occasionally go somewhere for lunch after the meetings, and I hung around long enough to get invited to these lunches. These "off-campus" lunches led to increased hanging out with the boys in different locations around the neighborhood, and eventually into their homes and other destinations. These other locations – which allowed me to observe their behaviors relating to Islamic and American youth culture across different settings – included neighborhood streets and stores near the mosque, their families' homes, malls and movie theaters, local youth centers and parks, hip hop concerts and recording studios, and their cars en route to these destinations.

My own religious identification as a Muslim seemed to play an important role in my gaining access to the site and the youth. First, I likely would not have been tapped into the social networks through which I found and gained access to the mosque in the first place were I not an identifying Muslim. Second, once I began to attend the mosque, I was able to demonstrate practices and knowledge that signaled that I was a Muslim, which allowed me to establish connections to people more quickly than otherwise may have been the case. These identity signals included using the traditional Muslim greeting "*A salaam aleikum*" (peace be upon you)

and response “*Waleikum a salaam*” (and upon you be peace); knowing how to perform prayer (*salat*); participating in fasting during Ramadan; and introducing myself (and having others introduce me) as a Muslim. While the City Mosque is a relatively open and liberal mosque, often inviting members from other faiths as well as the broader community to learn about Islam, there are still conversations that took place regarding issues of faith and cultural dynamics that I likely would not have been privy to had I not openly identified myself as a “Muslim.”

Getting to know the Legendz took the use of other kinds of identity signals beyond the religious. A working knowledge of hip hop music, and popular music in general, seemed to help, as did a familiarity and facility with a kind of self-reflexive humor about ethnicity, class, religion and social identity that I have found to be prevalent among urban youth of color. The fact that I had spent a semester abroad in college in Africa seemed to make an impression on Muhammad and Yassir. But the openness and trusting nature of the youth themselves was critical to the establishment of a rapport and connection with them. As positive as I feel about the inroads I have made into the lives of these youth, I also appreciate Mitch Duneier’s humbling warning in *Sidewalk* (1990), that in the end, we never really know to what extent our informants trust us and tell us the truth; we can only make our best effort.

To analyze my data, I utilized modified grounded theory, which emphasizes allowing locally prominent themes to emerge from the data through multiple rounds of inductive analysis (Glaser and Straus 1967, Katz 2001, Timmermans and Tavory 2007). During my fieldwork, I conducted data analysis every few months to locate salient themes. These themes, in turn, helped to guide my continuing data collection and analysis. I believe these approaches yielded a data-driven

analysis in which the local meanings of the research subjects have taken center stage. Meetings with my advisor also proved crucial in tailoring the ongoing work. I have found a modified grounded theory approach to be quite useful for this project, as at times I could see where my own biases or interests – in the political rights of American Muslims, or in the harassment experienced by Muslim youth – might have steered me to fit the data to my concerns, to squeeze my subjects into the story I wanted to tell. But the method’s relentless return to the data itself ensured that I could never really do this, and what has emerged is, I hope, a finished product that accurately and sensitively portrays the complex lives of my subjects and their management of multicultural lives.

Plan of the Dissertation

As befits this project’s methodological and analytical focus on processes, each of the dissertation’s main chapters will identify and elucidate one social process through which the Legendz – sometimes in conjunction with their peers and community adults – manage participation in multiple cultural systems in their daily lives. Chapter Two will demonstrate how the boys engage in specific interactional strategies of cultural reception – or “listening practices” (De Nora 2000) – in order to thread the needle between involvement in religious Islam and secular hip hop culture, and produce a bi-cultural identity performance that I call *cool piety*. Chapter Three details the way that the Legendz use cultural schemas drawn from religious Islam to mitigate the ambiguity in American dating practices, and in so doing move themselves towards a more normatively “Muslim” form of social life. Chapter Four illustrates how the Legendz and their peers, guided by religious and youth program leaders, practice ways to

manage their cultural minority status in public through backstage interactions which I term *stigma management rehearsals*. Finally, Chapter Five reviews the broader social consequences of these processes of cultural management for my Muslim American subjects and for cultural minorities more generally. Overall, I argue that is the direct *experience* of these processes of cultural management – in interaction with their particular social context – that makes the Legendz into certain kinds of multicultural subjects, and allows them to engage in American youth practices while still hewing closely to an Islamic behavioral normativity, religious practice, and social identification.

CHAPTER TWO

Religious Youth, Secular Hip Hop, and ‘Cool Piety’

Like other “highly religious” young people in the United States – adolescents who regularly engage in traditional religious practices and are socially enmeshed in faith-based communities (Smith and Denton 2005)– the Legendz face a cultural dilemma regarding their involvement with mainstream popular culture. On the one hand, popular culture products carry significant appeal for young people, as they provide teenagers with the aesthetic means for expressing a stylistic individuality, demonstrating a measure of rebellion from adult norms, displaying cultural know-how to peers, and simply experiencing pleasure (Carter 2005, Hebdige 1979, Hoover 2006). At the same time, much of American pop culture includes references to or portrayals of social behaviors considered sacrilegious by most major religious traditions and their leaders – including Islam – such as extra-marital sex, drug and alcohol use, and profane language (Rossman 2009). The cultural friction between American pop culture and traditional religious morality places highly religious American adolescents like the Legendz in a contradictory situation in which a core social expectation of their age group – active involvement in pop culture – is at odds with a core social expectation of their religious tradition – the abstention from cultural materials with profane content.

The majority of the scholarship addressing religious youth and pop culture focuses on how the pop culture-religion tension is managed at the level of institutions, through the production of religiously appropriate versions of pop culture products for youth by religious leaders, companies, and artists (Flory and Miller 2008, Hendershot 2004, Howard and Streck 1999, Luhr 2009, Rossman 2009, Sanchez-Walsh 2003). While research on institutional resolutions to the

pop culture-religion dilemma is useful as an account of the actions and intentions of institutions and leaders, it often leaves a crucial piece of puzzle uninvestigated – the experience of religious young people themselves regarding pop culture and religiosity. The omission of religious youth’s firsthand experiences from this scholarship presents two interrelated problems. First, research slanted heavily towards institutional concerns can carry the unspoken assumption that the sacralized pop culture materials produced by organizations are unproblematically received and consumed by religious youth in precisely the ways that leaders intend. Such implications of cultural passivity on the part of religious youth, however inadvertent, not only contradict the findings of sociologists on the active ways young people appropriate pop cultural materials (Hebdige 1979, Willis 1978), but also play into the troublesome but prevalent characterization of religious meaning as flowing in a single direction from the holy book or religious leader into the head of the religious person (Ammerman 2003, Lichterman 2012). Second, institutional level analyses overlook the possibility that religious young people engage in their own strategies to manage the pop culture-religion dilemma in their everyday lives. To assess whether and how religious youth navigate the tension between their daily religious and pop cultural commitments it is necessary to turn the focus of analytical attention from the institutional level workings of cultural production (Peterson 2004) to the ground level processes of cultural reception (Griswold 1987).

The Everyday Reception of Cultural Materials

Sociologists of culture argue that the meaning of a given cultural good – song, painting, TV show – does not reside within the work itself, but is produced in the interaction between the

aesthetic item in question and a receiving audience (Griswold 1987, Peterson 2000). Research on cultural reception has demonstrated that people often interact with cultural goods in active ways that reflect their social identities (i.e. class, race, gender) and frequently – though not always – express dissatisfaction with their social circumstances (Duncan and Brummet 1993, Ehrenreich and Hess 1992, Fiske 1993, Griswold 1987, Liebes and Katz 1990, Press 1991, Radway 1991). For example, Fiske (1993) found that when disenfranchised homeless men watched the movie *Die Hard* together, they energetically cheered for the weaker party in every violent confrontation, even when this meant rooting against the movie’s “hero.” Similarly, Hebdige (1979) detailed the ways that disaffected working class British punks repurposed mass-produced materials into an aggressive style of fashion aimed at disrupting the aesthetic order of everyday life.

While such canonical reception studies helpfully established the active role that consumers of culture play in making meaning in ways relevant to their social circumstance, they also carried two theoretical assumptions that limited their generalizability, especially regarding modern social subjects. First, reception studies tended to treat social identities as preconstituted motivators of reception. That is, even when reception scholars emphasized the ability of actors to challenge the social status associated with their identity group (Press 1991) or forge new subcultural identities (Hebdige 1979), these reception activities were still explained as a result of their primary membership in a stable identity group (e.g. working class women, homeless men). Since these studies, sociologists have convincingly asserted that people are rarely in a situation of allegiance to a single overarching identity, but rather experience cross-cutting and fluctuating social identifications, which vary in relevance and impact in the course of everyday life

(Ammerman 2003, Brubaker 2006, Giddens 1991, McDermott 2006). Along the same lines, influential reception studies have tended to prioritize the question of resistance to or acceptance of cultural hegemony over all other potential concerns of culturally consuming subjects (Bennett 2002). As a result, this body of research has overlooked the myriad modes through which subjects can engage with cultural materials, in ways relevant to their particular and locally resonant social concerns.

Works on cultural reception since the 1990s have adopted the canonical works' important emphasis on the agency of consumers and have brought two significant theoretical improvements to bear – a sensitivity to the diverse social concerns of modern subjects (beyond the acceptance or rejection of hegemony) and an awareness of the fluctuating and constructed nature of contemporary social identities. Regarding the first point, Tia De Nora (2000) demonstrates the immense range of everyday social uses to which individuals can put musical materials, including the construction of settings, the coordination of group action, and the regulation of one's mood. Further reception-oriented scholarship in the sociology of music demonstrates the variety of everyday cultural work that actors can do through specific kinds of interactions with music – what De Nora calls “musical practices” – including establishing realms of fantasy within everyday life (Malbon 1999), gaining “authentic” nightlife experiences (Grazian 2003), and building interethnic religious congregations (Marti forthcoming). Like their predecessors, post-1990s reception scholars make social identities a prominent concern, but rather than treating the reception of cultural goods as a reflection of fundamental pre-existing identities, these researchers demonstrate the ways that cultural reception works towards the construction and maintenance of contingent and complex social identifications. For example, this research has

shown that young people can consume pop culture – and frequently music – in ways that demonstrate or encourage allegiance to a traditional social identity (e.g. African-American), an organization or subculture that crosses boundaries of traditional social identities (e.g. a social movement or music scene), or a culturally relevant and appealingly complicated version of a traditional identity (e.g. hip hop Indian, basketball-playing Catholic) (Byrne 2003, Carter 2006, Frith 1996, Gilroy 1991, Malbon 1999, Marti forthcoming, Roy 2010, Wood 2006, Warikoo 2007).

In this same vein, scholars studying the relationship of young peoples' *religious* identities to their pop culture reception have treated identities as socially constructed and contingent. They have also demonstrated that, in addition to traditional religious institutions and sacralized pop culture, *secular* pop culture can play an important role in the religious identity work of young people (Byrne 2003; Clark 2002, 2007; Loomis 2004). This line of argument – made by Clark (2002) and supported by Loomis (2004) – asserts that religious youth draw on symbols and representations from nominally non-religious books, movies, and TV shows to construct explanations and understandings of the transcendent, the otherworldly, and the spiritual. In other words, religious youth use pop culture forms to make sense of and concretize abstract religious ideas as they discuss them. Taking a more action-oriented approach, Byrne (2003) shows how through the act of playing basketball, college-age Catholic women came to more deeply embrace their religion, in part because they experienced faith as something immediate and dynamic. These players used basketball to engage in an “improvised” and “customized” version of Catholicism, where physical pleasure mixed with religious commitment.

In addition to supporting the assertion that secular pop culture can serve as a resource through which young people forge and experience fresh versions of traditional religious identities, this chapter makes two original contributions.

First, it is not simply a more lively experience of one's religion that pop culture engagement provides. It is also through such engagement that one can temporarily experience, and project to others, a simultaneous expression of religious piety and secular cool. This desirable, if challenging, identity performance is a key step in the process of making the religious life more palatable and enjoyable to youth, as well as making a blend of piety and secularity seem possible to young religious people. Second, it is not just the engagement with pop culture, but specifically *how* it is engaged with, that make these materials useful resources for religious youth managing the pop culture-religiosity dilemma. My paper demonstrates the active and specific ways that youth interact with rap music to manage the cultural tension between profane music and religious morality and project a *cool piety*. As will be seen, in doing this ground level cultural work, Muslim youth use the flexibility and mobility of modern pop culture to play off the symbolic "rootedness" of traditional Islam. More generally, these findings suggest that the generation of bi-cultural identity performances and experiences through pop culture reception practices is one everyday means through which modern actors manage situations of conflicting cultural demands.

The Musical Practices of the Legendz

The Legendz are practicing Muslims and demonstrate a consistent adherence to the basic tenets of Islamic behavior as it is locally understood – saying daily prayers; abstaining from alcohol,

drugs, and premarital sex; observing dietary guidelines; and expressing belief in Allah (God), the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad. The boys spend the majority of their non-school time within social worlds associated with Islam – the mosque, the youth group, their own families, and their all-Muslim friendship group. The Legendz are also ardent fans of hip hop music, and spend much of their time together listening to, talking about, informally performing, and making references to secular hip hop albums, artists, songs, and videos. Due to the nature of the genre, especially in its mainstream and most accessible manifestation, many of the hip hop songs listened to and talked about by the Legendz include the frequent use of profane language, sexual imagery, references to drugs and alcohol, and/or descriptions of graphic violence.

To manage the tension between religious commitments and secular pop culture participation in their daily lives, the Legendz utilize three distinct musical practices. First, by applying religious guidelines to their music listening, the Legendz work to enjoy the pleasures of secular hip hop while remaining “good Muslims.” Second, by collaboratively locating Islamic symbols nested within otherwise secular hip hop songs, the boys work to experience orthodox religiosity through culturally youthful means. Third, by making constant, fleeting references to hip hop’s un-Islamic elements, the Legendz work to briefly pivot away from religious orthodoxy, and suggest a secular worldliness in conjunction with their religious devotion. Each of these practices involves a conscious consideration of Islamic practices, and therefore pushes the Legendz deeper into an Islamic moral order. At the same time, each of these practices also involves an engagement with secular hip hop, and therefore allow the Legendz to experience – and express – Muslim identity as something fun, agentive, and compatible with youthful independence. The Legendz address the pop culture-religiosity dilemma by utilizing this assemblage of musical reception techniques

to manifest a way of being a devout Muslim that attempts to pay homage to both their secular adolescent and religious Islamic obligations – a *cool piety*. As will be seen, cool piety is not a solidified identity or subculture, but an ongoing project that must be constantly maintained with subtle interactional work, carefully deployed symbolic signals, and routinized musical practices.

The Legendz' ability to manage the pop culture-religion dilemma is not purely a result of their own efforts. Two characteristics of their local cultural context help to make their negotiations workable. The first is the relatively liberal interpretation of the permissibility of music held by the leadership of the Legendz' mosque. While hip hop music containing profane sentiments is certainly not permitted in their religious community, a general laxity regarding music opens the door for the Legendz's musical practices to take place. Second, the Legendz's musical practices are aided by the sizable number of rap artists who are either Muslim, or have a familiarity with Islamic ideas. This characteristic of the hip hop genre enables the Legendz to experience – and jointly celebrate - an aesthetic commensurability of secular music and religious symbolism that would be otherwise unlikely. In the end, though, it is the Legendz own active reception of hip hop that gives locally resonant meaning to the music, in ways that allow them to develop and embrace a vital version of Islamic being.

Islamic Listening: Applying Religious Rules to Hip Hop Engagement

The leaders of the Legendz's mosque do not, as some Muslim religious authorities do, argue that all secular music is *haram*, or religiously forbidden. They do, however, openly disapprove of music that includes references to or is seen as encouraging *haram* behaviors such as dancing, the

use of alcohol or drugs, profane language, and pre-marital sex. As one mosque leader told me, “*Halal* [permissible] music is *halal*. *Haram* music is *haram*.” This local judgment on music casts much of mainstream hip hop out of the sphere of acceptability, and presents the Legendz with a practical cultural dilemma: how do they engage with their beloved hip hop music while spending time together in settings where Islamically appropriate behavior is the norm? The answer, for the Legendz, lies in *how* they listen to the music. By consciously and carefully working to interact with hip hop in religiously appropriate ways, the Legendz strive to invent and practice modes of “Islamic listening.” One example of Islamic listening took place one Sunday afternoon in the main lobby of the mosque as Muhammad spoke with two friends, Aziz and Hasan. Earlier, Muhammad had been telling the other two boys that he had some new hip hop by a Somali rapper.

Muhammad lets Aziz listen to the Somali rap on his MP3 player, and then passes it to Hasan. Hasan starts moving his body to the music. Muhammad reaches out both of his open hands towards Hasan, and in an exaggerated Arab accent, says, “There is no dancing in the mosque, brother.” Hasan smiles and stops dancing, but keeps listening and bobbing his head slightly. Muhammad smiles.

Here we see Muhammad encouraging a specific way of listening to hip hop within the mosque – bobbing one’s head but not dancing – that is less likely to clash with local Islamic behavioral standards. While the mosque location suggests a general standard of Islamic conduct, Muslim theology provides no particular guidance regarding listening to secular music in a sacred space. The Legendz work to fill this gap by providing themselves and their friends with ad-hoc solutions for being a pious Muslim fan of secular hip hop.

In practicing and sharing religiously acceptable modes of hip hop listening, the Legendz work to manage the pop culture-religion dilemma in ways that neither require them to abandon their Islamic piety nor to shun secular hip hop. Two elements of Islamic listening interactions, both evident in this example, demonstrate how this musical practice allows the Legendz to feel that they are staying true to both their religious practice and their identities as hip hop fans. First, Islamic listening requires an active and conscious engagement with norms of good Muslim behavior. While most of the Legendz' daily activities tend to be either nominally secular (school, basketball, skateboarding) or overtly religious (praying, Qur'an class), listening to hip hop in the mosque falls between these spheres and, as such, requires the Legendz to proactively orient themselves as religiously devout subjects in relation to a secular phenomena and to take a visible stand on these matters. This is what Muhammad does, when he tells Hasan, "There is no dancing in the mosque, brother." In this way, and due to the music's problematic relation to Islam, hip hop listening in Islamic settings becomes an occasion for what is otherwise a rare occurrence in the Legendz' daily lives – the open articulation and application of Islamic behavioral guidelines to their own actions. In practicing Islamic listening, the Legendz actively work to make their behavior "Muslim," in a way that works with their hip hop fandom.

A second element of this interaction also demonstrates how Islamic listening allows the Legendz to still feel like real hip hoppers, even as they curtail music listening with religious rules. Here, as in other cases of Islamic listening, the Legendz make sure to signal allegiance to youth culture in the course of the interaction. In the current example, Muhammad signifies this allegiance in two ways – by allowing Hasan to continue listening to the music and bobbing his head and by parodying the accent of an Arab "mosque elder" while delivering his Islamic injunction.

Enlisting a comedic trope well known within mosque youth circles – the overly serious and uncool mosque authority figure – Muhammad works to let Hasan know that he is on his (and hip hop’s) “side,” even as he actively restricts Hasan’s behavior to align with Islamic expectations. In signifying allegiance to youth culture in the course of promoting Islamic listening, the Legendz demonstrate to themselves and others that while they may be applying a religious norm in these particular cases, they still maintain a youth-oriented perspective and are not therefore completely beholden to Islam.

The combination of open application of religious rules and signifying allegiance to youth culture which characterizes Islamic listening allows the Legendz to demonstrate a knowledge of and affinity for youth musical culture even as they work to partially conform it to Islamic standards. A second example of Islamic listening, which took place during a hip hop performance by the Legendz at a Muslim youth arts showcase, reinforces this point. As was always the case when the boys performed before a Muslim audience, their songs were free of profane language or references to sex, drugs, or alcohol. The Legendz were received warmly by the audience of other youth, parents, and mosque leaders. The morning after the performance, the Legendz recounted the successful show with Michael, one of the youth program staff.

Michael and the boys talk about their show last night. Michael says, “The sound was pretty messed up.” Abdul says, “Yeah, because that guy had soundboard from Toys R Us.” People laugh. Michael says, “I’m just glad none of you all was grabbing yourselves.” Muhammad nods and says, “I was going like this.” He takes his left hand and moves it down right near his crotch but then moves it to the side. Michael smiles.

Here again we see the two characteristic elements of Islamic listening interactions. First, Muhammad is required to actively consider and apply a norm of Islamic behavior – here, bodily

and sexual modesty – in order to make his hip hop cultural participation compatible with an Islamic setting. In this way, Muhammad is enacting Islamic religiosity through the medium of hip hop, visibly being Muslim via a familiar pop cultural form. Second, Muhammad demonstrates to himself and others that he knows about the un-Islamic gestures affiliated with hip hop, even if he chooses not to use them. In telling the other Legendz that he did not grab his crotch, Muhammad is both letting others know that he did the Islamically appropriate thing – that he successfully tailored hip hop for an Islamic context – and *that he knew exactly what that un-Islamic thing was*. In this way, Muhammad positions himself as an in-the-know teenager, and a culturally agile subject, while still demonstrating a commitment to Islamic norms.

During my time with the Legendz, the boys continually made slight adjustments to hip hop behaviors so that they would fall more in line with Islamic norms. Songs played on cell phones were turned down or off at certain points to avoid profane lyrics. Recited raps were edited on the fly to remove references to sex or drugs. Overt dancing or other embodied responses to music were quelled within the mosque or other Islamic settings. In working to resolve the tension between secular hip hop and religious Islam – a tension that emerges repeatedly in the course of their daily lives – the Legendz are constantly triggered to openly consider and customize Islamic religious guidelines. In this way, the tension between hip hop and Islam pushes the Legendz to engage with their religion in a direct, immediate, and personally relevant way. In adjusting their hip hop behaviors to be more Islamic, the Legendz make what can be an abstract system of beliefs and theology tangible and meaningful. As sociologists of religion have indicated, because religion is not a material object, human actors must work to make religion manifest in the course of daily life through efforts such as ritual, congregation, and interaction with religious artifacts

(Berger 1967, Durkheim 2001[1913], McDannell 1995, Orsi 1996, Tavory and Winchester 2010). For the Legendz, the musical practice of Islamic listening is a local means of producing religious meaning, one that they experience as fun, creative, and youthful, and one that is complimentary with their other, more traditional religious practices.

Listening like a Cool Muslim: Finding Islamic Piety in Secular Music

A second way that the Legendz manage tension between religion and pop culture through music listening is by finding Islam within hip hop, collaboratively locating elements expressive of Muslim religiosity within otherwise secular rap songs. I first experienced this musical practice one day, as the Legendz and I walked out of a fast food restaurant across from the mosque, and discussed our favorite rappers.

We start walking out the door and back onto the street. Abdul says, “Talib Kweli is one of my favorites. He’s good.” “I saw Mos Def and Talib Kweli perform one time as Black Star,” I say. “Really?” they say. Muhammad says, “What songs did they do?” “I can’t really remember,” I say. “It was a while ago.” Abdul asks, “Did they do that song ‘Definition’?” “I’m not sure,” I say. “They did the one about, ‘Black is the...’” Muhammad picks up the line and starts reciting the rap, ‘Black is the color of my true love’s hair.’” By the next line all three of them are rapping together: “Black is the veil that the *Musliminas* wear.” “That’s tight!” Abdul says.

Here, the Legendz are engaging in the well documented phenomena of experiencing a shared social identity through joint musical engagement. Contemporary theorists of identity argue that an “identity” is not something that all individuals possess but, rather, a feeling of belonging with “similar others,” an experienced sense of connection to a given ethnicity, race, gender, or nationality that is constructed through social processes (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Because identity can be an emotional and sensory experience (see Frith 1996), music – and particularly

the coordinated listening to music inflected with identity symbols – is an especially powerful means of producing experiences of identification with others (Carter 2006, Eyerman and Jamison 1998, Marti forthcoming, Roy 2010, Schutz 1951, Warikoo 2007, Willis 1978). This identity group-building function of music listening can be seen here, as it is the active and shared process of locating and celebrating the Islamic cues in the music – rather than some active element of the symbols or sounds within the music itself – that works to build a sense of Muslim identity among the group. As a genre, American hip hop is uniquely suited for this purpose, as a number of rappers are either Muslim or have a familiarity with Islam. As a result, many rap songs include phrases of Islamic scripture, Arabic-sounding musical cues, or other Muslim-associated cultural elements, often overlooked by the casual listener.

More than just gaining a sense of “Muslim-ness” through listening to music together, something that members of any religious group could do with sacred or sacralized music, the Legendz pinpoint and celebrate a certain kind of Muslim-ness located within a certain kind of music. That is, while the music does not magically produce a sense of identity by itself, the specifics of the music’s genre and symbolism, and the particular meanings they carry for the listeners, do make a difference for how hip hop is drawn on by the Legendz (De Nora 2000, Willis 1978). The specific symbols of Islam identified and celebrated by the Legendz when they listen to secular hip hop are almost always resonant of a high level of Islamic piety. In the excerpt above, the lyric jointly latched on to by the Legendz describes a Muslim woman (“Muslimina”) wearing the *hijab*, or headscarf (“the veil”), which is understood to be a sign of religious devotion. The color of the veil in the song – black – further deepens this association with piety, as black *hijab* is linked with a strong commitment to modesty. In clear contrast, when rappers casually drop

Islamic Arabic phrases into their songs, such as “Alhamdulillah” (thanks be to God) or “a salaam aleikum” (peace be upon you), the Legendz are never celebratory in this way, but rather suspicious of the rapper’s suggested claim of Muslim identity.

When the symbol of the black *hijab* is invoked by popular rapper Mos Def, and then re-recited by the boys, their response is enthusiastic (“That’s tight!”). However, the common sight of a woman wearing *hijab* within the Legendz’s own families or mosque communities never elicits this kind of energetic approval. This symbol of Islamic piety is jointly celebrated by the Legendz in this instance because it is framed by a musical context associated with youth, coolness, and an extra-religious worldliness. Most of the lyrics in this Mos Def song, and others that the Legendz listen to in this way, are *not* concerned with religion or Islam at all, and so the religious symbolism is set within a diverse array of lyrical symbols and never becomes all-encompassing. In addition, the strong beats and dance-associated rhythms pull against an overarching Muslim religious conformity. The rap songs within which the Legendz locate Islamic symbols always shared these two qualities – they included lyrics or musical cues associated with a high level of piety (the call to prayer, *Qur’anic* scripture or characters, the *hijab*), and the musical and lyrical context surrounding these symbols was unmistakably hip hop and predominantly secular.

Celebrating Islamic identity by locating religious symbols within secular hip hop allows the Legendz to demonstrate an allegiance to Islamic piety without seeming overly devout.

Sociologists who study religious youth in the United States have found that most practicing youth are wary of those who they consider “too religious” – whose behavior and attitude suggests an overly serious religiosity and prioritization of piety over all else (Smith and Denton

2005). The Legendz's behavior was consistent with these findings, and the boys regularly poked fun at those who they considered overly pious. These parties included mosque adults who lectured youth on the minutiae of Islamic rules, as well as youth who spent a bulk of their time praying or memorizing the *Qur'an*. The most frequent criticisms of the too religious, though, were aimed at Muslim musicians and rappers who limited their music to addressing Islamic themes. As I accompanied the Legendz to concerts of Muslim musicians, the boys repeatedly made fun of performers whose strictly Islamic lyrics or self-presentation made them seem "boring," "cheesy," or, from the Legendz's perspective, out of touch with the real world. This common characterization of "Muslim musicians" was expressed by Muhammad one day at a community concert, when I asked the boys if they would consider giving one of their rap demo CDs to the popular Muslim musician Sami Yusef.

We eat our lunches. I overhear Muhammad talking to Yassir about a song they are working on called "This is how we pray." "Hey," I say to Muhammad and the others, "You should give Sami Yusuf a demo." "Man, what's he gonna do?" says Muhammad. "He probably can't get us on his label... We'll probably give it to him and he'll say, (affecting accent and raising his arms upward with palms facing each other about shoulder's width apart): 'My label is Allah.'" The other guys laugh.

In sharp contrast to their celebration of rappers who interject signs of Islamic piety within otherwise secular hip hop, the Legendz are openly disparaging of Muslim musicians whose music is primarily about Islam. When listening to secular hip hop while identifying symbols of Islamic piety within it, the boys are able to feel simultaneously religiously devout and secularly cool. This is a cultural experience that listening to overtly "Muslim" rap does not provide them.

In listening to hip hop in a way that involves a constant searching for messages of Islamic piety within a secular audio landscape, the boys establish themselves as certain kinds of Muslims,

those who can and do experience religious devotion and youthful worldliness at the same time, who demonstrate a *cool piety*. While the occurrence of Muslim religious symbols within secular rap provides an opportunity for the Legendz to find cool piety through hip hop, it is only through the *process* of actively locating and sharing this style of Muslim identity that the Legendz repeatedly cast themselves, and each other, as cool Muslims (De Nora 2000, Willis 1979). This kind of collaborative identity experience took place one evening, when my wife, Saba, and I accompanied the Legendz to a dinner event at the mosque and talked about hip hop.

As we sit at the table with the Legendz, Yusef tells Saba about the performance the boys had earlier in the evening. Saba tells him, ‘We just got the new Lupe Fiasco CD. Have you heard it?’ He smiles and nods enthusiastically, ‘That’s a really good CD! I think he actually has the *adhan* (call to prayer) on one of the tracks!’ Saba and I nod.

This example again demonstrates that it is symbols of devout Islamic practice – here, the call to prayer – that attract the Legendz’s special attention when they listen to secular hip hop. While it is possible that Yusef noticed the call to prayer while listening to this CD by himself, his uncertain phrasing (“I *think* he actually has...”) suggests that he may have heard this reported from another Muslim friend. This possibility, as well as the way he excitedly passes this news on to us, demonstrates how the practice of listening to hip hop as a cool Muslim is a *social* experience, one that is given meaning through interaction. When Yusef tells us that he thinks this secular hip hop includes a symbol of Islamic piety, he is doing more than celebrating a reference to his own minority religion within a pop culture form. He is also demonstrating to us that he is someone who is able to identify – and who identifies with – this particular combination of Islamic and musical symbols. In other words, he is a cool, pious Muslim.

Pivoting Away from Piety: Using Hip Hop to Signify a Complex Muslim Identity

While the Legendz sometimes engage with secular hip hop in ways that emphasize a simultaneity of Islamic piety and pop cultural cool, at other times, the boys enlist secular hip hop to briefly but intentionally demonstrate their familiarity with the un-Islamic elements of hip hop culture. In so doing, the Legendz work to project a measure of independence from religious obligations, employing hip hop's *haram* content to interactionally "pivot away" from Islam. As discussed above, the Legendz's ability to project a multi-dimensional identity and extra-Islamic worldliness through participation in hip hop is important to the boys because they, like most religious youth in the United States, are wary of those who they consider "too religious" (Smith and Denton 2005). One way they make distinctions between themselves and overly devout Muslims is through the strategic deployment of hip hop's profane content in everyday interactions. The continual presence of hip hop music and cultural references in the Legendz's daily lives affords them multiple opportunities to momentarily display a degree of autonomy from Islamic strictures, and to suggest to themselves and their peers that they are more worldly and independent than the identity of "good Muslim" might imply.

Hip hop's massive popularity among mosque youth, as well as its well-known association with deviant themes, makes it a particularly useful resource for the Legendz's demonstration of multi-dimensional Islamic identity within their community. Because specific songs and rappers are well known by the youth, and because the local association between secular hip hop and un-Islamic behavior is so strong, the Legendz need only make the slightest suggestion of affiliation with hip hop to gain a measure of countercultural cachet. An incident which took place one

afternoon during a youth program meeting at the mosque demonstrated just how subtle these implications of deviance from Islamic behavior can be. During this session, the Legendz were asked to prepare a rap song for an upcoming youth program reunion. In working on the song, the boys considered various currently popular rap songs as templates.

The crew of boys gathers to start working on their song. I sit with them. They joke around for a while, then Muhammad takes the lead, “OK,” he asks the group, “What beats can we use?” People throw out ideas – Tupac, Timbaland, but nothing seems to stick... They play around with different rhymes set to songs they know, trying to get some good lines for their song for the reunion. Once in a while Abdul does a line in a heavy Arab accent. After Muhammad tries one line out, Yusef says, “Yeah, you could use that!” Muhammad continues rapping: “MYP [Muslim Youth Program] is my other half. Lean like a cholo...Lean like a Muslim.” People in earshot laugh, especially the girls at the table working on the picture collages. Muhammad smiles.

Here Muhammad improvises a brief parody of the then popular hip hop song “Lean Like a Cholo” by the rapper Down. Through his informal performance of a short piece of the song, Muhammad calls to mind the lyrical content of the well-known original, which focuses on gang lifestyles, casual sex, and dancing. It is the juxtaposition of these profane themes with the mosque location and the word “Muslim” that makes Muhammad’s parody funny, and causes the nearby girls to laugh. By making a fleeting reference to this song and its content, Muhammad momentarily distances himself from Islamic normativity, interactively suggesting that he and the other Legendz have a familiarity with songs, lyrics, and maybe even behavior such as this. This use of hip hop symbolism works to make the Legendz seem, and feel, like more than just pious Muslims, even though the great majority of their behavior hews closely to local Islamic norms.

If Islamic listening prioritizes Muslim propriety over hip hop coolness and listening as a cool Muslim seeks to strike a balance between the two, pivoting away from Islam emphasizes secular

coolness over religious devotion, and uses hip hop music and symbology to project an identity as a cool Muslim. For the Legendz, this means being the kind of person who is worldly enough to know about secular music and its content and is daring enough to push, even slightly, against the boundaries of Islam. This vision of teenage “coolness” is not that different from the image of risk and experience that many adolescents work to cultivate (Ausubel et al. 1977, Cobb 1995), but here it is constructed by exploiting the locally salient tension between secular music and religious behavior.

The Legendz’s interactive suggestions of hip hop-related deviance are not just a matter of ignoring appropriate Islamic behavior and pursuing hip hop-related profanity. They involve an active “pushing off” against Muslim behavioral norms using specific Islamic references as conservative foils for their brief displays of hip hop-inflected rebellion. As the Legendz work together to prepare a presentation on the duties of a good Muslim for the youth group, Yassir intentionally mishears the name of the revered scholar *Al-Bukhari* as “Bacardi,” the brand of rum frequently referenced by mainstream rappers. After sitting through a lecture on the *sirah*, meaning the life of the Prophet Muhammad, Aziz alters the Arabic word to the name “Serena,” which triggers a group recitation of an explicitly sexual verse from the Kanye West single, “Gold Digger.” During a humorous conversation considering how one might pray in a night club, Yusef revises the movements of prayer to suggest a funky new dance move, then quickly stops when he remembers he is in the mosque. Such hip hop-associated suggestions of *haram* behavior are almost always made in close proximity to Islamic symbols or practices. These references are always brief, and usually involve stifled laughter and knowing glances among the Legendz, who

signal to one another and anyone else watching that, although they may be practicing Muslims, they know about more than just Islam.

The Legendz's interactional work to distinguish themselves from musicians who hew strictly to Islamic themes, mentioned above, is another form of using hip hop to pivot away from what they consider an all-encompassing and monochromatic religious identity. This type of distancing is even more precise, as the Legendz "push off" not just against Islamic rules in general, but also from the attempts of adult Muslim leaders and musicians to combine forms of hip hop culture and Islamic religiosity in a way that will appeal to youth. While the Legendz are practicing Muslims who are involved in hip hop, they resist being pigeonholed as "Muslim rappers" because, to them, this signifies a boring, overly-serious, and one-dimensional identity. This resistance to the "Muslim rapper" label was demonstrated by Abdul one day over lunch with the other Legendz at a fast food restaurant. Toward the end of the meal, I asked Abdul if the boys were "Muslim rappers."

There's a pause. Abdul says, "I mean, we are...but only when we're playing for Muslim things." "So you guys only play Muslim stuff when you're playing for Muslim audiences?" I ask. "No," he says. "I mean, we play political stuff...and we talk about Islam and everything. But my other stuff that I write, I mean, it's crazy. You wouldn't want to see it."

In working to distance himself from a strictly religious identity, even that of a "Muslim rapper," Abdul utilizes the association of hip hop with deviance to suggest a darker side to his identity, one that is so "crazy" that I "wouldn't want to see it." In employing hip hop in this way, Abdul and the other Legendz repeatedly work to insinuate a potentially un-Islamic dimension to their identity – one that always exists just out of sight – without needing to actually engage in *haram*

behavior. These visible hip hop associations signal to others, and themselves, that the Legendz have a measure of cultural autonomy and a cool, interesting, and complex Muslim identity, even as they generally conform to locally normative religious expectations.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated three musical practices through which the Legendz attempt to interactively produce a way of being a religious teenager that is both religiously devout and secularly cool. First, the boys practice “Islamic listening,” a way of consuming hip hop that falls within Muslim religious guidelines, in order to maintain status as good Muslims while engaging with secular, and often profane, music. Second, the Legendz jointly identify and celebrate symbols of pious Islam nested within secular hip hop to experience themselves as “cool Muslims.” Thirdly, by making constant and fleeting references to hip hop’s un-Islamic elements, the youth attempt to project a complex religious identity, one that reflects secular worldliness in conjunction with religious devotion. Through these practices, the Legendz work to construct and enact a practice of cool piety, a way of being Muslim that is devout without being too religious and that is cool without being un-Islamic. As my data demonstrates, cool piety as a mode of youth religiosity is never fully achieved, but is rather an ongoing project that requires continual interactional work through particular kinds of engagements with pop culture forms.

Two environmental factors assist the Legendz in generating experiences and impressions of cool piety through musical practices. The first is the correlation of specific settings (Goffman 1959) with certain practices. Both “Islamic listening” and “pivoting away from piety” almost always

took place within the mosque. This religiously dense location helps to facilitate the achievement of these practices both because the mosque presents itself as a place where people are expected to appear pious and because the setting provides an accessible cache of religious symbols, discourses, and practices which can either be visibly adapted (as in “Islamic listening”) or momentarily shunned (as in “pivoting away from piety”). In contrast, the practice of “listening like a cool Muslim” usually took place outside of the mosque, where secular music could be more freely consumed, and where the identification of sacred symbols would stand in relief to a secular physical setting.

The second environmental factor that aided the Legendz in their generation of cool piety through music listening was audience composition. The presence of other Muslim youth – familiar with both sacred Islam and secular hip hop – was crucial to the Legendz’s effective conjuring of cool piety through adapting hip hop practices for Islamic purposes and for pivoting away from Islamic piety. Here the meaning of cool piety – and the boundaries around the Legendz clique - were made manifest, in part, by the reactions of other, slightly less “cool” Muslim youth to the boys’ cultural agility and symbolic suggestions of deviance. For all three practices, and most obviously “listening like a cool Muslim,” the boys’ primary audience was each other, as they worked to remind themselves, again and again, that they could be both Muslim and cool. The range of kinds of elements which coalesce to manifest cool piety through musical practices – interactional, semiotic (discursive, musical, linguistic), and environmental (setting, audience) – reaffirms what several recent critiques of the traditional subculture school of youth studies have proposed: that the nuanced and dynamic ways that young people interact with and adapt cultural

materials is most effectively captured by moving beyond semiotic oriented studies to emplaced, ethnographic accounts of youth cultures (Bennett 2002, Grazian 2004).

In addition to demonstrating the multi-faceted dynamism of youth pop cultural reception, the case of the Legendz also provides evidence of one way that traditional religious identities can be maintained in the midst of a secular cultural context. Through the ongoing use of particular modes of pop cultural reception, actors can maintain a delicate balance between secular cultural participation and religious piety. While other contextual factors – such as the level of integration into a religious community and the religiosity of friends and family – are also important for the maintenance of religious identity in modern society (Desmond et al. 2010, King et al. 1997, Ozorack 1989, Smith and Denton 2005, Tavory 2010), this paper demonstrates how particular practices of pop culture engagement provide actors with direct and active ways to experience and maintain their religiosity. Practices of pop cultural reception are particularly well suited for facilitating the maintenance of modern religious identities in an American context because they allow religious people to feel culturally autonomous, even as they embrace traditional practices (Bellah 1985, Carr 1998, Roof 1999).

Practices of pop cultural reception can allow religiously devout people to feel culturally autonomous for two, intertwining reasons. First, many pop cultural materials, especially those available to youth in the United States, express values of individuality, rebellion, and freedom, both in content and form. Experiencing these materials in conjunction with traditional and often adult-led religious practices can inject these routine aspects of religious life with a jolt of energy and vitality. The increased vibrancy and experienced relevance of religion when it is intertwined

with secular pop cultural forms, especially from the perspective of young people, has been reported in a range of cases (Byrne 2003, Clark 2002, Loomis 2004). This finding also echoes the conclusions of social historians of “popular religion” – that the intermixing of pop cultural forms with traditional religious practices, while often resisted by religious leadership, provides lay practitioners with ways to embrace religious identity and practice that are revitalizing and accessible (Kaufman 2005, McDannell 1995, Orsi 1985). One reason that pop cultural reception can be key to the maintenance of religious identities in secular contexts, then, is because American pop cultural forms, with their inscribed aesthetic values of independence and freedom, serve as symbolic complements to the communal and traditional rituals of religious life. In the words of Wade Clark Roof, they help religious people to be “fluid yet grounded” (1999). The symbolic and aesthetic diversity and flow of pop cultural forms provide an aesthetic experience of independence while religious tradition keeps one rooted in a stable cultural community.

This intermingling of modern secular and traditional religious cultural forms does not come easily, though. As the case of the Legendz illustrates, it takes a significant amount of ongoing, ground level cultural work to manage the tension between these symbolic elements. Yet, while negotiating this tension requires effort, it is not effort that seems particularly troublesome or stressful, at least not in the existential ways that the conventional thinking about religious people might suggest. As everyday modern religious subjects move daily through a mix of religious and secular symbols, they are hardly traumatized by this situation. Instead, many approach the task of balancing these elements as something pleasurable, even “playful” (Hoover 2006: 293). It is this playfulness – this continual working to find ways to be both religious and secular – that also gives religious people a sense of autonomy about their religious identities. Managing the tension

between secular pop culture and religious practices gives people the opportunity to actively engage with the specific elements of their religious traditions and their favorite pop cultural forms. This, in turn, pushes them to a greater familiarity and facility with both symbolic systems. Critically, and consistent with theoretical conceptions of agency, it is the application of rules and schemas from each set of cultural forms to the other arena that provides actors with a sense of autonomy and reflexivity regarding their cultural lives (Bourdieu 1990, Giddens 1991, Sewell 1992, Willis 1981[1977]). For modern religious subjects this has the effect of making their religious identities and traditions experienced as less, not more, constraining, and as infused with an attractive dynamism and creativity.

CHAPTER THREE

“Keeping it *Halal*”: The Legendz and Muslim-American Dating

I first learned that the Legendz and their friends were dating during a car ride with Yusef – the oldest and most religiously observant of the group. I had met him at the mosque for *Jummah*, the weekly congregational prayer, and then we drove to his workplace, an ice cream store near his college. As we rode down the highway, Yusef played me a CD by the band *Kings of Leon*. The songs were driving, anthemic, and expressed romantic angst and longing. After listening quietly for a few minutes, Yusef said:

One day this girl called me and she said that she liked me, you know. And I was like, ‘Whoa I need to control myself.’ I told her that I liked her too, because I did. And she’s Muslim. But I told her that I wasn’t interested in a relationship with kissing or hugging or anything like that. I just wanted to, you know, keep it *halal*, that’s what we say. And she said that she was fine with that, that that’s what she wanted, too. So we hung out all the time. That’s why you never saw me at nothing for a long time. I was just hanging out with her all the time. And it kind of distracted me from everything else. My grades slipped last semester...But it was incredible, you know? I had never felt that way for anyone before. Everybody around me had girlfriends, but I never knew what it was like...She called me last month and said that she didn’t want to do it anymore. That it was too hard. She didn’t want to be disloyal to her family. That she wanted to be a good Muslim. So I was like, ‘Whatever, OK. I understand what you’re saying.’...It hurt so much, John...I mean, I had never felt that way. I think I really loved her, you know...I cared for her so much. And we never kissed or hugged or anything like that. Even though I wanted to kiss her sometimes or hug her or hold her hand, but I could just catch myself. But I cared for her so much. I’ve never cared for someone so much. Like, if she was falling, I would run to catch her. Like if she had a scratch, I would run to get a band-aid and take care of it. Like, as if she was my child.

Later in the conversation, I asked him if her parents knew about the relationship.

I think her mother had an idea; her Dad not so much...One of the reasons she was starting to worry was that her mother saw me in my car. Her family knows my car. That’s why I was trying to get this car painted. John, I was trying to get this car painted so fast. Like, as fast as possible. And get the windows tinted so no one could see in here...Now, I don’t care at all.

Yusef went on to tell me more about his eight month relationship with the girl, Leila, and how he was coping with its ending. Particularly striking was the tenderness with which this tall, muscular, and athletic young man described his feelings of care for Leila: “Like, if she was falling, I would run to catch her. Like if she had a scratch, I would run to get a band-aid and take care of it. Like, as if she was my child...” The experience of such strong emotions of care is at the core of what makes early romantic relationships so central and powerful in the lives of adolescents (Furman and Buhrmeister 1992, Wilson-Shockley 1995, Feiring 1996, Shuman and Kipnis 2001, Shulman and Scharf 2000), and Yusef was clearly feeling these emotions in spades. In fact, by March of 2010 – nine months after my talk with Yusef – all five of the Legendz would be involved in serious dating relationships with young women, romances that would last a range of three months to two years. I watched as attention that had been previously devoted to peer group activities like skateboarding, basketball, and just joking around together was redirected to spending hours talking on the phone and texting with girlfriends, working to find ways to spend time with girlfriends alone, giving and receiving tokens of affection like flowers and cookies, sneaking kisses and opportunities to hold hands in and around the mosque, flirting at community events, and writing songs and poems for their girlfriends (cf. Conolly et al 2004). Such expressions of love and admiration were most evident with Muhammad, whose romance seemed to infuse him with a jolt of newfound energy, optimism, and direction (cf. Connolly and Konarski 1994, Harter 1999, Gray and Steinberg 1999). One day I asked Abdul if his mother knew about his girlfriend:

Not yet, but she’s definitely going to like her. I mean, she has everything. She’s smart, you know? She’s a good person, she’s like everything at the same time.

In a different conversation, the boys were discussing how they did not like to date young women who were pessimistic and negative. When I commented to Abdul that his girlfriend did not seem like that, he replied, “I know. That’s why I really love her.” Most pointedly, one night I was asking him about his relationship and he jokingly asked me, “Is this for your book, John?” When I sheepishly replied yes, Abdul said emphatically: “Put this in your book, John: I found the perfect girl.”

Puzzles of the Legendz’ Dating Lives

While the Legendz’ dating lives reflected what are perhaps universal experiences of youthful romantic (and hormonal) excitement, they also told a very specific sociological story. As I spent more time with the Legendz and spoke to them in detail about present and past dating experiences, I was able to assemble a romantic history of each of the boys. When seen together, as they can be in Table 1 (p. 104), these histories demonstrate two clear trajectories in the Legendz’ dating practices. The first is a movement from dating non-Muslim young women in middle school and early high school to dating only Muslim girls in later high school and college. As the table indicates, while none of the Legendz had dated a Muslim girl before 2008 (although they had been dating), they *all* had Muslim girlfriends by 2010 and have only dated Muslims since then. As I witnessed this convergence take place, I wondered what explained this group movement from interfaith relationships to exclusively religiously endogamous ones. While there certainly was pressure from parents and other adults for young Muslims to choose only Muslim partners to *marry*, the Legendz’ move towards dating endogamy took place far before any of them were seriously considering marriage. In addition, the Legendz’ dating histories did not

neatly align with the wishes of parents or religious leaders for two other reasons – they involved the dating of non-Muslim young women and they involved dating Muslim girls in ways considered unacceptable to adults – in secret, with some physical intimacy, and without the intention of marriage. If the Legendz were not moving to date Muslim girls solely due to parental pressure, what explained this change?

The second notable and puzzling trajectory in the Legendz' dating practices is a movement from dating girls in secret – with great care taken to hide relationships from parents, mosque adults, and some other youth – to making their relationships more public within their religious community. From their initial forays into dating non-Muslims in middle school through to their first relationships with Muslim young women in high school, the Legendz took pains to hide this activity from potentially judgmental and sanctioning adults (cf. Rumbaut 1994, Gans 1997, McGown 1999, Zhou and Bankston 1998, O'Sullivan and Meyer-Bahlburg 2003, Louie 2004, Smith and Denton 2005, Chen 2006, Frietas 2008). After about a year of dating Muslim girls, though, all of the Legendz' began to practice less secrecy and more openness with their dating, even with their parents and religious leaders (see Table 1). I sought to understand why the Legendz came out into the open with these relationships at the moment they did, especially when – as will be discussed later – this move involved significant social risk.

By summer of 2010, all of the Legendz were involved in stable relationships with Muslim young women which were known to their religious community, and which they considered to be more or less religiously appropriate. Yet only one year earlier, they were all conducting dating in secret, and not necessarily pairing with Muslims. What explained this move from a more secular,

American, and secret mode of dating to a more public, religiously accepted, and “Islamic” one? In analyzing my ethnographic data on the Legendz and their romantic relationships, I sought not only to illuminate *how* the Legendz’ dating practices managed both Islamic- and American-associated expectations and practices, but *why* this cultural management work took the specific form – and had the particular consequences – that it did (Katz 2002, Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

Understanding Youth Religious Dating

Scholarship on highly religious youth and non-marital dating provides three main explanations for why religious young people engage in romantic relationships in ways that maintain consistency with the norms of their religious communities. The first answer is that religious leaders and organizations make a religious style of dating attractive and possible for youth by developing institutionalized methods for engaging in pre-marital relationships that are officially deemed within the bounds of religious propriety (Gans 1997: 877). Examples of this approach include the Amish tradition of *rumspringa*, which temporally brackets deviant pre-marital dating behavior by young community members (Wagler 2011), and the growing trend within Evangelical communities of promoting “Christian dating” through the production of guidebooks, workshops, and support groups for religious teenagers (Rosenbloom 2005; Bryant 2006, 2007; Freitas 2008; Perry and Armstrong 2007; Irby 2011). While such institutional supports facilitate the inclusion of religious consideration in youth dating practices in *some* communities and among *some* youth, the high – and sometimes unclear – standards set by such programs are rarely fully met by religious youth, some of whom respond by turning away from religious

approaches altogether and/or suffering tremendous guilt and regret (Freitas 2008). As Mark Regnerus (2007) found in his extensive study on American religious youth and sexual behavior, youth who do think about and act in the arena of dating in a religiously-informed manner tend to do so in a way that is less consistent and coherent than an official program promoting religious dating would suggest. In other words – and in keeping with the discussion of officially religious music in Chapter 2 – institutionalized versions of religious youth dating often lack the flexibility to meet the specific and dynamic cultural needs of highly religious adolescents (Smith and Denton 2005, Irby 2011, Wagler 2011). In addition, as in the case of the Legendz, some religious minority communities simply lack the resources and infrastructure to produce such parallel dating practices for their young members.

The second explanation for why young people date in ways that reflect religious concerns is that they are guided by unconscious moral schemas to pursue romantic relationships in ways consistent with an internalized religious-moral framework (Smith 2003, Smith 2005, Vaisey 2009). Christian Smith, along with Stephen Vaisey, argues that the major mechanism through which religion can come to have an impact on adolescent behavior – including dating behavior – is in the form of a “moral order,” which has been adopted in the course of religious education, and is then internalized as “moral directives” which can guide action and decision-making according to religious standards (Smith 2003, Vaisey 2009). While Smith touches on the ways that “social and organizational ties” and “learned competencies” can also promote the diffusion of religious-derived practices into a teenager’s broader social world, his focus on “morality” as religion’s main contribution ignores the myriad other forms that religion takes in everyday life. A burgeoning literature within the “everyday religion” school of the sociology of religion

demonstrates the diverse impacts that the various manifestations of religion and religious identity can have in the undertaking of nominally secular actions. To cite but a few examples, behavioral scripts drawn from religious traditions can provide templates for political mobilizations (Pattillo-McCoy 1998, Lichterman 2005), communal practices of religious life can assist in the reframing and management of personal crises (Davidman 1991, Tavory 2010, Smilde 2007), and structures of religious worship services and rituals can provide opportunities for the joint performance of innovative social identities (Gray and Thumma 1997, Wilcox and Mina 2010). What is missing from Smith's analysis – as well as from the accounts of institutional approaches to youth religious dating – is the consideration that young people may, like their adult counterparts in the “everyday religion” literature, utilize aspects of religious traditions in creative ways to manage the practical challenges of everyday life. Indeed, scholars have found that when young people lack an official religious script that suits them, or disagree with the normative take on religious tradition in their community, they can work to adopt aspects of the religion for their own purposes and in their own ways (Jacobson 1998, Davidman 2007).

A third explanation for why young people might engage in teenage dating – or other aspects of adolescent life – in a way that reflects religious concerns is that they are doing so for “instrumental” purposes, using religious forms and cultural tools as means to secular goals (Regnerus 2007). Regnerus explains that being part of a religious tradition and community can help one to minimize social risks of adolescence (e.g. drugs, pre-marital sex, gangs) and maximize opportunities for beneficial outcomes (e.g. close friends, good schools, adult role models). While this explanation likely captures the way that some extremely “planful” (Regnerus 2007: p. 232) religious teenagers approach religion and social life, there are others for whom

religious resources, while always proximate, essentially exist in the “background” of life, until they are needed (Smith and Denton 2005, Swidler 2001). This was the case with the Legendz, for whom increasing the religious tenor of their romantic relationships was a conscious effort, but not part of a coherent plan towards a specific end. For the Legendz, the increasing appearance of the *external form* of their dating as consistent with two local religious norms regarding pre-marital relationships – couple endogamy and parental knowledge – reflected the Legendz’ own application of Islamic cultural tools to the *internal dynamics* of their relationships, in a practical attempt to navigate the culturally ambiguous world of Western adolescent dating.

Pre- and Non-Marital Relationships in the West and in the City Mosque

Sociologists of youth have established that most adolescents and young adults in developed Western countries in the present era – and particularly in the United States – lack clear cultural models to guide them in practices of courtship and non- or pre-marital dating (Hamon and Ingoldsby 2003; Arnett 2004; Manning, Giordano, and Longmore 2006; Bouchey and Furman 2008; Schalet 2011). While in more traditional societies, or smaller communities, denser social networks and “tighter” cultures (Hofstede 1980) supply strict guidelines for processes of courtship, industrialized Western societies generally lack such prescriptions regarding how to engage in romantic relationships during adolescence and young adulthood. While this lacunae of cultural guidance allows youth in the West a comparatively high level of autonomy regarding how and with whom they engage in dating, it can also lead to confusion, frustration, and even depression among American youth (Cupach and Metts 1991), many of whom also feel pressure – from peers, pop culture sources, and themselves – to participate in romantic and/or sexual

relationships at an early age (Smiler 2008).

While the general American cultural landscape provides little specific guidance regarding non- or pre-marital romantic relationships, tight-knit highly religious and/or immigrant communities in the US often supply clear proscriptions for dating behavior on the part of young people, usually focused on delaying romantic involvement and especially sexual activity until marriage and pressing for endogamy in relationships (Espiritu 2001; Hamon and Ingoldsby 2003; Sherif-Trask 2003). Such is the case in the City Mosque community, in which youth dating is generally seen as an American-rooted infringement on proper Islamic behavior and must therefore be discouraged. The main mechanism of this discouragement, aside from proclamations of religious leaders, is negative social pressure, as even the *appearance* that a young person might be dating poses a real and serious threat to the social and religious reputation of the teenager and their family. The Legendz and other members of the Muslim Youth Program at the City Mosque generally shared a common understanding of the basic local guidelines for religiously appropriate interaction with the opposite gender before marriage. First, young unmarried men and women should never spend time together in private, because, as the well known saying goes, “the third person in the room is *shaitan* (satan)” and this could likely lead to sinful physical intimacy. Second, young unmarried men and women should never engage in pre- or non-marital physical intimacy or sex. Third, if a young unmarried man and woman do get to know one another as close friends, it should be with the intention of marriage, in complete knowledge of their parents, and only with a Muslim partner.

So while American culture provided the Legendz with little clear guidance on dating, the mosque community supplied an abundance of requirements regarding pre-marital mixed gender behavior, rules which the boys experienced as overly constraining. In response, the Legendz and their partners worked out their own ways to date that they considered religiously acceptable. As will be seen, the boys and their girlfriends strove to infuse an American style of dating – which included relationship privacy and some physical intimacy – with Islamic notions of sexual chastity and purity of religious intention. As a result, the Legendz’ relationships – which initially appeared to reflect a more “American” or culturally hybridized form of dating – grew increasingly aligned with local Islamic norms of pre-marital mixed gender relations. This transformation took place *from the inside out*, as Islamic cultural structures adopted to ease internal dating practices at the couple level came to match externally present and reinforced religious expectations at the community level. Through this process, the Legendz moved towards a mode of dating more in line with broader community norms of pre-marital mixed gender relations, particularly regarding parental knowledge and couple endogamy, but in a way that they primarily experienced as voluntary and practically useful.

Rather than signifying evidence of an internalized religious morality, a wholesale adoption of adult-sanctioned dating practices, or a highly planned use of religion to reach broader goals, I find the Legendz’ move towards religiously appropriate dating as a reflection of their own application of Islamic cultural resources to romantic relationships as a means of navigating the culturally ambiguous aspects of early adolescent dating. In particular, the boys use the Islamic concepts of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden) in flexible ways that help them give shape and direction to the otherwise amorphous experiences of deciding who to date, setting

boundaries on relationships, and talking to others about sex and romance. This application of Islamically-rooted cultural structures to the internal dynamics of their relationships beginning in mid-2009 explains why, by mid-2010, all of these relationships were considered “religious” enough – by the Legendz as well as some parents – to be shared with their broader Muslim community. It also explains why Muslim young women became the preferred type of partner, as the Legendz found through experience that it was far easier to manage relationship ambiguity via Islamic cultural schemas with girls who were already familiar with such scripts. The Legendz’ progression from dating styles that were less reflective of external community norms of endogamy and parental knowledge to those that more neatly matched these broader expectations is explained by the boys’ increasing application of Islamic cultural tools to manage the ambiguities of their particular romantic involvements.

From Interfaith Dating to Non-Marital Religious Endogamy

All of the Legendz dated – or at least attempted to date – non-Muslim women in their middle and early high school years (2003-2009), in romantic involvements that they described as confusing, embarrassing, and disappointing. When I asked the Legendz about their early experiences with girls, the central common theme was the boys’ sense of not knowing the “right way” to handle romantic situations.

John: Can you tell me what happened with some of [your early crushes].

Yusef: Well I usually never said anything...Once I said something. But I didn’t know how to go about it, you know? So, it would be really awkward, like [in “awkward” voice]:“OK!”

J: Can you tell me about any of these?

Y: Yeah, there was one girl in tenth grade. I liked her a lot. And we went on this field trip like to Disneyland... So I met her then. She was a senior and I was just a sophomore... And one her friends told me that she found me attractive. And I was like, "Oh my god!" You know? So I pursued it, and I talked to her. But I didn't know how to do it, you know? Like I didn't know how you were supposed to play hard to get and stuff like that... And she just shot me down. She was like, "I don't see you like that."

J: And what was her background?

Y: She was Latina.

J: And you said there was another one?

Y: There were plenty more [laughs]... There was one that was sort of the opposite. There was a girl in school who liked me. And she would always pass me notes in class. And I got really uncomfortable. So I would sit way across the room from her. And I really messed up, you know? I just didn't know how to deal with it. That was in 7th grade. She was Latino also.

Yusef's sense of being confused and at a loss in these romantic encounters is reflected in his repeated statements that, he "didn't know how to go about it," "didn't know how to do it," and "just didn't know how to deal with it." Zaid and Muhammad described early experiences with girls in strikingly similar ways (emphases mine):

Zaid: There was one girl, during my sophomore year. It was only for about one week. She liked me, and her friend told me she did. I didn't really feel the same way, but *I didn't know what to do*. So I went out with her for the week, then I had to tell her, I felt bad afterwards. She liked me a lot but I didn't have the same feelings as her.

Muhammad: In high school and middle school, there were no Muslims around. There was no Muslim crew. So I fell into this group of guys in 8th grade. And it was like, "Oh we should start going after girls." But it was just middle school stuff, like 2 week – 3 week type things. Just middle school type relationships. But it wasn't serious. *And we didn't know what the hell we were doing.*

The sense of awkwardness and embarrassment experienced by the Legendz as they stumbled in early romantic experiences is not unique to young Muslims or even highly religious youth.

Rather, it is a reflection of both the newness of these experiences for the young people involved and the cultural milieus of Western societies, which provide precious little guidance or rules when it comes to romantic life. The difference for the Legendz is that, as young Muslims, they have proximity to and familiarity with a set of cultural tools that *can* provide guidelines for appropriate relationship behavior (Swidler 1986, 2001). By adapting these Islamic tools for use in their adolescent dating lives, the Legendz found a way to bring a reassuring sense of order to the confusing realm of interpersonal romantic relationships.

By March 2010, all of the boys would be involved in stable relationships with Muslim young women, and all of these relationships were described and conducted using the cultural template of *halal* – Islamically permissible. But the Legendz’ interest in having relationships that hewed more closely to Islamic propriety was something that preceded, rather than followed, their exclusive dating of Muslim girls. While Muhammad starting dating Muslim girls in a *halal* manner in April of 2009, he told me that he had been seriously considering this approach as early as 2005, as he experienced frustrations with dating a Catholic Latina girl at his school. Abdul, who embraced dating endogamy in 2010, only did so after clashes between an Islamic mode of dating and the wishes of his non-religious Latina girlfriend led to the end of that relationship. What this sequence of events means is that the Legendz commitment to religious endogamy in dating was not primarily the result of the experience of dating Muslim young women, although this experience reinforced this tendency. Rather, this interest in romantically pursuing Muslim girls was the result of the discovery that the stabilizing process of “keeping it *halal*” – of applying Islamic cultural tools to secular dating practices to manage ambiguity – was something that conflicted sharply with modes of dating practiced by the non-Muslim girls they knew, and

was therefore far more easily accomplished with young women who were also identified as Muslims. Looking more closely at the pre-endogamy relationships of Muhammad and Abdul illustrates how the desire to “keep it *halal*” moved the Legendz away from non-Muslims and towards Muslims as romantic partners.

According to Abdul, he and Ana, a young Latina woman from his school, had been “more than friends” on and off since ninth grade. During Abdul’s junior year of high school, around the same time that I got to know the Legendz well enough to speak to them about their romantic relationships, his romance with Ana became more stable and serious. Abdul’s parents found out about the romance and became angry at their son’s irreligious behavior – his mother yelled at him that this was “*haram!*” and his father threatened to “beat his ass.” While this was disconcerting to Abdul and Ana, they tried to talk about it and get through the stress. However, Abdul’s anxiety about these parental accusations of *haram* behavior, coupled with Ana’s telling Abdul that she “didn’t understand” and was “scared of” his parents, eventually contributed to the dissolution of the relationship. Abdul told me that during one argument with Ana directly following a fight with his parents about the relationship, he “went off on” Ana.

“What did you say?” I ask. “I told her she was worthless, and all this other stuff.”
“Wow,” I say. He says, “Yeah.” “Did she get upset?” “Yeah,” he says. “She was crying... She told me she lost feelings for me after that... So now we’re just friends.”
“Oh,” I say.

The relationship ended due to a confluence of factors, including the particularly restrictive nature of Abdul’s parents, the local cultural availability of anti-dating norms, Abdul’s own angry response towards Ana, and likely other interpersonal issues between the two. But a crucial factor was the inability of the two partners to share an understanding of the meaning of the parental

accusations. For Abdul, these accusations of *haram* behavior were experienced as strong, clear, and anxiety-producing. He also knew what to do about them – as soon as his mother told him this was “*haram*,” he told me that he and Ana needed to “cool it down” and to be more cautious about how they conducted the relationship. For Ana, however, these accusations and Abdul’s response did not make sense – she said she “didn’t understand” and was “scared.” So, although the pressure of Abdul’s parents clearly played a role in the ending of the relationship, it was actually Ana and Abdul’s differing responses and ways of interpreting these actions that disrupted the sense of an intimate personal connection between the two youth.

The lesson that Abdul took away from his experience dating Ana– and one I heard echoed by the other Legendz as they moved from relationships with non-Muslims to exclusively Muslim relationships – was that it was just easier to date Muslim young women because they understood how the rules worked regarding relationships in the Muslim community. Abdul articulated this practical adoption of a philosophy of religious endogamy in dating when I asked him one day why he thought his father opposed his relationship with Ana so strongly.

“Is it because she’s not Muslim or he just doesn’t want you hanging out with girls at all?” “No,” he says. “When I was hanging out with May, remember, that girl at the mosque?” “Yeah,” I say. He says, “He didn’t care because it was a Muslim, and he knew she came from a good family...But also, we could never go anywhere else, you know? We would just hang out at the mosque and stuff.” “Yeah,” I say. “That’s why it’s easier to go out with Muslim girls,” Abdul says. “Because it’s all the same rules.”

The lesson that Abdul drew from his relationship with Ana, and that drove him and the rest of the Legendz to pursue only Muslim young women from that point forward, was that dating Muslim girls was preferable because, despite the challenges of strict parents and other obstacles, these young women share the same cultural framework regarding dating practices. The key

difference between interfaith and endogamous relationships was not that dating non-Muslims results in sanctions and restrictions from parents and other community adults and dating Muslims does not – they both do, though of different kinds. The crucial distinction, from the Legendz’ perspective, was that as romantic partners, Muslim young women were more likely to understand the relevant cultural dynamics, be familiar with the concepts and practices of *haram* and *halal*, and therefore at least share the same conceptualization of the challenges to the relationship.

This frustrating experience of having a romantic relationship that lacked a shared interpretative framework regarding religious propriety was echoed by Muhammad, who also dated a non-Muslim young woman in high school before adopting a philosophy and approach of endogamy in later high school.

My first real girlfriend was this girl named Sandra in ninth grade. I met her in 8th grade. That first relationship was mostly a school thing. Like we never saw each other outside of school. The only thing we did outside of school was talk on the phone and stuff. Like we never got together to hang out. And that was because I was worried about what my Mom would think.

J: And so she was not Muslim?

M: No, she was Hispanic.

J: And did the fact that you were Muslim and she wasn’t ever get in the way in the relationship?

M: At times, yes, because she didn’t take religion seriously. Her family was Catholic. And she didn’t listen when I would try to explain Islam. I would try to show her, but she didn’t care or want to pay attention. It also tripped me out. Because at this time I started going to the mosque more. And they would talk about dating, have talks about dating, and they spoke badly about it. They said that we were supposed to wait for marriage. So I felt like I’m sinning and the person I’m with doesn’t even believe in it! [laughs] But I was having a puppy love experience, so I wanted to stay in the relationship. That was more important to me at the time.

J: So, how did it end with you two?

M: Actually, she left and told me...she got pregnant.

J: Whoa.

M: Yeah, she told me she was with another person. All those times she was out of state she was with this other person and then she got pregnant. The first year was cool. But the second year, it was getting old, so it felt like a relief. I wanted to break up, but I didn't know how to deal with it. So this helped me push her away. Thank God!

Like Abdul, Muhammad identifies the lack of common understanding regarding cultural rules governing romance – regardless of whether those rules are actually followed – as a major reason why his most significant pre-endogamy relationship was unfulfilling.

The experience of this cultural disconnect is expressed nicely by Muhammad when he says, “So I feel like I’m sinning and the person I’m sinning with doesn’t even believe in it!” The implication, and one expressed by Abdul and the other Legendz as well, is that even if dating Muslim girls almost guarantees struggles with parents and unrealistically strict community norms, at least they are the *same* norms. When I asked the Legendz about their decision to date only Muslim girls – a decision they had all reached by 2010 – they all mentioned the shared understanding of religious rules regarding proper behavior, including rules about dating, as central to the decision.

Zaid: I do feel more comfortable with Muslim girls. It’s better if a girl understands my religion. If I can’t do certain things, she understands. I think its better.

Yusef: Muslim girls already understand the boundaries of Islam

Yassir: I wanted to get with Muslim people. Because you have something more in common...The stuff that we can and can’t do. That was one of the reasons.

Muhammad: But it’s just easier. You don’t have to talk and explain about everything.

After having tried to date non-Muslims and found these experiences frustrating and confusing due to a lack of jointly orienting guidelines, the Legendz – first implicitly, and then explicitly – sought relationships with partners with whom a store of cultural knowledge could be assumed, based on shared social identification and associated experiences (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). As a result, they decided to pursue only Muslim young women. While parental and community pressure was certainly a factor here, it was not as central to the Legendz experience or understanding as was the prioritization of finding partners who knew the same rules and restrictions regarding dating, romance, and sex.

“Keeping it *Halal*” to Stabilize Relationship Meaning

While the Legendz early dating years (2003-2009) were characterized by confusion, a lack of control, and dating in fits and starts, by late 2009-early 2010 they were all in relationships, and these partnerships were demonstrating a steadiness and duration (see Table 1). This increase in the stability of the Legendz’ romantic relationships correlated with their use of Islamic cultural tools to set parameters and provide structure to their dating lives, and with their use of the phrase “keeping it *halal* [permissible]” to describe this shared approach. The first time I heard the term “keeping it *halal*”¹⁰ was during my conversation with Yusef, quoted at the beginning of the

¹⁰ While the specific origins of the term are unknown, “keeping it *halal*” is likely a hybridization of the hop hopper’s claim of authenticity (“keepin’ it real”) and the Islamic term for religiously permissible (*halal*), with an echo of the Orthodox Jewish request to “keep it kosher.” The term was used by the Danish Muslim rappers *Outlandish* for the title of their 2008 album, and can be seen on thousands of internet postings by Muslim youth discussing how to conduct secular youth activities in a religiously appropriate manner. The term’s connection to youth culture as well as Islamic orthodoxy facilitated its use as a means of employing a community derived religious notion without seeming too strict or authoritative. Going further, the use of “keeping it *halal*” reflected – and signaled to others – that what was being implemented here was a *youth* version of “halal,” and while it might involve some of the same strictures of adult norms for pre-marital mixed gender relations (i.e. limited physical

chapter, in August 2009, when he told me about his relationship with Leila that had lasted the previous eight months.

One day this girl called me and she said that she liked me, you know. And I was like, ‘Whoa I need to control myself.’ I told her that I liked her too, because I did. And she’s Muslim. But I told her that I wasn’t interested in a relationship with kissing or hugging or anything like that. I just wanted to, you know, keep it *halal*, that’s what we say. And she said that she was fine with that, that that’s what she wanted, too. So we hung out all the time. That’s why you never saw me at nothing for a long time. I was just hanging out with her all the time.

Here Yusef is faced with the potentially uncomfortable situation of a girl telling him that she likes him, the exact kind of encounter that caused him confusion five years earlier in middle school (see p. 49). While he still demonstrates nervousness about the incident (“Whoa, I need to control myself!”), Yusef quickly works to bring order to the situation by applying an Islamic normative framework regarding physical intimacy to the arrangement. This move to forge a joint and early pledge to “keep it *halal*” not only places reassuring limits on potential sexual involvement, it also allows both partners to make sense of the relationship – “And she said that she was fine with that, that that’s what she wanted, too” – and move forward.

While for Yusef – and for all of the Legendz – “keeping it *halal*” carried a meaning of sexual restraint, other boys emphasized additional and different means by which a couple could keep their relationship *halal*, all of which involved the use of Islamic cultural tools in attempts to bring stability to the partnership. Around the same time that the other Legendz started getting into more serious relationships, Hasan met a girl named Aliyah at an ethnic festival. He got her phone number and began calling her frequently, even though he knew that she had another

intimacy), it also ignored others (i.e. it included spending time together in private and keeping the relationship secret from parents).

boyfriend. A week after Hasan initially told me about this girl, I asked him about her at the mosque.

“So what’s up with that girl?” I ask him. “Oh,” he says, looking a little taken aback. “You mean Aliyah?” “I don’t know...The girl you were talking about last time...” “Oh yeah, that’s Aliyah...It’s pretty good. We’re keeping it *halal*, you know.” He looks down at his skateboard, then up at me again. “I’ve been teaching her some *suras* [chapters of the *Qur’an*].” “Oh,” I say. He continues, “You know, last week I taught her *Al-Fatiha*.” I nod. “And also, *Al-Asr*,” he adds.

Later that evening, I ask Hasan directly

“So what does ‘keeping it *halal*’ mean anyway?” He says, “Well, it means don’t just not do the *haram* stuff, but also do extra good things. Like teach someone and make them a better Muslim...Like I’ve been teaching her the *suras*.” “Oh,” I say.

Like Yusef, Hasan’s version of “keeping it *halal*” fundamentally involves a restraint from sexual involvement (“the *haram* stuff”) and also involves the incorporation of the more general *haram-halal* dichotomy into the definition of the relationship. In addition, though, Hasan’s use involves integrating religious rituals – the learning and recitation of *Qur’anic* verses, for example – into the romantic partnership.

Hasan’s reliance on the practice and idea of “keeping it *halal*” to see a way forward for the relationship with Aliyah became clear as the relationship became more troubled. Although Aliyah kept telling Hasan she was planning to break up with her boyfriend Mike, she never seemed to get around to it. This caused Hasan great frustration, but he kept calling Aliyah and trying to win her affections. After about a month of this back-and-forth, I asked Hasan how it was going with Aliyah one night after youth group.

Hasan says, “I don’t really know what’s going to happen. We had a fight yesterday, but then later she was saying that she wanted to dump Mike and try to make it work with me. I mean, she was even saying that she would want to try to marry me and everything.” “Wow,” I say. “Yeah,” he says. “I mean, that’s what I wish sometimes,

you know? I wish I could just say to her parents and my parents, ‘We want to be together, but we’re just going to keep it *halal*, you know?’ We’re not going to do anything, but just see each other and talk to each other. Then we wouldn’t have to keep going through all of this... She was telling me that she was having these nightmares and so she wanted me to tell her *Al-Falaq* [a *sura* of the *Qur’an*], but I didn’t know that one. So I was just teaching her the *Al-Fatiha* over the phone, and she was learning it. I’m trying to help her to be more religious. And she said it before she went to sleep and then she didn’t have the nightmares anymore.”... Hasan tells me about a boy and girl “couple” that he knows at school. He says, “They completely ‘keep it *halal*,’ you know? They don’t do anything. They’re just like really good friends. And they’re not even Muslim. They just do it that way. And I have so much respect for them. They were sitting with each other at lunch the other day, and I was watching them, and she said something to him like, ‘I’ll always be there for you.’ And I saw that and almost wanted to cry, you know, like it was so beautiful to me.”

As the potential relationship with Aliyah fails to materialize, Hasan employs two resources drawn from his religious tradition – religious texts and the pledge of chastity – to try to solidify the connection and almost will the partnership into being. Although the results are far from clear, Hasan expresses the belief that keeping the relationship *halal* will somehow cleanse it of the ambiguities and uncertainties that currently plague it. Although the particulars are different, Hasan’s use of Islam in his relationship reflects the same sense of a structuring and ordering force that Yusef found helpful in using the *halal-haram* dichotomy to establish his pairing with Leila. In both cases, the fact that Islamically derived cultural resources are considered apart from and above the messiness and unpredictability of human relationships imbues them with a stabilizing power in the context of these shaky young couplings.

A final example of how one of the Legendz worked to keep his relationship *halal* in order to supply it with a sense of stability and direction demonstrates a third variation of this practice. Although Abdul also practiced sexual chastity in his relationship, he did not emphasize this dimension of the relationship as Yusef did. Nor did he focus on incorporating religious practice

in the partnership, like Hasan. Rather, for Abdul, working to provide some culturally structuring mechanism to his relationship meant pushing to meet his girlfriend's parents early in the courtship. This was not something, incidentally, that his girlfriend felt was necessary, but Abdul insisted that this was the appropriate path to take. Abdul and a few of the other Legendz went to meet his girlfriend's parents one evening. I met the boys later that night, and hung out with them as they talked about the evening's events.

Muhammad says, "Abdul, I thought we were supposed to go to a movie or something." "We were going to," Abdul says. "But I said to her that I thought I should meet her parents first. And she was like, 'Well, I don't know if we're ready for that.' And that made me feel kind of bad, like, oh, you don't think we're ready for that?" Muhammad says, "No that was good that they met you, and how they know who you are and who you hang out with, right, so they can trust you a little better. They know you're not trying to do something crazy."... "I don't know," Abdul says. "Yeah, I guess it was good." I ask, "So her parents would have been OK with her going out with you guys?" "Yeah, I think so," he says. "I just thought it would be good if I met them first." We pull into a gas station, and hop out of the car. Everyone seems to be buzzing a little from the experience of the evening. I walk next to Abdul into the station and ask him, "So, does your mom know where you were tonight?" "No way," he says. "What would she think?" I ask. He says, "Well, she thinks I'm just playing around with girls, so..." "Oh," I say.

Abdul's commitment to meeting his girlfriend's parents before taking her out – something that was not only *not* required by the young woman's parents but is kept secret from his own mother – reflects his own desire to make this relationship "right" in his own way, by providing it the cultural heft of a courting requirement drawn from his religious and cultural community. As can be seen in his disappointment at his girlfriend's suggestion that they are "not ready" for this step, Abdul sees this ritual as a way to give the relationship – still in its fragile, early stages – a reassuring sense of direction and trajectory.

The Useful Flexibility of Halal

Yusef had begun his first “halal” relationship with a Muslim girl – Leila – in April 2009 and by February 2010 all of the Legendz were in religiously endogamous romantic partnerships whose mode they would characterize as “keeping it *halal*.” While the Legendz relied on *halal*’s association with rooted religious tradition and the timeless and transcendent to provide relationships with a sense of structure, boundary, and definition, in practice the boys conducted themselves within the established framework of these “*halal*” relationships in a range of ways, including experimenting with physical intimacy to varying degrees (Swidler 2001). Some couples did keep their partnerships free of kissing or hugging, as far as I could tell. Others demonstrated a high level of physical comfort with each other when I spent time with them out of sight of other adults, easily wrapping their arms around each other and sometimes kissing at length. Still other couples fell somewhere between these poles, secretly holding hands from time to time and sometimes stealing a quick kiss. The fact that the Legendz and their partners understood these relationships to be *halal* in designation – and in practice regarding the more serious violation of pre-marital sex – allowed the youth to tinker around the edges of this central and centering religious concept.

In practice, the idea that one was keeping it *halal* – and that this meant there was some restriction on dating activity – was more important than the details of what this meant, which were hardly ever discussed. For the Legendz and their friends, “keeping it *halal*” was helpful because it suggested that there was some boundary, but specifying exactly what that boundary included or excluded – or suggesting that these particulars should be the same for everyone – would make

this religious notion more restrictive than helpful. The importance of the *haram-halal* dichotomy over its particular contents was reflected in a conversation between some of the Legendz and an older boy, Mustafa, behind the mosque one Sunday afternoon.

Mustafa says, “I mean, the thing about relationships is, I think it’s only the business of those people in the relationship, you know?” I nod. Mustafa says, “You can have a relationship. It’s fine, as long as you don’t do anything that isn’t *haram*, you know?” The boys nod. Zaid says, “As long as you have the intention to marry the person, it’s OK, right?” Mustafa nods, “Yeah, and its *haram* to have sex before marriage.” Yassir jumps in quickly: “Man, I never had the intention to have sex before marriage.” Mustafa says, “As long as you do it in the right way, you know, you have your homeys around. You don’t be alone with just that person [he gestures to an invisible someone next to him], so nothing happens, you know.” Yassir says, as if checking his own behavior against this criteria, “Yeah, Abdul’s always with us, so...” Zaid asks, “What if it’s her homeys that are with you?” “Her homeys?” Mustafa asks. “Yeah, that’s OK, too.”

This was the only conversation I ever witnessed between any of the boys when they discussed what might be the specifics of the *haram-halal* rule in relationships, and even here, the details are far from clear. The only specifics mentioned are that there should be no sex before marriage, that you should have the intention of marriage, and that you should always be with others. Beyond tagging sex as *haram*, the particulars of physical intimacy are left untouched, covered only by Mustafa’s typically vague declaration that “It’s fine, as long as you don’t do anything that isn’t *haram*.” The emphasis here is much more on acknowledging that there is *some* boundary than that it is crucial what lies in or outside of it. This was consistent with the Legendz’ dating practices, which each had some restrictions to it, though what it was that was restricted varied. While some couples placed kissing and hugging in the *haram* column, others slid these over to the *halal* side and kept sex in the *haram* column. As mentioned above, for Abdul, *halal* was about parental approval while for Hasan it was about religious rituals. In all cases, it was the presence of the religiously-rooted *haram-halal* dichotomy that mattered.

According to the Legendz' logic, as long as you deemed something *haram* that you were not doing – and something else *halal* that you were – you were “keeping it *halal*.”

Assisting the Legendz in reconciling the stated *halal*-ness of their relationships with their occasional foray into romantic physicality was the local availability of the Islamic idea of *niat*, or religious intention. As taught in the religious lessons at the City Mosque's youth program, having pure intentions in action was important because, even if someone did something incorrectly, if it was done with the intention of pleasing Allah, it was seen as an acceptable action. The Legendz were quite familiar with this idea, and often applied it – either overtly or tacitly – in their interactions with young women and their dating relationships. One instance of such an application of *niat* occurred after I had accompanied the Legendz to one of their hip hop performances, this one at a local private high school attended by two of the girls from the mosque, Asifa and Shazia. As we walked out of the school and into the darkening parking lot, the young women from the mosque walked with the Legendz and talked to them.

Our little group stops by one car, and Asifa says goodbye to everyone. Shazia says goodbye to us all as well. Asifa hugs everyone, and then Shazia does, too. I stand near Yusef and Shazia as they hug and then I hear her say something about “weird” to Yusef. The rest of the group – the boys, the MC, and Asifa's friend – keep walking further into the parking lot. I ask Yusef, “What did she say?” He says, “She said it feels weird to hug like that.” “Oh,” I say, nodding. Then he says, “But I don't trip because it's OK if your mind is in the right place. And my mind was in the right place.” I nod. We keep walking towards my car.

As can be seen here, the idea of intention, or *niat*, suggests manifesting a religiously pure motivation in action. At the same time, though, this notion can actually help to facilitate one's involvement in potentially sacrilegious action, such as hugging a non-married female. This role of religious intention as a kind of prophylactic against *haram* action means that as long as one

demonstrates this intention – that one is *trying* to act in a religiously appropriate way – one is actually more able to participate in potentially borderline activities, such as pre-marital dating. The practical usefulness of this idea of religious intention for the conducting of dating relationships was evident during a conversation I had with Yusef one day, about his girlfriend Samara. By this time, the relationship with his first girlfriend Leila had been over for about six months and he had been seeing Samara for about six weeks. One day after youth group at the mosque, I was asking him how it was going with Samara.

“So do you see her a lot?” I ask. “Yeah,” he says. “I’ve been seeing her almost every day.” “Where do you see her?” I ask. He says, “At school.” “Oh,” I say. “So are you guys, like, keeping it *halal*?” I look down at my shoe, then over at him. “Weeeell...” he says, rolling his eyes upward, and smiling a little. “We’re trying to, but sometimes things get a little out of control... Its hard when you like someone like that. But, you know, we try to keep it chill. When we start to do something, we try to calm ourselves down and say, OK we don’t want this to get too out of hand. We were just talking about that actually.”

Although Yusef is slightly embarrassed to admit falling short of keeping his relationship completely free of physical intimacy, he does not express any major internal conflict regarding this occasional straying from the ideal. Rather than fixate on a strict code of behavior that must be met, Yusef emphasizes how much he and his partner have been keeping such goals in mind. He uses the word “try” three times in explaining how their sometimes questionable actions relate to their religious ideal, and he mentions that this is something that he and Samara discuss. While he admits this straying from perfection, Yusef does not consider his status as a good religious Muslim threatened in any troubling way because he and his partner are acting with the *intention* of religiously pure behavior.

Halal's particular combination of religious authority and definitional looseness was useful to the Legendz not only because it permitted romantic partners to engage in a range of behaviors that could still be deemed Islamic, but also because it helped to prevent the specifics of these activities from being discussed among friends. A well documented fact of adolescent male social life is the social expectation of sexual progress, and the pressure to discuss these activities among peers (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg 1989). Such conversations can be uncomfortable for youth because they may reveal differences in experience among friendship group members. This discovered discrepancy can make those with less to report feel embarrassed, or can simply cause otherwise close friends to acknowledge a troubling difference between them (Marsiglio 1988). For the Legendz, tagging relationship activities with the label "keeping it *halal*" in interaction provided a useful way of avoiding an uncomfortable discussion of sexual specifics, as the phrase's sense of sacred finality worked to discourage any further questioning on these matters. An example of this use of the phrase occurred one Friday evening as Abdul and I dropped Zaid off at a movie theater where he was going to meet his girlfriend and some of her friends.

Zaid points to a street corner to my right, "You can just drop me off here, cuz I'm going to that theater over there." I pull over and he hops out. "OK, see you later," he says. "Have a good time," I say. "Yeah," Abdul says, "Keep it *halal*." Zaid laughs: "Alright," and hops out of the car and walks across the street.

Here Abdul's half-joking reminder to Zaid to "keep it *halal*" suggests that they both know that the specifics of Zaid's behavior will likely not hew completely tightly to an Islamic code of behavior, but, as importantly, it allows them not to actually discuss any of this in detail. This interactional use of the phrase among the Legendz when talking about their relationships not only helped Legendz who had engaged in more physical involvement than was religiously appropriate, it also served to protect those who had less sexual progress from sharing this

information. This use of the term became clear to me while sitting in Muhammad's car in front of 7-11 one evening, Muhammad, Abdul, and I ate snacks and chatted. As we talked about their friend Hasan and the young woman he was interested in, I took the opportunity to ask about the idea of "keeping it *halal*."

I ask Muhammad, "When Hasan was telling me about that girl he's talking to..." "Aliyah?" he says. "Yeah," I say. "He was telling me that they were 'keeping it *halal*.' What does that mean?" Muhammad rolls his eyes: "Please! He's just saying that because he can't do anything! Because all he's doing is talking to her on the phone and texting her. He's saying that because he can't do anything else!"

Not only does keeping it *halal* serve the Legendz as a means of avoiding discussion of sexual progress and variance, but they also occasionally understand and acknowledge it as such.

While *halal*'s combination of religious authority and lack of specificity was useful for the Legendz in managing their romantic relationships and easing peer interactions, these same qualities of the idea could be used by their partners to set undesirable terms of dating or even end romances. In two cases, girlfriends of the Legendz used religious impropriety – and the concern for family's judgment of this behavior – as the primary reason for ending a relationship. Here's how Yusef recounted the way that his first girlfriend Leila broke up with him.

She called me last month and said that she didn't want to do it anymore. That it was too hard. She didn't want to be disloyal to her family. That she wanted to be a good Muslim. So I was like, 'Whatever, OK. I understand what you're saying.'

A similar justification for ending a romance was given to Muhammad by his girlfriend of five months, Noor, who lived in Arizona. This came up when Yusef, Muhammad, and I were

washing Yusef's car in the parking lot behind the mosque one Sunday afternoon (emphasis mine).

“So, are you going to Arizona anytime?” I ask Muhammad. “No,” he says. “My Mom canceled that. But I don't really want to go now anyway.” Yusef says, “Why because its finished with Noor?” “No,” Muhammad says. “We're supposed to be on a break supposedly. She's the one who broke it off. She said she wanted to try to be a better Muslim during Ramadan.” Yusef says, “*Man, that's always how they do it, by wanting to be a better Muslim.*” “I know,” Muhammad says. “And I can't say anything to that.” “Yeah,” Yusef nods. “You can't say anything to it.” Muhammad says, “What can I say? ‘No, I want you to be a bad Muslim’? So, I don't know. She's worried about her family.” “I know how that goes,” Yusef says.

With both break-ups, it is unclear to what extent concerns about religious propriety on the part of the female partner were the “real” reason for ending the relationship. While these might well be the central reasons for the girls' decisions, a range of other unspoken reasons are possible to imagine – that Leila was finding Yusef's strict abstinence too boring, say, or that Noor did not like being so far away from Muhammad and found someone new and closer. In any event, the justification of desiring to be a “better Muslim” proves a culturally potent reason, as the understood sacred quality of this desire prevents both Yusef or Muhammad from presenting a strong challenge to the girls' actions (“You can't say anything to it.”) At the same time, this authoritative use of religion also makes the break up easier on the boys, as any other, messier, more personal reason for the relationship's end is left unspoken. The girls apply an Islamic cultural framework to the break ups – and the boys defer to this meaning – so that an otherwise untidy aspect of young relationships can be provided with a sense of order and associated with the realm of the extra-human.

Keeping it *Halal* and the Puzzle of Public Muslim Dating

A convergence on religious endogamy in non-marital dating was not the only notable trajectory in the Legendz dating lives during their adolescence. The other was a movement from conducting romantic relationships in secret to allowing these activities to be seen by family members and religious leaders. As can be seen in the Legendz' aggregated dating history (Table 1), the boys kept dating hidden from parents and other adults from 2003 to early 2010. During this period, the boys and their girlfriends spent immense time and energy working to keep relationships clandestine by meeting partners at locations distant from areas of shared communal life; limiting electronic communication to late night calls, texts, or emails; attending community or group youth activities and then "peeling off" with one's partner in a quiet corner or outside location; and – in a particularly creative strategy – "transforming" discovered flowers and other gifts intended for one's girlfriend into presents for one's mother. By January 2010, this policy of concealment had eased. Some boys took less care when spending time outside of the mosque with girlfriends, and were seen in public by other community members. Others directly told parents about their relationships. By the time of the youth group retreat in January 2010, most of the boys' parents and even religious leaders could see that the Legendz were in significant relationships with young women in the youth group.

What explains the timing of the emergence of the Legendz' relationships into the public communal realm? And why were these relationships more or less – if grudgingly – accepted by the adult community of the mosque when they did become public? The Legendz' movement into a later stage of adolescence more associated with romantic dating in the US – and their parents'

reluctant acknowledgment of this fact – likely provides part of the explanation. But the specific timing of events, as well as the ways that the Legendz and their parents talked about these relationships, suggests an additional explanation – that the Legendz’ work to keep their relationships *halal* supplied these activities with a sense of religious legitimacy which facilitated the Legendz’ making them public and eased their acceptance by community adults. This thesis is supported by the sequence of events in the Legendz’ aggregated dating history (Table1), which reveals a period of nine months - April 2009 to Jan 2010 – during which the Legendz dated Muslim girls in ways that began to employ Islamic cultural frameworks but were also kept hidden from their parents and other community adults. As described above, during this time, the Legendz were attempting to apply various cultural tools from religious Islam – from limits on sexual involvement to sacred texts to courting rituals – to their relationships in order to provide them a sense of order and stability. As the Legendz and their partners were engaged in this ground level cultural tinkering from April 2009 to January 2010, these relationships accumulated an internally experienced (by the Legendz) and externally directed (towards their parents) cast of religious legitimacy.

The Legendz’ experience at constructing *halal* relationships with their girlfriends in private and in their own ways meant that they had enough experiences mixing cultural elements of religious Islam and American style dating culture to feel some ownership over and confidence in the cultural integrity and religious legitimacy of these partnerships when they became public. In describing his first relationship, with Leila, Yusef specifically expressed a sense of pride in their ability to keep their activities within the bounds of Islamic propriety. Speaking with me after the relationship ended, he said

Now I can do it, you know? Maybe Allah wanted to show me what that was like, for five months, and now I know...I know that I can do it. I mean, we never messed around or anything.

Yusef's suggestion that Allah was involved in this dating experience reflects the extent to which the Legendz still managed to see these relationships as Islamic, even if they knew they did not meet all the community requirements of a "proper" Muslim pre-marital arrangement. This confidence in the religious propriety of the Legendz' relationships only grew over time, as can be seen in Yusef's statement quoted on page 89 – and made seven months after the above comment – that his relationship with Samara was sufficiently *halal* because they were consistently *trying* to maintain limits on physical intimacy.

This sense of having been around the block – not just in terms of dating but specifically in terms of dating in a way that they considered to be religious – gave the Legendz more confidence and even a little swagger when these relationships began to become public. When in March of 2010, Abdul's father drove by the mosque and saw his son standing alone next to his girlfriend on the front steps of the building, he called Abdul's cell phone and yelled at him, threatening to beat him and throw him out of the house. Abdul was initially worried, but his older brother Yusef, who already had a relationship's worth of *halal* dating experience under his belt, demonstrated a newfound confidence in the boys' dating practices when facing their father. A week after the incident with Abdul's father, I asked Abdul about it at the mosque.

I ask Abdul, "What ever happened with your Dad seeing you at the mosque with that girl?" "Oh," he says. "He was like, 'I know you guys are hanging out with girls.' He was talking to me and Yusef, actually. And Yusef was crazy, he was like [puts on 'tough' Yusef voice], 'So what if I hang out with girls. So what?' And he just walked

away like this.” He mimes Yusef doing a ‘tough’ walk away from his father. I was like, ‘This dude is crazier than me!’”

Yusef’s attitude towards his father reflected a growing confidence on the part of the Legendz that the style of dating they had been practicing in hiding was culturally durable enough to stand up to parental scrutiny and threats of punishment.

Following his brother’s lead, and buttressed by his own accumulated time in a “keeping it *halal*” relationship, Abdul too gained confidence in the religious and moral propriety of his dating activity. One afternoon, a month after the incident with his father, I asked him about his girlfriend’s parents’ take on their relationship.

I ask him, “So her parents are cool with you guys hanging out together?” He says. “Yeah. We aren’t doing anything wrong.” When her parents come to pick her up, I always talk to her Dad, say ‘salaam aleikum,’ ask him how everything is going...But it was funny, when they dropped her off at the barbecue the other day, her mom was smiling and saying, ‘Have fun’ and her Dad was like [makes a stern face], ‘What time is this going to be over?’” He laughs.

Abdul’s statement that he and his girlfriend “weren’t doing anything wrong” reflects the growing ability of the Legendz to present their own interpretations of their dating activities as sufficiently Islamic, even in the face of continuing adult suspicion (i.e. her father’s “stern face”).

The Legendz’ process of becoming increasingly confident in the religious acceptability of their relationships dovetailed with an increase in their parents’ openness to this Islamically influenced dating activity. While none of the parents would have preferred to have their children involved in dating, once they observed their sons and daughters’ behaviors within these relationships, many

of them eased their strict opposition to this activity. Still beholden to strict community norms regarding allowing children to date, parents who did begin to demonstrate some measure of sympathy for the Legendz' romantic behavior signaled this openness in fleeting and subtle ways, rather than overt endorsements. The story of Abdul and Yusef's mother demonstrates this progression towards laxity, which paralleled her sons' growing older as well as their lengthening involvement in self-proclaimed *halal* relationships.

In fall of 2009, when Abdul was involved with Ana, a Latina girl from his school, his mother spent a lot of time and energy trying to track him down, making sure he wasn't "playing around with girls," and expressing anger if he did not toe the line. This single mother of four often appeared tired and harried at the mosque during this time, and became frustrated when she did not know Abdul's whereabouts. One night in October 2009, she arrived at the mosque while I was there with Muhammad, Zaid, and Yassir.

Mrs. El-Shafie asks me, "Is Abdul here?" I say, "No." She shakes her head slightly and bunches her lips together: "I don't know where he is." "I talked to him earlier and he said he was going to come to the mosque," I say, trying to lessen her worry. It doesn't seem to work. Muhammad, Zaid, and Yassir walk over to where we are standing...She asks them, "Where is Abdul?" Muhammad says, "I don't know. I haven't seen Abdul in like a week." "You guys are always with him. You must know where he is." "No," Abdul says. "I really don't know." I say again, "He texted me earlier and said he was coming to the mosque...He said he was going to come at 6:30." "What time is it now?" she asks me. "Seven fifteen," I say, looking at my phone. She shakes her head again, then turns to Yassir: "Do you know where he is?" Yassir says, "No, auntie, I really don't." "OK," she says, with some frustration, "You go on and hide him." As he says "hide him," she brings one of her palms down on top of the other as if she's closing a book. Yassir says, "Auntie, we're not hiding him, *wallahi* (by God)." She says, "All week, I haven't known where he is. He just goes to school at seven in the morning, then comes home at ten o'clock at night." She turns slightly towards me: "I don't know where he is, who is with, or what he is doing." I nod. She turns back to the three boys, "But you just go ahead and hide him if you want." She makes the same gesture on the word "hide," and the boys again insist that that is not what they are doing. Mrs. El-Shafie tells Muhammad, "You call him

please...I try to call him but he doesn't answer the phone." Muhammad nods, and moves a few steps away to call. The other two boys walk away as Mrs. El-Shafie turns to me. "Abdul is changing, all of a sudden," she says. "He used to come home everyday after school. Now he doesn't come home until 10 or 11 at night, and I don't where he has been or who he has been with. He's changing." She shakes her head back and forth.

By December 2009, Abdul's relationship with Ana had run its course. During this same month, Abdul became involved with a young Muslim woman, and worked to pursue this relationship in a *halal* way, meeting her parents and setting limits on physical intimacy. At the early stages of this relationship, Mrs. El-Shafie was still suspicious of Abdul's behavior, and would still come to the mosque asking where he was. By March 2010, after Abdul had been dating his girlfriend for two months, and his older brother Yusef had been involved in *halal* relationships for almost a year, Mrs. El-Shafie was still playing the role of concerned mother, but beginning to reveal slight cracks in her sternness. These alterations in response to the boys' dating was never openly discussed by Abdul and Yusef's mother, but was communicated through fleeting and subtle signals in interaction. She made this kind of gesture one night in March when Abdul, Yassir, Zaid, and I were planning to go to Oakdale, a nearby town where the boys were going to meet up with their girlfriends. Before making the 30 minute drive, we stopped by Abdul's house so he could change his clothes. When we arrived at the small apartment, his mother was there and, although Abdul had told her that we were all going to a movie together, she seemed suspicious that something else was going on. She kept asking the boys specific questions like "What movie are you going to see?" and "Do you even have enough money to go to that?" At one point she asked me, "And you will be watching them the whole time?" I nodded.

Yassir says, "We're just going to a movie over there." Abdul's mother looks at me, "And you'll be watching them the whole time?" "Yes," I nod...Abdul's mother asks Yassir, "Is Muhammad going with you?" "No," Yassir shakes his head. "Why?" she

asks. “He doesn’t have anybody in Oakdale?” Everyone laughs, especially Zaid and Yassir. She says, “I’m not stupid, you know,” and smiles broadly, shaking her head, her dimples showing.

While Ms. El-Shafie’s increasing openness to her sons’ dating can likely be partially explained by an acknowledgment that her children were growing up in an American cultural milieu and this was the direction that things were headed whether she liked it or not, the way that her sons were engaged in dating certainly made a difference. Their appropriate behavior with young women at the mosque, gathering in group dates, increasing openness to parents, and selection of Muslim young women all presented a style of dating that was easier for her and other parents to accept while keeping some sense of religious propriety in tact. Yusef described this process of change one evening when I asked him how things were going with Samara, a girl he had been dating for about a month.

“It’s great. Really great. She’s the coolest person.” “That’s great,” I say. He says, “And her mom is cool with it and everything.” “That’s good,” I say. “What about your mom?” I ask. He says, “My mom’s cool. You know, as long as I tell my Mom what’s up she’s cool. She just doesn’t want us to be doing something behind her back. But if I tell her upfront, maybe at first she’ll get worried about it, but then she’ll be cool. That’s the way you have to do it. Just be up front and then it will be smoother.” I ask, “But what about Abdul? Is your mom cool about him?” “Yeah,” he says. “At first she was stressing out, but once she gets a chance to see how’s he doing it, you know, how I’m doing it, she’s OK because she sees that we’re not doing anything crazy.”

Thanks to time spent working on developing *halal* relationships in secret, the Legendz were more able to confidently bring these partnerships into the open, and their parents were more able to receive these activities positively.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the Legendz use cultural tools drawn from their religious community to assist them in navigating the culturally ambiguous world of adolescent dating and how this adoption of religious resources for dating purposes explains the change in their forms of dating from less (interfaith and private) to more (public and endogamous) religiously appropriate. While current literature treats youth religious dating as either reflecting an internalized morality (Smith 2003, 2010), resulting from effective adult social organization (Freitas 2008), or indicating an instrumental strategizing (Regnerus 2007), I find youth discovering their own ways to apply and adjust specific religious resources to assist them in managing the everyday challenges of adolescent relationships. As demonstrated, this adoption of locally available religious frameworks and meanings results in the youth moving towards a more normatively “religious” mode of dating, even though they experience this change as resulting from a series of autonomously made decisions. At the same time, the youth’s adoption of religious practices for their dating lives spurs community adults to become more accepting of these practices. As a result, the acceptability of the youth’s religious dating is the result of a double movement – of adults and youth – towards a locally constructed *halal* middle.

This chapter supports the claim, made by other sociologists of “everyday religion,” that ordinary people use and adapt religious cultural resources in everyday life to manage practical problems, both personal and political (Smilde 2007, Lichterman 2005, Ammerman 2007, Davidman 2007, Wood 2002). But it demonstrates something more specific as well – that in some cases, the use of such resources, and the appreciation of their practical benefit, moves actors in the direction of

institutionalized religious norms, even if this is not their primary intent. While many scholars of religious voluntarism have emphasized the way that piecemeal uses of religious can move people away from – or position them in contrast to – formal religious organization or authority (e.g. Roof 1987, Davidman 1991, Orsi 1985, McDannell 1995), the case of the Legendz’ dating activities demonstrates how using religious resources in a practical way can cause one’s lifestyle to come into line with formal religious norms and therefore move, or keep, one within the fold of a broader, and reinforcing, moral religious community.

Two factors seem crucial to making this embrace of formal religious norms and membership that is experienced as voluntary take place. The first is a consolidated and well bounded religious community. Those who pick and choose religious cultural practices – such as “cultural” Jews or practitioners of “material Christianity” (McDannell 1995, Davidman 2007) – find it easier to stay out of formal religious organizations or communities if they live outside of them in the first place. In contrast, those who find cultural tools drawn from their religious traditions practical for everyday use *and* are situated within or proximate to an organized religious community will likely find that the affinity between the practices they utilize and the norms of the religious group pulls them towards commitment to formalized practices and associated community membership (Mahmood 2005, Wagler 2011). As a result, those who merely intend to embrace select aspects of religious practice may find it difficult to resist a more complete adoption of communal norms and participation if they are located within a highly religious social milieu. The second factor is the flexibility of religious authorities (Chaves 1994) regarding slight reforms to practice. While the Legendz’ application of religiously derived cultural frameworks to American style dating practices was accepted by some adults in their community as evidence of good Islamic

intentions, this might not be the case in a more strictly “orthodox” religious community. Having the room that the Legendz did to construct and pursue these culturally hybrid relationships in the first place was vital to the development and eventual acceptance of these arrangements – this may not have been possible in a more conservative and tightly monitored community. As well, the status of the mosque as “liberal” was central to its openness to alterations in practices considered “traditional.”

How do gender differences impact the processes described here? While both young men and women were involved in “keeping it *halal*” relationships, these arrangements seem to reinforce male power and privilege in two ways. First, it was young men who initiated these relationships and moved to make them *halal*. In comparison to the helplessness experienced by the boys when they attempted to date Latina girls in middle school, the application of Islamic norms gave them a way to set their own terms and take charge of the relationships. Second, the process of experimenting with these kinds of culturally hybrid relationships – and being able to leave the house in order to do so in the first place – is far more available to young men than women in highly religious communities (e.g., Dasgupta 1998; Espiritu 2009; Foner & Kasinitz, 2007; Manohar 2008; Samuel 2010; Talbani and Hasanali, 2000; Zaidi and Shuraydi, 2002). As a result, the opportunity to undergo this voluntarily experienced move towards increasingly locally and normatively “religious” behavior may be something primarily available to young men. This may mean that young women in such communities may be more likely to experience religious approaches to dating as primarily constraining rather than as a source of individual creativity or practical benefit. At the same time, as was seen on the section regarding the flexibility of *halal*, young women can also use religious resources to take action within these relationships. In

addition, community reforms adopted by adults and religious leaders in response to male-initiated attempts to date religiously may end up resulting in increased freedom of action for females as well.

Table 1. From Secret and Secular to Religious and Public: The Legendz' Dating History 2003-2012

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Muhum-Mad	Cheryl(s)	Sandra(s)	Sandra(s)	Sandra(s)			Noor (s)	Nailah (p)	Noor (s/p)	Noor (p)
Yusef		Carolina(s)		Yasmin(s)			Leila (s)	Samara (s/p)	Samara (p)	Samara (p)
Yassir							Angela (s)	Hana (s)	Hana (p)	Safia (p)
Abdul	Inez(s)		Angelica(s)		Ana(s)	1.Ana(s) 2. May(p)	1. May(p) 2.Ana(s) 3. Saher (s)	Saher (s/p)	Saher (p)	
Zaid							1.Sophia (s) 2. Sara (s)	Sara (s)		
Hasan							Aliyah (s)	Aliyah (s)		

Legend

Regular Text = Non-Muslim Partner

Bold Text = Muslim Partner

(s) = secret relationship (hidden from parents and mosque community)

(p) = public relationship (known to parents and some mosque community).

CHAPTER FOUR

Preparing to Present Muslim Identity: Stigma Management Rehearsals at the City Mosque

As mentioned in this dissertation's opening chapter, much of the scholarly work on Muslim American youth focuses on the increasing harassment of and discrimination against Muslim youth and their communities since the attacks of 9/11 (e.g. (Bayoumi 2008, Sirin and Fine 2008, Cainkar 2009, Maira 2009). While each of the Legendz had experienced such incidents firsthand – and although all of them knew youth and adults whose lives had been more directly and negatively impacted by law enforcement policies as well as commonplace bias targeting Muslims – this issue of anti-Muslim stigma was not the central subjective concern of the daily lives of the Legendz, nor was it the defining aspect of the lives of most of the other youth at the City Mosque. Although the Legendz and their friends were not constantly troubled by anti-Muslim bias, being classified as members of a social identity group linked to negative stereotypes *did* have an ongoing and important impact on the lives of the Legendz and their peers. This social status made the City Mosque a site of continual concern about, and discussion of, the *potential* for anti-Muslim harassment and consideration of the ways that such treatment might be avoided or addressed. The preoccupation with these questions of possible harassment and response generally stemmed from adult leaders, but worked to place Muslim youth in a daily environment where particular ways of enacting Muslim identity in response to stigma – usually peaceful and passive modes – were continually promoted and demonstrated. This chapter will illustrate the ways that religious and youth group leaders, and some teen peers, worked to prepare young Muslims in the public management of Muslim identity using a type of interaction I term “stigma management rehearsals.”

Stigma and Stigma Management Work in Small Groups

A stigma is commonly understood to be an attribute of a person—such as a racial phenotype, physical deformity, or perceived character flaw—that is treated as “deeply discrediting” by others in society (Goffman 1963:3). Sociologists and social psychologists argue that it is the specific social context, including actions by powerful institutions, that allows the construction of a “relationship between an attribute and a stereotype” (Goffman 1963:3). This relationship transforms a given trait into a negatively considered stigma carrying the potential for undesirable social consequences (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Corrigan, Markowitz, and Watson 2004). Stigma is constructed by processes operating at both the macro and micro levels of social life. At the macro level, cultural and political processes link certain identifications with stigmatizing stereotypes during specific historical periods and in particular locations (Link and Phelan 2001; Corrigan et al. 2004). For example, due to actions of government, media, educational, legal, and police institutions, to be identified as “Irish” in the United States during the early-mid nineteenth century was to carry a stigma with social and economic consequences. By the start of the twentieth century, however, this particular stigma was no longer salient (Ignatiev 1995). Action at the micro level is also central to the manifestation and maintenance of stigma, as it is often during ground-level social interactions between individuals that a given trait may be treated as stigmatized, and the negative consequences of the given stigma may be brought to bear (Corrigan and Watson 2002).

Stigma management is the attempt by persons with stigmatized social identities to approach interpersonal interactions in ways aimed at minimizing the social costs of carrying these

identities. Commonly employed stigma management strategies include passing (the attempt to hide the stigmatized attribute completely), disclosure (the open admission of stigma in hopes of acceptance), and disavowal (in which both the stigmatized and nonstigmatized parties ignore the visible stigma). Stigma management is important from the perspective of the stigmatized, as carrying an unmanaged stigmatized attribute in society can result in serious psychological costs, such as feelings of embarrassment or shame, loss of self-esteem, and a sense of responsibility for perpetuating the negative stereotype (Miall 1986; Snow and Anderson 1987; Steele and Aronson 1995). Unmanaged stigma can also lead to severe social sanctions, such as verbal or physical harassment, loss of employment, or imprisonment or institutionalization (Edgerton 1967; Spradley 1970; Schneider and Conrad 1980).

The most widely discussed and documented kind of stigma management work is that which takes place in *public*, when a person with a spoiled social identity encounters nonstigmatized others and, in response, employs one or another interactional strategy, with some help from the nonstigmatized “normals” in the interaction (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Major and O’Brien 2005). An equally important but less explicitly theorized kind of stigma management work takes place in *private*, when persons with a shared stigmatized identification discuss their marginal social status and potential stigma management approaches among themselves or with sympathetic allies (Goffman 1963; Schneider and Conrad 1980). Such ingroup interactions addressing stigma and stigma management response have been discussed to some degree within sociology and social psychology (for a review see Herman-Kinney 2003:716). Goffman (1963) gestures towards the importance of these private interactions, mentioning that the stigmatized are usually taught “tricks of the trade” for managing stigma by their like-stigmatized peers (Goffman

1963:20), and describing how “professionals” and “spokespeople” from advocacy organizations tend to give stigmatized people specific advice in how to present themselves (Goffman 1963:109–14). In addition, some ethnographic studies of small groups of individuals sharing racial, economic, or medical stigmas describe the ways in which group members help one another learn about, prepare for, or rehearse stigma management strategies (e.g., Spradley 1970; Schneider and Conrad 1980; Miall 1986).

What has been missing from these approaches is an explicit, detailed, and generalizable theorization of how these backstage stigma management rehearsals work *as interactions* and an explanation of what these ingroup encounters reveal about the local stigma management culture of different collectivities of stigmatized persons. In order to address this gap in the literature, I sharpen the focus on ingroup stigma management work introduced by Schneider and Conrad (1980) and Miall (1986). Utilizing ethnographic observations from the City Mosque and Muslim Youth Program, I identify and label the various processes present in stigma management rehearsal interactions that contribute to their socializing power, and argue that these concepts can be usefully applied to understand other cases of stigmatized collectivities.

Along the same lines, I want to suggest that stigma management rehearsals are a unique and consequential type of small group interaction. The microsociology of Gary Alan Fine (1979; 2000; Fine and Harrington 2004) and Randall Collins (2004) has demonstrated how small groups of repeatedly interacting individuals serve as important locations for the creation, transmission, and reinforcement of shared cultural meanings. Data on stigma management rehearsals presented here affirms this overall notion of small groups as active socializing forces and provides

evidence for the centrality of common cultural vocabulary and experience (Fine 1979)—and repeated ingroup emotional expression (Collins 2004)—to the effectiveness of small group acculturation. Theorizing the stigma management rehearsal as a distinct and prevalent type of social interaction, with its own particular variants and processes, will provide an analytical framework for investigating the backstage, ingroup dynamics that help to shape the front stage, public management of stigma across a broad range of social contexts.

The Social Contours of Muslim Stigmatization

Carrying a social identity that is vulnerable to stigmatization in a given historical time and social space—such as being a Muslim in the contemporary United States—is not the same as being always and everywhere stigmatized. It does, however, make experiences of stigmatization, which may include the public denouncement of one’s group identification, personal harassment or abuse, or slightly differential treatment, more likely. Such stigmatizing treatment is especially likely when one is in a social situation where “cultural resources” (Lamont 1992) or “schemas” (Sewell 1992) that express or carry certain prejudices or stereotypes are readily available and, sometimes, even socially rewarded. Such is the situation facing Muslim Americans today, where a complex of social factors has left persons with this religious identification vulnerable to stigmatization and potential harassment, violence, arrest, or detention. This stigmatization and harassment stems from an array of sources, including federal government policies and actions, representations in local and national media outlets, state and local law enforcement behaviors, and actions of individual citizens. These various sources of prejudicial schemas, stereotypes, and actions—many of which serve to strengthen one other—create an environment where the

stigmatization of Muslim Americans is sometimes allowed to proceed with little or no visible sanction from any official quarter. The 2008 election year rumor that Barack Obama was a Muslim, which was commonly met with allegations of slander but not of bigotry, is a case in point. And while there has been an accompanying outpouring of social support and encouragement for American Muslims from various corners of American society since September 11, 2001 (Howell and Shryock 2003; Cainkar 2009), there have also been continued discriminatory actions targeting Muslim Americans for their religious background and its alleged link with violence and terrorism.

While the initial, most intense period of social surveillance and targeting of American Muslims after 9/11, which included incidents of mass detentions (Cainkar 2009) and registration requirements (Ibish 2008), as well a sharp rise in hate crimes (Human Rights Watch 2002), cooled somewhat after 2003, there have remained in place less overt practices that utilize religious and/or national background as a central criteria for surveillance, prosecution, or harassment. An FBI initiative launched in 2003 to infiltrate mosques in the US with undercover agents remains operational as well as controversial (Cainkar 2009; Watanabe and Glover 2009). Stringent immigration policies put in place after 9/11 continue to create significant delays in naturalization petition processing for Muslim and Arab Americans, due to lengthy FBI name and background checks (Ibish 2008). A tight-knit group of academics and writers produces books, papers, and films attacking Islam and its adherents with titles such as *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't* (Spencer 2007) and *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us* (Emerson 2002). Members of the same group organize annual events on college campuses, including “Islamofascism Week,” a gathering that promotes the idea that there is homegrown

violent jihadist movement brewing in the United States, and that campus Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) are a key part of this movement (www.terrorismawareness.org). Verbal and physical harassment of Muslim and Arab youth in middle and high schools has risen and remained at increased levels since 9/11 (Ibish 2008; Cainkar 2009) and in a 2007 survey, 42 percent of Muslim Americans under 30 said that in the past year they had been verbally taunted, treated with suspicion, physically threatened or attacked, or targeted by police because they are Muslims (Pew 2007). The strong public opposition to a 2010 proposal to build an Islamic community center two blocks from the site of the former World Trade Center, much of which relied on the assumption that Islam has an inherent link with terrorism (Mohamed and O'Brien 2011), is another example of the potency of Muslim stigma in the United States.

As will be seen, many of the broader political, legal, and social processes concerned with Muslim Americans and their alleged linkage to terrorism and violence filter down into the daily lives of the Legendz and other young members of the Muslim Youth Program at the City Mosque. The social salience of Muslim stereotyping, sometimes backed by state and law enforcement power, does not mean that the Muslim youth of the City Mosque are constantly suffering the effects of stigma, but it does mean that they are often in a situation of potential or anticipated stigmatization. As a result, there is a hyper-awareness within the community of Muslim stereotypes and their potential negative consequences, as well as consideration of how triggering them might be provoked or avoided. It is within this context that mosque youth group leaders and members utilize stigma management rehearsals as a socializing mechanism.

The City Mosque and Youth Group as Sites of Backstage Preparation

Established in the 1950s, the City Mosque is one of the largest, most well known, and generally well-regarded mosques in the city. Since the mosque's founding, its leadership has intentionally sought to promote the formation of a "Muslim-American identity," and has encouraged interaction with members of other faith groups, especially Jews and Christians. Like many Muslim American communities, the City Mosque membership was negatively impacted by the post-9/11 social and political climate in the US, with Muslim youth facing increasing harassment at schools, adults being questioned and/or detained by federal law enforcement and immigration officials, and members having the general sense that they were under suspicion because of their religious identity. The mosque's primary response to this situation has been one of increased community outreach, with hundreds of interfaith and educational events held every year since 9/11, both within and outside the mosque, focused on the explicit goal of reaching out to non-Muslims and "setting the record straight" about Islam.

Both the mosque more broadly and specifically the youth group can be considered sites where community adults and young leaders work to prepare younger Muslim Americans in locally appropriate ways of performing and presenting Muslim identity in public. As will be described in detail, the promotion of specific strategies for responding to anti-Muslim harassment or discrimination in peaceful and calm ways was the most common form of this backstage preparation work for cross-cultural identity presentations. But other kinds of preparation took place as well, many of which involved the training of youth in specific scripts for presenting Islam and Muslims in a positive light. Regarding gender relations among Muslims, for example,

all youth in the mosque were familiar with the preferred way to explain why women prayed behind men at the mosque to non-Muslims – that it was a way to prevent men from looking at women from behind and therefore sexualizing them in the mosque. While this may or may not actually be the principal reason behind this arrangement for prayer, the larger point is that the mosque and youth group were sites of continual backstage preparation work for the public presentation of Muslim identity, most obviously in the realm of stigma management.

Stigma Management Rehearsals

A stigma management rehearsal is a private interaction among members of a stigmatized identity group, and sometimes nonstigmatized allies, in which a real or hypothetical incident of stigmatization is discussed and possible strategies for responding are considered. Stigma management rehearsals take place in settings that participants consider to be safely “backstage” (Goffman 1959) relevant to the perceptions of potential stigmatizers, and therefore allow members to openly discuss strategies, and express emotions, in ways normally curtailed by their everyday stigma management concerns.¹¹ Stigma management rehearsals also usually take place in small groups (Fine 1979), among individuals who have developed a common history and local culture. The sense of shared purpose, social location, and cultural vocabulary among small group members—as well as their participation in group rituals of emotional expression (Collins 2004)—make the small group an especially suitable arena for the socialization of members in strategies through stigma management rehearsals.

¹¹ This does not mean that rehearsal participants are off duty from all impression management work, however. As Goffman (1959) reminds us, the backstage of one social performance is simultaneously the front stage of another, and while members of stigmatized groups may relax impression management work regarding their relevant stigmatized status during ingroup interactions, they continue to engage in performances associated with their other social identities, as well as those directed towards other ingroup members.

I find two types of stigma management rehearsals operating within a small group of stigmatized persons. In *direct preparation*, the anticipation of an impending interaction with outside stigmatizers spurs group leaders and other members to coach an individual in the locally dominant stigma management strategy. In *deep education*, leaders use backstage time and space to instruct members in acceptable cultural justifications for the locally dominant stigma management strategy, and to permit the expression of a wide range of potential stigma responses for pedagogical purposes. These rehearsal types represent two distinct ways that members of stigmatized small groups may be socialized in stigma management strategies within ingroup settings. Despite their different emphases, both rehearsal types work to socialize group members in the same approach—the dominant stigma management strategy of the group. A *dominant stigma management strategy*, as I term it, is the specific approach to managing stigma (e.g., passing, covering, aggression, passivity) that is most often recommended and utilized among the members of a small group of stigmatized persons.

In addition to socializing members in locally dominant stigma management strategies, stigma management rehearsals promote a sense of groupness (Brubaker 2004) among members based on shared stigma and stigma management concerns, and provide an outlet for the private expression of emotions that are generally considered inappropriate for public display. These interactional features of stigma management rehearsals—their salient emotionality and emphasis on ingroup membership—make them particularly effective sites for stigma strategy socialization. As will be seen below, local power hierarchies and interpersonal dynamics also play an important role in stigma rehearsals, as it is usually, though not always, veteran members or official leaders who

promote the locally dominant response among lower status members within rehearsal interactions.

Stigma response rehearsals also demonstrate the importance of temporality when studying social interaction. George Herbert Mead (1932) argued that because the present is the only time that people ever actually inhabit, the active consideration of the past or the future requires cognitive work on the part of human actors to bring these other temporalities into present interactions. Once invoked by participants, perceptions of past or future may then impact the course of present-time interactions. Picking up Mead's thread, contemporary sociologists have begun to explore the ways in which perceptions of the future may condition present decision-making and action (Zimbardo and Boyd 2008; Mische 2009; Eliasoph and Tavorly 2010). This study supports this line of research by illustrating the concrete impact of temporality on interaction. As will be seen below, the consideration of different temporalities by group members and leaders impacts the particular kind of stigma socialization work that takes place in stigma management rehearsals.

Stigma Management Rehearsals: The Basic Form

The basic interactional ingredients for a stigma management rehearsal include the presentation of a real or hypothetical incident of stigmatization and the consideration and/or promotion of strategies for responding to the stigma. These elements were evident during a stigma rehearsal that took place one afternoon at the mosque when Legend Yusef, who at this time was attending

City College, approached Nabil, a youth staff person, as they left a youth group meeting together:

Everyone walks down the stairs, out the door, and onto the front stoop. I follow them out. Yusef talks to Nabil with others looking on: “So, you heard about this thing, they’re having it at our school, called Islamo Fascism Week?” “Yeah,” Nabil says, nodding his head. “They’re having that at a lot of schools.” Yusef says, “Yeah, I think it’s next week at City or something. But, man, why are they trying to hate on us like that? I’m gonna have to go over there and . . .” He raises his arms with fists clenched as if preparing to fight. “But you know,” Nabil says. “I think going to protest those people doesn’t help that much. It might be better just to leave them alone, because if people go and act crazy, then other Muslims don’t want to get involved. They look at the Muslims protesting and acting crazy, and then say, ‘I don’t want to get involved in this.’ So maybe we should just ignore those people.” Yusef says, “Yeah, I won’t do anything crazy, I’ll just handle it . . . But if I see those people at City, I’m gonna be like . . .” He mimes walking over to someone, punching them out, then, while they’re on the floor, pulling out a gun, holding it turned sideways and shooting them. Then he breaks his act and smiles: “Nah.”

The primary purpose of stigma management rehearsals—to socialize members in locally approved stigma responses—can be seen here, as Nabil actively intervenes to dissuade Yusef from pursuing his implicitly proposed aggressive response, suggesting instead that “maybe we should just ignore those people.” As I demonstrate, the kind of passive and peaceful response to stigmatization advocated for by Nabil is also the approach most consistently promoted by the leaders, and most members, of the City Mosque. Stigma management rehearsals like this one serve as the mechanism through which a locally preferred strategy—that of passivity—is transmitted and achieves dominance within the small group. In each of the dozens of stigma management rehearsals I observed at the City Mosque, one or more members of the group *always* argued in favor of this passive approach to stigma response.

In addition to illustrating the socializing role of stigma management rehearsals, this example also demonstrates three other dimensions of these rehearsals: their use for backstage emotional release, their role in constructing group solidarity, and their reflection of temporal concerns. First, the rehearsal serves as a private setting where Yusef can openly express and enact his frustration at the imagined stigmatizers (“I’m gonna have to go over there and . . .”) without worrying about the perspectives or possible judgments of outgroup members. Nabil allows Yusef’s venting performance of imagined aggression towards the organizers of Islamo Fascism Week to proceed to a point, objecting specifically to the possibility that Yusef might take this display of anger public. Nabil’s momentary allowance of Yusef’s aggressive demonstration, as well as his sympathetic head nods at Yusef’s description of Islamo Fascism Week, serves to emphasize the commonality of stigma and stigma management dilemmas among the two group members. This, in turn, works towards the second additional dimension of stigma rehearsals: increasing the sense of groupness (Brubaker 2004) among members of the collectivity. As both of the interaction participants express joint recognition of Muslim stigma and their connection to it, they actively signal and reinforce their own belonging to the stigmatized group “Muslim.” Finally, the possibility that Yusef may soon directly confront the imagined stigmatizers with an inappropriately angry response orients this rehearsal towards an impending future, which makes Nabil’s instruction in proper stigma management more urgent and focused. This temporal dimension of rehearsals will be discussed in further detail below.

The intertwining of ingroup emotional release and small group identity work evident here echoes the microsociology of Randall Collins (2004), who emphasizes that it is during such moments of mutually focused emotion and attention that symbols of group membership are created and group

solidarity is increased. Working in tandem with this shared emotional expression to solidify group bonds during the rehearsal is the articulation and acknowledgment of a common “known culture” (Fine 1979) among the participants. The emotional and strategic articulations within the rehearsal rely on a foundation of shared cultural experiences—Muslim identification and stigmatization—that are common to members of this small group. Infused with a sense of group identification, charged with emotional release, constrained by temporal concerns, and aimed at the promotion of specific strategies, stigma management rehearsals represent the interactional, ground-level “supply side” of a process of abiding concern to sociologists—the emergence, or deterrence, of public action among individuals and collectivities in response to stigma, discrimination, and oppression (Moore 1978; Anspach 1979; Scott 1985).

Direct Preparation Stigma Rehearsals: Pre-Game Coaching

Stigma management rehearsals fall into two types, direct preparation and deep education, and each kind of rehearsal emphasizes a different variety of ingroup stigma management socialization. In direct preparation rehearsals, group leaders and members focus on instructing one or more other members in the locally dominant stigma management strategy in preparation for an upcoming interaction with perceived stigmatizers. Because it is oriented towards a specific and temporally approaching event with potentially high social stakes for the group, a direct preparation rehearsal is like the pre-game coaching of an athlete.¹² The sense of an impending and consequential encounter with outgroup members triggers the focused instruction of one or

¹² Schneider and Conrad (1980) have previously employed the term “coaching” to describe situations in which stigmatized persons practice stigma strategies with the aid of friends or family members. Here I employ a similar term to emphasize the future-oriented nature of one type of backstage stigma rehearsal work—direct preparation.

more ingroup members in the locally dominant strategy. One such direct preparation rehearsal took place on a Sunday morning as I sat and talked with twenty-four-year-old youth group coordinator Maryam, seventeen-year-old group member Sarah, and sixteen-year-old member Zeina, as we waited in the youth room of the mosque for other members to arrive.

Sarah tells Maryam, “I saw this book called the *Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam* and it was really messed up . . . It was saying that Mohammed is a prophet of war and that non-Muslims aren’t safe anywhere in the world, even in America!” “Did you see it at a bookstore?” I ask her. “Yes,” she says. “And they were recommending it! One of the staff people named Edward wrote a note that said, ‘Sometimes you have to choose between the ugly truth and being politically correct.’” Maryam shakes her head disapprovingly. “So,” Sarah says. “I walked up to the counter and said, ‘Is Edward here?’” Maryam and I laugh. Sarah continues, “And they said, ‘No he doesn’t work here today.’ And I said, ‘Well, I need to talk to him so I can set him straight about Islam.’” Zeina says to Sarah, “But if you say something to them, it will just create more anger.” Sarah says, “But we need to do something!”

As can be seen here, direct preparation rehearsals involve the consideration of a specific, impending encounter with outgroup members (Sarah’s potential confrontation with the bookstore employee) and the triggered coaching of one member (Sarah) by another member (Zeina) in the locally dominant strategy (peaceful passivity). When Sarah proposes an assertive approach to responding to the stigmatizing experience—i.e., directly approaching Edward and “setting him straight about Islam”—Zeina counters by recommending the passive strategy, saying that Sarah’s approach will just “create more anger.” While Sarah may not be fully convinced to alter her approach by the end of the exchange, the socializing forces at work in the rehearsal are evident in the lack of support expressed for Sarah’s assertive approach by the other members and by Zeina’s direct counterargument. Through such interpersonal signals, direct preparation rehearsals serve to encourage members to learn and adopt the locally dominant stigma management

strategy while simultaneously working to dampen their enthusiasm for the use of alternate, locally unacceptable strategies.

Two interrelated characteristics of direct preparation rehearsals distinguish them clearly from the other type of rehearsal, deep education. First, direct preparation rehearsals are *oriented towards a specific and approaching future-set event and therefore have a sense of immediacy*. As participants imagine the looming confrontation between the coached individual and stigmatizing outgroup members, they engage in what sociologists of time have conceptualized as the cognitive and linguistic “bringing in” of imagined people and events from the predicted future into the actual present (Mead 1932; Katovich 1987; Fine 2007). Zeina’s advice to Sarah to be more passive therefore does not result from a purely philosophical consideration of the situation, but rather takes into account and is constrained and spurred on by the imagined interests and potential reactions of a specific and temporally approaching “them.” The consideration of such impending future-set encounters gives direct preparation rehearsals a sense of immediacy and causes members, with the urgency of coaches just before game time, to quickly intervene before one of their group moves to publicly respond to stigma in a normatively inappropriate manner.

The orientation of direct preparation rehearsals towards a specific, impending event also means that they are *narrow in scope and focus primarily on the teaching of the locally dominant strategy*. In direct preparation rehearsals, the sense that a fellow ingroup member may be about to utilize an unacceptable strategy in public triggers others to focus their energies on coaching the first member in the locally dominant strategy and dissuading them from using an inappropriate one. While they sometimes also allow for limited emotional release and the

momentary expression of group solidarity, each direct preparation rehearsal witnessed at the City Mosque centered on and emphasized the urgent and explicit training of one member by one or more others in the peaceful and passive stigma management strategy. In this way, direct preparation rehearsals, in the City Mosque at least, can be conceived as a set of crude bulwarks, quickly erected by group members in an attempt to prevent inappropriately assertive or aggressive stigma responses from escaping the boundaries of the ingroup and finding expression in the public arena.

Deep Education Stigma Rehearsals: The Training Ground

While direct preparation rehearsals involve the straightforward teaching of the dominant stigma strategy to one or more members in anticipation of an upcoming interaction, deep education rehearsals provide members with more in-depth stigma socialization experiences, including instruction in the reasoning behind the locally preferred strategy as well as opportunities to more carefully consider—and even express—stigma responses normally considered inappropriate. Rather than being triggered by a recent incident of stigma and the proposed response of a member, deep education rehearsals are initiated by group leaders and address stigmatizing incidents and response encounters set in either the remote past or hypothetical future. The perceived temporal distance between the considered incidents of stigma and response and the immediate group gathering in deep education means that group leaders can prioritize other facets of stigma management socialization besides direct coaching, including the teaching of justifications for stigma strategy and the solidifying of ingroup bonds through collective emotional release and shared frustration at stigmatization. In this way, deep education rehearsals

are like a training ground—a location where members receive a broad education in locally dominant stigma management approaches via a range of pedagogical means.

In deep education rehearsals, mosque leaders commonly use one (or both) of two instructional techniques to encourage members to adopt a peaceful and nonaggressive approach to stigma response. The first is to use the discussion of a real or hypothetical incident of stigma and response as an opportunity to *explain the religious, moral, or strategic reasoning underlying the locally dominant response*. One example of such instruction took place during a Sunday youth group discussion. Adult youth group leader Omar asked the group if anyone had ever been bothered for being Muslim and, if so, what they did about it. During the conversation, a tall Arab American girl named Farah said:

“I remember a bunch of us were at a picnic area one day, and there were some *mujahaba* there [older women wearing headscarves], and some younger girls wearing scarves, including Asma [another girl in the youth group]. And there were a group of skater guys skating at the park. And they kept looking at us and laughing. And this one guy actually came down and sat in front of one of the girls and pretended to meditate. We just walked away, but they were really, really rude.” Omar says, “Do you know what the *Qur’an* says do to in this specific situation? The *Qur’an* says [he recites in Arabic and then translates]: ‘When ignorant or stupid people speak to them’—and here the subject is the righteous person—‘they reply only “peace.”’ That doesn’t mean they have to actually say the word peace; it just means that what they say is not fighting words. They just brush it off; they are not affected. When you have confidence, you don’t have to worry about it.”

Whereas direct preparation rehearsals equip individuals with discrete tools for immediate stigma management, deep education rehearsals work to supply group members with the thinking *behind* the tools, so that they may emerge more richly educated stigma managers, ready to assess and handle incidents of anti-Muslim stigma whenever and wherever they may occur. When leaders at the City Mosque use deep education rehearsals to explain the reasoning behind the locally

preferred stigma response, they most often provide a *religious* reasoning for the strategy and in doing so frequently draw on quotes from the *Qur'an* or stories of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Sometimes, though, *moral* and *strategic* justifications for dominant stigma management approaches are provided during deep education rehearsals. Moral justifications include the basic notion, repeated time and again in rehearsals, without explicitly religious language, that passive approaches to stigma management are simply “good” and “right” and aggressive ones are “wrong.” Strategic justifications for peaceful stigma management include the commonly articulated argument that a passive response to stigma will combat stereotypes of Muslims as violent and aggressive while an aggressive approach works to perpetuate such representations. Omar explained this strategic justification during a youth group discussion promoting the peaceful approach, saying, “When people know you’re a Muslim and see that you’re not crazy, what a difference that makes. When they think of Muslims, they’ll think of you.”

The second instructional technique used by leaders during deep education rehearsals is to *permit the emotional expression of normally unacceptable responses to stigma without immediate correction* from group leaders or other members. As was previously demonstrated, members sometimes express inappropriately aggressive stigma responses during direct preparation rehearsals, but in such cases leaders and other members quickly counter these proposals with direct coaching in the approved peaceful response. In deep education rehearsals, in contrast, leaders allow members’ expression of alternate stigma responses to stand without direct and immediate opposition, permit other members to briefly express support for these options, and sometimes even signal their own sympathy with these publicly taboo strategies and emotions.

One deep education rehearsal emphasizing the open expression of normally unacceptable responses took place during a Sunday youth group meeting. An adult staff member named Kim led a workshop on the “Theater of the Oppressed,” a type of dramatic exercise in which small groups of participants act out social problems and the entire group discusses potential solutions (Boal 2008). The skits presented by each group reflected social issues that most urban teenagers face—gang violence, drugs, rumors/gossip, peer pressure—but the group addressing racism and discrimination presented a skit directly related to Muslim stigma:

As the skit begins, Yusef and Layla are sitting next to each other. The other kids in the skit walk over and say things like, “You guys are a bunch of terrorists!” “Why don’t you guys go bomb another building?” “Why don’t you just go back to Iraq?” Yusef says to Layla, “Man, those guys are getting me mad, but I don’t want to do anything. But I feel like I should beat them up.” He stands up and walks over as if preparing to fight them. People laugh. Kim says, “OK, what’s another way to solve this?” Yasmin comes in and says to the group of harassers: “Why are you going to say stuff about Muslims when you don’t know anything about it? You haven’t read the Qur’an. How would you know anything about it?” People applaud. Another kid, Waseem, goes up. He tells the group: “Why would you fools call me a terrorist? You (to Yusef) you look like Chewbacca! And you, you look like a piece of bleep!” People laugh a lot, and Kim laughs too. Then she says, “Is that a good way to solve it?” Everyone says, “NO!” Next Adam volunteers to step in: “You don’t know anything about Islam. You don’t know who their families are or where they are from! How do you know they’re terrorists?” People nod approvingly. Kim says, “So, you should defend yourself, but not in a violent way.”

As seen here, deep education rehearsals allow group members to express and enact a variety of locally inappropriate approaches to stigma response. In this example, group members act out multiple potential stigma management strategies, including aggressive violence and name-calling, and these normally unacceptable strategies are initially met with enthusiastic laughter from other group members, as well as group leader Kim at one point. Rather than objecting directly to these suggestions, Kim allows these expressions to be voiced and then gently guides the group towards the appropriate response by asking questions like “Is that the right response?”

In effect, Kim capitalizes on the sense of group cohesion created by the brief, emotional expression of enthusiasm for aggressive responses and redirects this collective energy in service of supporting the appropriate response and denouncing the inappropriate ones.

The same permissiveness regarding the expression of locally inappropriate stigma responses by members was observed across multiple cases of deep education rehearsals. In each case of deep education, the incidents of stigma response being considered were never temporally set in the approaching future but, rather, in either a hypothetical future, as in the “Theatre of the Oppressed” example, or in the actual past. In both cases, these temporalities allowed participants to feel a sense of distance from the stigma and the stigmatizer and, as a result, permitted a wider range of stigma responses to be articulated. An example of a deep education rehearsal addressing past-set incidents of stigma response took place during Omar’s large group discussion on anti-Muslim stigma and possible reactions at the annual youth group retreat.

Omar asks the group, “How many people here have been harassed because of what happened on 9/11?” A lot of hands are raised. Omar asks, “And how did you respond?” Aziz replies, “I wanted to beat someone up.” Omar says, “OK, that’s a natural feeling.”

While Omar went on to espouse the wisdom and effectiveness of a passive and peaceful response to harassment later in the lecture, for a few moments Aziz’s aggressive response to stigmatization was allowed to stand uncorrected and even yielded an expression of sympathy from the group leader. The temporal orientations of deep education rehearsals provide them with the perceived time and space necessary for the articulation and consideration of varying stigma responses, even if these alternative responses are elicited for the ultimate purpose of promoting the locally dominant one. This more subtle and deliberate form of stigma socialization is only

possible in the deep education setting, where leaders and members are not hemmed in by the sense of a temporally approaching encounter with stigmatizers that characterizes direct preparation rehearsals.

Although the permitting of initially uncorrected expressions of aggressive stigma responses within deep education rehearsals may initially seem at odds with the socializing purpose of these interactions, this practice actually seems to work *towards* the broader socialization of group members in local stigma management doctrine in two interrelated ways. First, the openly expressed, inappropriate stigma responses articulated (and observed) by members during deep education rehearsals serve as vivid rhetorical counterpoints to the dominant approach advocated by mosque leadership. As was seen in the Theater of the Oppressed example and the retreat incident, once youth offer up their own felt or enacted responses, they can be used as stigma management “don’ts” to contrast with the leadership’s stigma response “do’s.” Experienced together by group members, these “don’ts” become shared symbols of inappropriate *public* stigma response behavior, even if leaders and members express some sympathy for these responses in *private*. The shared experience and knowledge of the stigma response “don’ts,” then, work towards the construction of a more tightly knit group, one bound not only by shared religious identification and stigmatized status, but also by a common stigma management doctrine and perspective.

Second, the articulation of more aggressive stigma responses allows participants in deep education rehearsals to engage together in the private release of publicly inappropriate emotions in response to stigma. By collectively recounting or enacting angry responses to stigma,

members experience a powerful release of these emotions in the private backstage area and are simultaneously taught that they should not express them in public. In allowing for this private release of redirected anger while using its expression to make the case for a more passive public face (see Hochschild 1983), deep education rehearsals actually contribute to the maintenance of passivity as the locally dominant response to stigma. At the same time, this jointly expressed aggression and anger towards stigmatizers creates a powerful, shared emotional experience for group members (Collins 2004), which works towards the solidifying of group bonds. These same bonds of joint accountability and trust within the group, constructed through shared aggressive emotional expression, can be utilized for the promotion and maintenance of the dominant, peaceful approach to stigma management.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the specific ways that the Legendz, their peers, and leaders – individuals sharing a social stigma – work together to manage the spoiled identity of “Muslims” while in private space. Through backstage stigma management rehearsals, group leaders and members work to socialize other members in locally preferred stigma management strategies. Direct preparation rehearsals are oriented towards impending, future interactions with stigmatizers and therefore emphasize quick instruction in the group’s approved strategy. Deep education rehearsals address stigmatizing incidents and responses set in a hypothetical future or distant past and are therefore experienced as having the time and space necessary for the deliberate teaching of stigma response justifications, the permission of a looser expression of inappropriate responses, and a more intensive experience of group solidarity through collective

emotional release. Both rehearsal types allow, to different degrees, the venting of publicly inappropriate emotions regarding stigma and the construction of the groupness of the collective based on the stigmatized identity and shared preferred response. Ultimately, in the current case at least, both types reinforce the prominence of a dominant stigma management strategy within the small group.

To what extent can we expect to find stigma management rehearsals operating within other groups of stigmatized individuals besides American Muslims? A sample of qualitative studies of stigmatized persons demonstrates that stigma management rehearsals are present across groups of people with different kinds of stigma, including racial minorities (Duneier 1999), economically disadvantaged persons (Spradley 1970), and those with medicalized stigmas (Edgerton 1967; Schneider and Conrad 1980; Miall 1986), and that the stigma rehearsal types operating within these collectivities vary by the stability of the group. This literature suggests that transitory groupings of stigmatized persons, such as homeless men spending one night in jail together awaiting trial (Spradley 1970:191) or African American men discussing the police during a brief encounter on a public street (Duneier 1999:34), use direct preparation rehearsals to advise one another regarding impending stigma management work, but do not engage in deep education rehearsals to transmit a broader philosophy of stigma management or strengthen group ties. In contrast, more stable and longer-term groups of stigmatized persons, such as support groups for deviants, nuclear families with a stigmatized member, or friendship cliques of stigmatized persons demonstrate the presence of direct preparation rehearsals (Schneider and Conrad 1980), deep education rehearsals (Schneider and Conrad 1980), or both types (Herman 1993). The correlation of deep education rehearsals with more durable group structures of

stigmatized persons suggested by the stigma literature is in line with the findings of the current study, which demonstrate the importance of repeated rehearsals, strong group bonds, and emotional trust for effective deep education rehearsals and stigma management socialization.

Along the same lines, it is stable groups of stigmatized persons, especially those with hierarchical power structures, that seem likely to develop, over time and through deep education rehearsals, a single stigma management strategy that becomes dominant and normative among members. When stable groups of stigmatized persons are characterized by power imbalances between leaders and other participants, as is the case within formal organizations (the current case) or nuclear families (Schneider and Conrad 1980; Herman 1993), group leaders can employ the power of their position, which includes the authority and means to initiate deep education rehearsals, to disseminate a single, preferred stigma management strategy among members. In less hierarchical groups of persons with stigmatized identities, such as a marriage between two stigmatized persons (Miall 1986) or a friendship clique of similarly deviant people (Herman and Musolf 1998), a single, dominant stigma management strategy may also emerge. In these cases, the emergence of such a dominant strategy is the result of a high degree of consensus among members regarding stigma management approaches rather than top-down stigma management socialization.

While group stability, power hierarchy, and ingroup consensus may contribute to the emergence of a normative stigma management approach within a stigmatized small group, what factors shape the *specific* dominant strategy that takes hold? Judging from the mosque case, as well as other examples in the literature, we can tentatively hypothesize two factors that influence the

tenor of the emergent dominant strategy within a hierarchically organized group of stigmatized persons. The first factor is the particular stigma response ideology promoted by a group's leaders, an ideology that is conditioned by the cultural resources regarding stigma response most readily available to leaders as well as the leaders' particular social position. The second factor impacting the determination of a dominant strategy within a group is whether certain stigma response options are considered undesirable by group leaders because they are perceived as carrying potentially severe social consequences for group members.

Regarding the first factor, one reason that passivity emerged as the dominant stigma management strategy within the Muslim Youth Program is because mosque leaders, who initiate and set the parameters for deep education rehearsals, espoused and promoted this particular stigma response ideology. Mosque leaders embraced this strategy partly because of their own repeated exposure to cultural resources (Lamont 1992; Sewell 1992) that supported such a response to stigma. The founders and senior leadership of the City Mosque use their various programs and activities to promote the idea that Islam is a "religion of peace" and to emphasize elements of Islamic teachings that support a peaceful approach to social conflict. As a result, passages from the *Qur'an* and the stories of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) that promote this line of thought are regularly circulated through the mosque community and are readily available to leaders, and in turn members, as interpretive frameworks through which to understand and make decisions about social conflict. Related to the availability of cultural resources promoting peace and understanding within the City Mosque is the particular social position of mosque leaders as "spokespeople" and middlemen (Pattillo 2007) representing the broader Muslim community. This role places them in a structured relationship of responsibility to both powerful institutional

actors—including government officials, law enforcement organizations, and other religious and community organizations—and their own Muslim constituency. This middleman position means that promoting an aggressive, or even a strongly assertive, stigma management strategy might potentially threaten mosque leaders' access to powerful political figures and groups or alienate the more politically cautious members of their own community.

In addition to the stigma response ideology and related social position of group leaders, a second factor that contributes to the emergence of a given dominant stigma management strategy among a small group of stigmatized persons is the perception that an alternative strategy—in the current case, the forceful assertion, or aggressive defense, of the stigmatized identity—could lead to highly undesirable social consequences for group members. While most members of the Muslim Youth Program had not experienced severe consequences for publically asserting or defending (or simply disclosing) their religious identity, the mass arrests, detentions, and extensive surveillance that took place after 9/11 were well known within the community, in part due to stories about friends and relatives who *had* faced such penalties. As a result, the potentially severe consequences for asserting or aggressively defending Muslim identity were well known within the small group. The shared knowledge of these consequences and the broader power dynamics they signify contributed to an ingroup culture of timidity and caution regarding public responses to Muslim stigmatization, not only at the mosque under study but among American Muslim communities more broadly (Hondagneu-Soletto 2008, Bail 2011).

Most examples of rehearsals within the broader stigma literature lack the detail needed to make wider generalizations about the influence of leaders' ideology and social position, or the

perceived consequences of using alternative responses, on the emergence of a particular dominant stigma management strategy within a stigmatized group. In one case, consistent with the current study, a group's dominant ideology of peacefulness, high social standing among leaders, and perception of severe consequences for an assertive stigma response correlated with the emergence of a passive dominant strategy (Schneider and Conrad 1980). In another, a stigmatized small group's system-blaming ideology, marginal social standing, and lack of concern with consequences correlated with the emergence of an aggressive dominant strategy (Herman and Musolf 1998). This suggests a potential negative case, which would also support the current study's findings. These are only individual cases, however, and more research on small groups and their stigma management approaches is needed to draw broader conclusions.

Finally, what role, if any, do stigma management rehearsals play in larger processes of social change and destigmatization? Depending on the ideology and social position of leadership, as well the perceived severity of consequences for identity assertion, stigma management rehearsals promoting an assertive or aggressive stigma response could work towards broader social change by teaching stigmatized persons how to openly challenge their stigma. In contrast, rehearsals teaching passive approaches might actually work *against* social transformation by facilitating the private release of anger that might otherwise be directed at powerful parties and institutions that serve to perpetuate the stigma in the first place. While the former, assertive approach is reflected in a few of the rehearsals documented in the literature (Schneider and Conrad 1980; Herman and Musolf 1998), the great majority of stigma rehearsals identified in studies of the stigmatized, as well as in the present case, are utilized to promote a passive approach to stigma management. This suggests the interesting possibility that, while capable of challenging stigma, stigma

management rehearsals generally serve as a socially disciplining mechanism (Elias 1978) through which stigmatized persons are taught to tone down and control their emotional and potentially more aggressive responses to stigma. The question of the relationship of stigma management rehearsals to broader social change processes will be most effectively investigated through an approach to studying stigma that includes the consideration of backstage as well as public interactions, asks where public stigma management responses come from and, ultimately, seeks to understand the link between the internal dynamics of stigmatized groups and their public responses to their stigmatized social status.

CHAPTER FIVE

Managing Multiple Cultures: Local Consequences, Scope Conditions, and Broader Applications

Spending nine months with the Legendz indicated to me that a central concern of their lives was managing their participation in multiple cultural systems, spending three and half years with them allowed me to observe the specific processes by which they managed these sometimes conflicting cultural allegiances. Each of these processes has been the focus of one chapter in this dissertation. First, in Chapter 2, I demonstrated how the Legendz use certain modes of cultural reception (Peterson 2000, Griswold 1987), or “listening practices” (De Nora 2000), to manage participation in the cultures of religious Islam and secular hip hop. Chapter 3 revealed how the boys “imported” cultural schemas from their religious tradition – the *haram-halal* dichotomy, religious texts, the concept of religious intention (*niat*) – to bring stability to their uncertain young romantic involvements, thus moving them, perhaps unwittingly, towards a religiously normative mode of pre-marital gender relations. Finally, Chapter 4 presented an analysis of the way that authorities of the Legendz’ mosque worked to prepare them in the management of Islamic identity and stigma in backstage private space in anticipation of public cross-cultural interactions. Each of these chapters has illuminated a particular process by which multicultural subjects work – or are encouraged – to manage participation in multiple cultural systems in modern life.

Beyond highlighting specific processes of everyday multicultural navigation, what broader conclusions can be drawn from this project? What kind of multicultural life do these processes conspire to construct for the Legendz and their peers? What social consequences might the

Legendz' participation in these processes have for them and their community? And, looking beyond the Legendz' case, what might these findings tell us about the way that multicultural subjects navigate social life more generally, and what kinds of multicultural lives different configurations of navigation processes and structural factors might produce or allow? In this concluding chapter, I will provide initial answers to these questions, and suggest beneficial directions for continuing research on these issues.

Qualities of the Legendz' Multicultural Life

By engaging with the specific processes of cultural management outlined above in interaction with their particular social and institutional environments, the Legendz produce and experience a certain kind of multicultural life, characterized by: a continuing allegiance to their minority culture and associated community; a sense of themselves as effective multicultural actors; a tendency to work for the avoidance of conflict between their own minority culture and the cultural mainstream; and the bringing of small changes to their local cultural community. I will now consider each of these aspects of the Legendz' multicultural life in turn, and explain which combination of navigation processes and structural factors works to produce these qualities.

Continuing Allegiance to Minority Culture and Community

The Legendz exhibit a continuing commitment to the practice of religious Islam and identification with their Muslim community for a confluence of reasons, some previously acknowledged in studies of cultural minority youth, some generally overlooked. As has been

noted of other young members of minority religious and immigrant communities, the Legendz are at this point in their lives deeply enmeshed and dependent upon their families, religious organization, and broader community in such a way that it would be quite socially disruptive for them to significantly decrease religious practice or identification, or to leave their family or community altogether. Indeed, scholars of minority religious and immigrant youth indicate that a primary reason why young people adopt and continue religious and other cultural minority practices and identifications is because of existent, strong, and meaningful social ties to co-identified community members, friends, and family (Ozorak 1989, Kibria 1993, Cornell 1996, King et al 1997, Espiritu 2001, Smith and Denton 2005, Desmond et al. 2010, McKune 2010). While such community ties are evident in the Legendz case, and are surely a part of the explanation of why they maintain their practice of, and identification with, religious Islam, the ways they *experience* this commitment – witnessed over years of daily interactions – provides additional important and complementary explanations for how young people understand their connections with their cultural minority practices, identity, and community.

First, the Legendz experience being Muslim American – and navigating between the sometimes differing expectations associated with religious Islam and American youth culture – as exciting, interesting, and even pleasurable. This is not the same thing as saying that the Legendz enjoy every aspect of being a highly religious Muslim young person. The Legendz often experienced the obligation of daily prayer, their parents' restrictions on their social lives, and the mosque adults' constant concern about anti-Muslim stigma as burdensome, onerous, or simply boring. But the Legendz' continual collaborative work to reconcile the expectations of urban American teenage life with the practices of religious Muslims provided them with a way of gaining a

firsthand familiarity and facility with cultural elements of religious Islam, and allowed them to see how these elements could possess a flexibility and dynamism. These active, daily, and ongoing interactions with Muslim cultural practices – often in conjunction and tension with competing cultural systems – gave the Legendz an experience with Islamic religiosity that countered the characterization of Islam, common among some Muslim adults and non-Muslims more generally, as primarily *about* obligations and static tradition. By expressing and experiencing Islam’s constitutive elements in interaction with American youth cultural practices and modes – through managing Muslim and hip hop meanings, infusing dating practices with religious constructs, and continual everyday joking– the Legendz took Muslim elements in their own direction, and made their continuing embrace of Islamic identity and practice not only more palatable but lively and exciting.

In addition to sometimes experiencing Islam as dynamic and fun, the Legendz also experienced elements of religious Islam as useful in their everyday lives. This practical applicability of Muslim cultural schema was evident in the ways that the Legendz found the sense of stability provided by the *haram-halal* designation beneficial for their adolescent romantic relationships. Experiencing religion not as an abstract and received system of beliefs, but as an applied and helpful set of ideas and practices makes the Legendz continued practice of Islam feel like something immediate and useful, rather than distant and externally imposed. Other ways that the Legendz demonstrated the everyday practical use of Islamic practices – enjoying seeing friends at mosque gatherings, for example, or praying in order to feel calm – reaffirmed that the boys found aspects of their faith useful for everyday life. This does not mean that the Legendz were consistently pious or always-religious subjects (Lichterman 2012). In fact, the Legendz did not

meet their religious obligations to the letter, and they rarely spoke or, apparently, thought much about ideas of God or abstract theology. More often than not, they were too consumed with the everyday preoccupations of their lives – sports, music, girls, food, jokes – to think about Islam in the abstract. For the Legendz, as is likely the case for most religious people, their faith was a system of practices, schemas, and symbols that was at times particularly and immediately useful and relevant, and at other times just existed in the background of their multifaceted and multidimensional social lives (Smith and Denton 2005, Ammerman 2007).

These experiences of Islam as dynamic and useful helped to keep the Legendz within the fold of Islam, and moved them more deeply into an ongoing involvement with their religious tradition and community. When viewed from the outside – or based on data gathered from surveys or even interviews – this identification with Islamic culture and religious practice may have appeared to be primarily the result of top-down pressure from parents or community leaders (Young 1976, Gans 1994, Cornell 1996), or as evidence of an effectively transferred religious “morality” (Smith 2003, Smith 2005, Vaisey 2009). However, an ethnographic account of the Legendz’ daily lives reveals that their community-influenced religious commitment is shot through with subjective experiences of dynamism and practicality. While this experience does not mean that the religious life of the Legendz is completely freely chosen or always preferred, it does mean that it is often experienced as something agentive, dynamic, and fun, even as it remains within the bounds of community and family expectation.

Subjective Experience of Multicultural Agility

Part of what enables the Legendz to experience their religious lives as agentive and dynamic is that their Muslim “world” – of the mosque, youth group, their families, and broader Muslim community – is located adjacent to other social worlds associated with differing and multiple cultural systems – their public schools, their ethnically diverse neighborhood, television and the internet, to name a few. The fact that their parents allow them to engage with these different worlds means that the Legendz have, from an early age, needed to figure out how to switch from setting to setting, weigh what to bring with them across borders and what to leave, and experience firsthand the disjunctures that traversing social boundaries can cause. As has been demonstrated, the Legendz rarely experience this navigation of everyday cultures as troublesome, but rather as interesting, and as reflecting something appealingly complex about themselves. Georg Simmel theorized that modern individuals would gain a stronger sense of their own identities as they moved through the diverse and multiple social spheres of urban life (1955, see also Coser 1975). More recent works on cultural tastes as well as immigrant youth have demonstrated that exhibiting familiarity with a broad range of styles can exhibit a desirable “multicultural capital” or cultural omnivorousness (Verkuyten 1994, Bryson 1996, Peterson and Kern 1996, Carter 2005, Warikoo 2007, Colombo 2010). While production of culture scholars – like some of the semiotic hybridists before them – have focused on the products that demonstrate multicultural capital (a diverse music collection, for example) the case of the Legendz demonstrates that the active *processes* of participating in multiple cultures are central for the experience – and expression – of appealingly multicultural selves, particularly for young people.

The story of the Legendz also suggests that displaying multicultural competency in daily life can be an important means by which members of culture-based minority communities (Cornell 1996) work to demonstrate – to themselves or others – that they are not completely subsumed by or always beholden to their minority cultural identification. The Legendz’ case – particularly their active modifications of Islamic, hip hop, and dating practices – illustrates how working to manage differing cultural systems can create the subjective experience – and the outward expression – of loose cultural boundaries, and of a temporary pivoting away from one’s cultural commitments. This kind of cultural agility – experienced as demonstrating independence and autonomy – is particularly useful in the United States, where individualism and personal expression, as well as diversity and pluralism, are highly valued (Varenne 1977, Gans 1979, Kurien 2007, Wimmer 2008). The Legendz’ achieved identity as multicultural subjects is therefore not evidence of their transcendence of cultural constraint, but is itself shaped by a powerful and deep-set cultural expectation of American society – that one should demonstrate a complex, autonomously crafted, and partially “ethnic” identity (Waters 1990).

Working to Avoid Cultural Conflict

One might expect that the Legendz’ strong identification with their religious culture, paired with their daily movement between their own “Muslim” social world and other spheres, would lead to a daily life characterized by frequent social tension and even conflict. As has been demonstrated, this was simply not the case. The relative lack of such conflicts in the Legendz’ lives can be explained by a few factors, including the fact that none of the boys dressed in an obviously “Muslim” way, the pluralistic nature of American society, and the immense diversity of the

Legendz' own urban neighborhoods and schools. But another answer lies in the Legendz' own tendencies – promoted at the mosque and shared by most of their young Muslim peers in the youth group – to work for the avoidance of cultural tension whenever possible. Partially due to the mosque's socialization work in public presentation of Muslim-ness, and partially due to the daily experience of being different, the Legendz and their peers are quite cautious about how they express their Muslim-ness in public. They do not hide their religion at school, on the street, or in other public settings, but neither do they overtly display it. While in one way this shows the Legendz' comfort with their identification as “Muslim” – they don't feel the need to demonstrate Muslim-ness in public to feel authentically Muslim – it also reveals a dimension of social life in pluralist and cosmopolitan societies that is often hidden from view.

As this dissertation has shown, and other researchers have indicated, cultural minorities engage in preparation and management work to smooth out interactions with majority identified persons, even in pluralistic societies (Goffman 1963, Spradley 1970; Schneider and Conrad 1980; Hochschild 1983; Miall 1986; Herman 1993; Herman-Kinney 2003). The Legendz' case provides more evidence of this dynamic, and reminds us that even if people of different racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds can mix and interact in a society, cultural minorities who are aware of their vulnerability to stigma may nonetheless be engaged in ongoing and extensive backstage (and frontstage) impression management work aimed at mitigating potential conflict. This suggests that, just as multicultural identity is a social achievement, so might multicultural and cosmopolitan society be considered a collective social performance, with cultural minorities often shouldering significant unseen and unacknowledged impression management work.

Bringing Small Changes to Local Culture

Even as the Legendz maintain a strong identification with their religious tradition and community, the particular cultural elements that constitute the local version of this tradition and practice are being gradually reorganized and altered, in part due to the Legendz' own cross-cultural movements. While the Legendz traverse culturally associated realms in their daily lives, they carry elements of popular youth and secular cultures back into the mosque, youth group, and their families' homes. As a result, and owing in large part to the mosque's liberal tenor, elements of these cultural systems find their way into, and become intertwined with, local Islamic practices. In this way, small changes in the mosque's practices are impacted by the circulation of the Legendz, and their peers, between the social worlds of the mosque, their schools, their neighborhoods, and popular media.

During the time I spent at the mosque, two changes in local cultural practices took place that could be attributed, at least in part, to the Legendz's cross-cultural involvements. The first, detailed in Chapter 3, was the growing acceptance of a form of "halal" pre-marital dating by the mosque community. While this acceptance likely involved consideration by religious leadership regarding how best to keep the youth involved in the community and mosque, this change certainly would not have taken place had the Legendz not been involved in American-style dating, and had they not participated in dating in the religiously-infused way that they did. The second change was the increasing openness to playing music in the mosque. When I first came to the mosque, the idea of playing music in the building seemed like an impossibility because the act would be considered *haram* by many members. But two years later – again, in response to the

interests of the Legendz and other youth – there was a fully amplified hip hop concert in the back parking lot, as well musical performances integrated into some youth program meetings in the building. These kinds of adjustments on the part of religious organizations to maintain youth participation are not uncommon, but it is important to note that even if they are undertaken to keep the institution viable, they at the same time often involve real and significant changes in religious practice. As has been seen in reform versions of Judaism and other denominations, over time these slight alterations can add up to a significantly different kind of religious culture.

Structural Influences and Scope Conditions

The Legendz’ kind of multicultural life, then, can be characterized by four qualities: a continuing identification with their minority culture and community, a subjective experience of multicultural agility, a tendency to avoid cultural conflict, and an ability to contribute to small changes in their local culture. In specifying this as one kind of multicultural life, I aim to suggest the existence of other kinds, impacted by differing navigation processes as well different combinations of contextual factors, in the social world. If additional kinds of multicultural lives could be typified, a greater sense of the modes and impacts of various ways of living between and among multiple cultural systems could be acquired. While the Legendz’ participation in the three processes of multicultural navigation at the heart of this dissertation – cultural reception, cultural importation, and backstage preparation – was central to the boys’ manifesting their particular kind of multicultural life, there were also important environmental conditions and structural factors that interacted with these processes to produce the Legendz’ multicultural reality. It is important to outline these “scope conditions” (Walker and Cohn 1985, Foschi 1997) of the Legendz’ case,

both to indicate the significance of structural factors in producing their experience and to remind us that theirs is one particular kind of multicultural life, made possible by a confluence of specific conditions.

Community Organization and Leadership

The City Mosque and its youth group are crucial players in the Legendz story, both as physical locations to gather with other Muslims and as institutions with a specific leadership and ideology. The mosque and youth group worked to facilitate the Legendz' multicultural life in two significant and overlapping ways. First, it provided a place for repeated gatherings of the Legendz with other Muslim youth and adults, and thus served them as a continual reservoir of Islamic cultural symbols, knowledge, and identity experiences. Attending the mosque frequently, and just knowing that it was there, provided a rootedness to the Legendz' experience of being part of a Muslim minority, which in turn allowed them to traverse the diverse cultural spheres of their daily lives without losing an identification with this community and culture (Durkheim 2001 [1913], Lacy 2004, R. Smith 2006). Although the mosque and youth group played an important role in the construction of the Legendz' multicultural life, this role was not primarily one of educating the youth in minority cultural practices or values (Kurien 1998, Smith 2003), or supplying them with culturally acceptable versions of mainstream cultural products and practices (Howard and Streck 1999, Hendershot 2004, Luhr 2009, Rossman 2009). Rather, for the Legendz, at their particular life stage of adolescence, the most important contribution of the mosque was simply providing a social space, free of assertive attempts as either religious teaching or lessons in multiculturalism but situated within a culturally dense setting, where the

boys could engage in their own consideration and mixing of divergent cultural elements with a sense autonomy and playfulness (Zhou 1997, Waters 1999, Warner 2001). As has been demonstrated, having the space and time to engage in these processes enabled the Legendz to become – over and over again – multicultural subjects through the interplay of Islamic and American youth elements and practices.

Complementing the mosque's role as a site of Islamic cultural concentration (Sewell 1999) was the mosque's location in a pluralistic city and society, as well as the mosque leadership's orientation towards interactions with non-Muslims and overt goal of integration into broader American society (Berry 1997). The City Mosque leaders' encouragement of participation in American civic life, as well as their relatively liberal interpretation of Islam, meant that the Legendz could move through different social spheres, as well as engage in some American youth cultural practices – listening to hip hop and spending time in gender mixed settings, for example – without feeling like they were betraying their community or being sacrilegious.

Gender Differences in Experiences of Cultural Autonomy

Another important factor worked to shape the Legendz' multicultural reality was their status as males. As is the case in many religious and immigrant communities, young women were permitted less social autonomy than men in the Legendz' mosque and among most families in their community (e.g., Dasgupta, 1998; Espiritu, 2009; Foner and Kasinitz 2007; Manohar 2008; Samuel, 2010; Talbani and Hasanali, 2000; Zaidi and Shuraydi, 2002). The daily lives of young women in the City Mosque community were characterized by experiences of being monitored

and controlled far more than were those of the Legendz and other boys. Young women in the community regularly experienced – and sometimes complained about – being continually told how to dress in the mosque, not being permitted the same social freedom as their brothers, being restricted in what kind of careers they could pursue, and being limited in terms of their media consumption. Most relevant to this study, this experience of monitoring and control meant that these women had neither the amount of free time and space – nor the opportunities for mobility – that allowed the male Legendz to take an active and ongoing part in the navigation of diverse cultural systems. As a result, while young women did engage in the same kind of playful culture balancing as the Legendz, particularly regarding pop culture elements, they were far more constrained in where, when, and how they could participate in these creative activities. As a result, for young women these activities may have provided less of a dramatic experience of multicultural agency than was the case with young men. From this perspective, it seems that the ability to participate in and construct a multicultural life and identity may be strongly conditioned by gender in highly religious and ethnic immigrant communities.

Stage of the Life Course

Adolescents are known for the visibility and performativity of their cultural lives (Swidler 2001), and this likely explains why so many sociological investigations into questions of cultural practice in everyday life – including this one – have focused on young people as central subjects. (e.g. Hebdige 1979, Willis 1981, Hall 1993, Frith 1996, MacLeod 1987, Fine 1987, R. Smith 2005, Warikoo 2007). But what if this focus on youth is skewing what we assume might be more generalizable lessons about culture? Taking the present case into consideration, what if the

specific social conditions of adolescence – a surfeit of unstructured free time, a social expectation of identity development, exposure to targeted media and consumer products – are so unique that this stage of life is the only time when these kinds of navigations of multiculturalism take place? What if, as cultural minorities age, their life conditions shift such that this kind of participation in multiple cultural systems is neither desired nor possible?

While it does seem true that navigations of multicultural lives are more dramatic and frequent – and therefore more observable – in the lives of young people such as the Legendz, considerations of cultural minorities at later life stages suggest that more subtle kinds of cultural navigation work also take place among adult members of cultural minority communities. While in some cases, cultural minority adults may live in relatively segregated enclaves, the difficulty of completely closing out exposure to varying cultural systems in modern life (Barth 1989, Sewell 1999, Swidler 2001) – as well as research on these populations – suggests that versions of the same three cultural management processes specified here likely occur among older people as well. Recent work of sociologists on adults and cultural reception, for example, establishes that the specific ways that these individuals interact with television, music, and other cultural products allows them to manage differing identifications and associated cultures, including religious conservative and mainstream American (Hoover 2006), devout Christian and ethnic minority (Marti 2012), and working mother and emotional self (De Nora 2000). As has been mentioned, the recent work on religion in everyday life has focused more on adult populations, providing multiple diverse examples of how religious adults “import” cultural schemas associated with their religious cultures to other, nominally secular parts of life – politics, psychological crises, performances of gay identity (Gay and Thumma 1997, Pattillo-McCoy

1998, , Davidman 1991, Tavory 2005, Smilde 2007, , Lichterman 2005, Wilcox 2010). Finally, research on stigmatized minority groups affirms the findings of this study – that, for many people, a significant part of participating in both minority and majority associated cultural systems involves anticipating and preparing for potentially troublesome public interactions (Goffman 1963, Spradley 1970; Schneider and Conrad 1980; Hochschild 1983; Miall 1986; Herman 1993; Herman-Kinney 2003). All of these findings suggest that the work of everyday navigation, and specifically the three processes outlined here, extends beyond the teenage years, and is, for many members of minority communities, part of the fabric of daily life.

Broader Applications - Substantive

As has been suggested throughout, the case of the Legendz reveals lessons that are applicable beyond the bounds of this single group of Muslim friends. The broader substantive lessons of the Legendz' case touch on areas of daily multicultural life, the continuing appeal of cultural minority identifications, and government approaches to managing diverse populations. First, the Legendz case illustrates that living a multicultural life is an ongoing project and a social achievement. Navigating multiple and diverse cultures in the course of daily life need not be a situation characterized either by dramatic trauma or easy-achieved hybridities. Rather, it may simply require continual and subtle interactional work, overwhelmingly by cultural minorities themselves, to smooth potential cultural friction or to avert social tension or trouble. When accomplished successfully – and dependent upon external conditions as outlined above – the experience of navigating multiple cultures can lead to feelings of pride and experiences of pleasure and excitement. While people managing multiple cultures in daily life do so through

engagement in specific processes, these processes and their particular modes are not solely determined by the actions or preferences of the individuals themselves. Rather, pressures exerted and resources made available and attractive by influential organizations and leaders – in this case, the mosque, parents, and peers – allow or promote certain approaches to multicultural lives. In other words, the management of multiple cultures, even at the ground level of everyday life, is a contested and contingent phenomenon. Utilizing empirical methods to observe the management of diverse cultural commitments in daily life across a range of populations and contexts will provide rich information regarding how these processes vary, and how they intersect with and impact upon other concurrent social phenomena, such as group boundary formation and maintenance, discrimination and marginality, and economic advancement. It is my hope that the conceptual tools provided here can be useful towards these ends.

Secondly, the case of the Legendz demonstrates that participating in culturally “tight” communities or lifestyles still holds appeal for modern individuals, including young people. The ability to cross cultural boundaries afforded the Legendz by being both being Muslim *and* American, in conjunction with the usefulness they found in their religious tradition, meant that the Legendz’ faith, religious identification, and cultural community held some appeal for them. At the same time, they continually took actions in the course of their daily lives to mitigate the potential experience of their religion and community as too stifling. The result was that the boys felt good about their identification as Muslims and their practice of Islam, but this state took ongoing work to achieve, particularly an engagement with the fluid cultural material of music to pull against the experienced rootedness of Islam. This demonstrates that while modern individuals continue to find comfort and guidance in culturally proscribed traditions,

communities and identifications, they also see the drawbacks to such involvement, and therefore may engage in continual, micro level efforts to offset the more stringent aspects of such social arrangements. That modern individuals can experience their cultural identities – even apparently “strict” ones – as somewhat flexible and loose helps to explain why people might continue to find such identifications appealing, even within cultural milieus – such as America – that celebrate independence and autonomy.

Finally, the case of the Legendz provides information that might be useful to those working to craft policies relevant to multicultural populations in diverse societies, particularly Western countries including Muslim immigrants. While such policies are occasionally informed by social research, this input usually takes the form of broad surveys or the recommendations of selected community spokespeople, both of which can miss the details of everyday lives as they are lived by multicultural subjects. The case of the Legendz demonstrates that there is no irreconcilable incompatibility between engaging deeply in Islamic culture and being a culturally American teenager. It also reveals that in order to facilitate the experience of multicultural compatibility within young people, one of the most helpful things governments could do is allow – and defend when needed – the establishment of ethnic or religious organizations who provide room for young people to embrace both minority and majority cultural practices. The existence of the City Mosque – made possible by a pluralist-oriented American government, as well as political support by the local Muslim community and supporters – served as a crucial site where the daily work of living and experiencing multiculturalism could take place.

If the Legendz – and other youth like them – are either raised within extremely culturally segregated enclaves, or cast into mainstream culture with little support for managing cultural tensions, such firsthand experiences of navigating multiple cultures might be missed. The existence of a mosque both steeped in locally valued Islamic practices and oriented towards participation in the larger society helped the boys establish and manage a multicultural life. While it would be difficult – and ethically questionable – to facilitate the construction of community organizations based on their practices of multiculturalism, the case of the Legendz and the City Mosque should at least warn us against knee-jerk suspicion regarding the construction of mosques per se, which has of late emerged in Europe, Australia, and the United States (Cesari 2005; Dunn, Klocker, and Salaby 2007; Astor 2010; Goodstein 2010; O’Brien and Mohamed 2011). As the case of the City Mosque shows, and other research corroborates, mosques can be one of the most helpful forces for promoting cultural integration and countering extremist ideologies (Schanzer, Kurzman, and Moosa 2010).¹³ The case of the Legendz supports what other researchers of immigrant populations have found, that community-based organizations can provide vital social structures within which the interplay of multiple cultural currents can safely and productively take place (Zhou 1997, Waters 1999, Warner 2001).

Broader Applications - Theoretical

In addition to providing analyses relevant to substantive issues of daily multiculturalism, the appeal of tight cultures, and multicultural policy, this dissertation presents support for three theoretical approaches to the sociological study of culture, minority cultures, and religion. First,

¹³ For other works documenting the integrating role that cultural minority organizations can play, see also McGown 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Zhou 1997, Waters 1999, Smith and Denton 2005, Rutelege 1985, Fenton 1988, Seller 1988, Williams 1988, Rumbaut 1994, Chen 2006, Warner 2000.

this project demonstrates the benefits of “pluralizing” our approach to studying culture in daily life within sociology by focusing on how *cultures* manifest, reify to varying degrees, and are negotiated within everyday social life. This approach to culture may initially seem in danger of either overly solidifying these multiple “cultures” – as is often the case in immigration studies – or making them endlessly fluid – as in the “hybridity” tradition. However, the “everyday cultures” approach modeled here demonstrates that such predicaments of analyzing multiple cultures in society can be mitigated through an ethnographically grounded methodology paired with a theoretical sensitivity to the variable forms and degrees of consequence that cultures can have in daily life. Such an approach can not only help us to understand the worlds of cultural minorities – the focus of the current project – but also assist us in viewing more accurately where, when, and how culture and cultures matter in daily life more generally. Doing so requires that we consider culture neither as a single, unified, and always consequential force nor as cleanly bounded and easily manipulated sets of signs and symbols. Instead, by looking to our subjects and their daily experiences as our primary guides we might, in Sewell’s words, “maintain a sense of the particular shapes and consistencies of worlds of meaning in different places and in different times and a sense that in spite of conflicts and resistance, these worlds of meaning somehow hang together” (1999: 57-8). Such a grounded, everyday, ethnographic approach to culture, and cultures, will allow us to more accurately see precisely how the multiple cultures which circulate through modern lives are variable, contingent, and differently consequential.

This dissertation also reaffirms the benefits of seeking to understand the social worlds of cultural minorities from the inside out. This may not initially sound like a novel approach – after all, the

ethnographic tradition in sociology has long prided itself on producing works that offer locally grounded views of marginal groups often counter to popular stereotypes (Katz 1997). However, two recent developments in sociological methodology, theory, and research call for a renewed commitment to discovering local meanings and processes of social construction through ethnographic methods. First, recent articulations of modified grounded theory methodology have formalized means of seeking to understand marginalized populations – as well as others – through the methodological prioritization of local meanings and dynamics. This does not mean turning a blind eye to relevant theories or broader structural considerations, but rather asks that we constantly return to the consideration of our subjects' own concerns as a grounding practice. In this way, we can be sure to place more spectacular or dramatically political issues, which may hold more attraction for many analysts, within the tempering context of the broader, and potentially more mundane, social realities of our subjects (Brekhus 1998, Timmermans and Tavory 2007, Tavory and Timmermans 2010).

Second, now that both theoretical and empirical works have firmly established the socially constructed nature of social identities, as well as the variability of their salience in everyday life, ethnographic approaches to studying social identity groups should pair close observation with a sensitivity to constructivism. Indeed, recent ethnographies have demonstrated the usefulness of participant observation in documenting the way that identities are made manifest in interaction and are constructed through social processes (Ammerman 2003, Brubaker 2006, McDermott 2006). That being said, such an approach need not limit its substantive concerns as the act of social identity construction itself. There is no reason that studies of social minority groups can not both demonstrate the constructed nature of such groups and identities and still keep as central

as consider as important the locally understood social concerns and preoccupations of minority identified subjects (Tavory and Timmermans 2012). Indeed, such an approach would allow us to assess whether and how the construction and subjective experience of such identifications intersects with these other local social concerns. While we should be wary of adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis, we should not treat the social concerns of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities – many of which may have little to do with these identifications *as such* – as a phantom creation of the process of identity construction. While social identity may be constructed, the concerns that tightly intertwine with these identities may be quite real (Jenkins 1997), and we should not overlook such realities in our efforts to demonstrate social constructivism.

Such a grounded approach to the study of cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial identities also works to complement the burgeoning macro- and multi-level approaches to understanding ethnic and racial identity construction (Wimmer 2008). While these approaches are crucial to demonstrating the social and historical contingencies of ethnic and racial group formation, they can – by the admission of some of their chief practitioners – give short shrift to the “cultural stuff” within these boundaries, and thereby miss the importance and practicality that such identifications and memberships can have for people in interaction with and in the context of their particular social milieus (Cornell 1996, Jenkins 1997). An attention to such dynamics need not be at odds with a constructivist approach, but rather can complement the emphases of the macro and multi-level scholars on identity “production” with a necessary, grounded focus on identity “reception”.

Finally, this dissertation demonstrates the benefit of an “everyday religion” approach to studying contemporary religious lives (Bender 2003, Lichterman 2005, Ammerman 2007). An ethnographic, grounded study of religious practice and identity allows us to observe the inconsistent, contradictory, and sometimes surprising ways that religion is (or is not) relevant in the course of daily life. Such a grounded approach is especially important, I believe, in the study of religion, a social field in which religious leaders, non-religious skeptics, and academics alike often portray given systems of belief and practice as totalizing, internally coherent, and consistently consequential to adherents (Lichterman 2012). On the ground, religion looks much messier, less logical, and sometimes more muted than the proclamations of religious authorities, conventional wisdom, or the treatments of some scholars would have us believe. It is important to recognize that such observed inconsistency is not evidence of a lack of “real” religiosity on the part of subjects, a claim sometimes made by sociologists of religion themselves. To the contrary, such a discovery is valuable evidence of how specific religious lives, and probably most religious lives, are lived – rife with contradictions, demonstrating patterned variability, and impacted by and intertwined with immediate social circumstances and concerns. Just because religious leaders – and some social scientists – sometimes portray religious systems as above the fray of human life, this does not require us to think of them this way. Indeed, if we do so, we risk missing the actual, messy, and consequential reality of religion in everyday social life.

The Future of the Legendz

Returning to a consideration of our main subjects, what can be speculated about the future trajectory of the Legendz’ lives, particularly as concerns the qualities of their multicultural

existence – commitment to Islam, experience of multicultural agility, avoidance of conflict, and bringing small changes to local culture? Regarding the issue of religiosity and identification, the Legendz practice of Islam is now ingrained in their daily lives to such an extent – through bodily and dietary practices, patterns of language, and temporal routines – that it would be difficult for it to become completely dislodged (Winchester 2008). In addition, they have experienced their religion as both dynamic and practically useful, which may increase the likelihood of their continued practice of Islam. That being said, it is also well established that a central factor causing religious youth to continue religious practice and identification is their proximity to their family or religious community (Ozorack 1989, King et al 1997, Smith and Denton 2005, Desmond et al. 2010, McKune 2010), and that the transition to college and/or the adult world of work is often a time of decreased religious practice (Madsen and Vernon 1983; Uecker et al, 2007). What seems crucial for the Legendz’ ability to continue practicing Islam in a way consistent with their current form of religiosity is an ongoing connection with those who practice and identify in a similar way. Whether this connection is established with similarly practicing Muslim youth at Muslim Student Associations at their colleges, or maintained through social media contacts with friends from home, I predict that a continued connection with like-practicing Muslim youth will be an important condition for their future religiosity and identification as Muslims. Similarly, I predict that their ability to maintain the subjective sense of themselves as agile multicultural navigators will rely in part on their ability to maintain some connection to the reservoir of Islamic symbology and meanings that the mosque and youth group can provide. Without this continued connection and replenished identification to provide a complement to their engagement in majority culture – through college, work, media, and other young adult activities in the wider society– it will be more difficult for the Legendz to subjectively

experience the cultural boundary crossing and displays of multicultural capital they so appreciated as younger people.

The question of approaches to potential cultural conflict is one that will likely be different for different members of the group. For those who had a tendency towards “political” thought and anger at the mistreatment of Muslims previously – Yusef, most prominently – the ability to participate in more aggressive political or protest activity (of the non-violent and democratic variety) during the college years may be embraced. For others, who were not so politically-oriented to begin with, the movement away from the mosque community will likely enable them to engage more freely in activities having nothing to do with “political” concerns at all– such as music, dating, and school. These youth – Abdul, Muhammad, Yassir, and Zaid – will likely maintain an orientation towards smoothing potential cultural conflicts, but will probably not go out of their way to engage in such ambassadorial cross-cultural work. The one potential condition that could alter this trajectory is if any of the boys – or their close friends – experience dramatic incidents of harassment or discrimination perceived to be based on their Muslim identity. In this case, the avoidance of conflict so continually promoted by the mosque might give way to anger and more assertive responses. Finally, the Legendz’ ability to influence the mosque culture directly will of course decrease as they move away. At the same time, the legacy that they and their peers have left – the demonstration that an effective way of keeping young Muslims involved in the mosque and community is by providing a measure of room for cultural experimentation – will likely leave the mosque changed, and therefore make it a different environment for later cohorts of young American Muslims.

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