

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Times of crisis and hardship can offer great examples of the strengths and resilience of families. On September 11, 2001, the United States was greatly devastated by attacks on its freedom and way of life. Four hijacked planes flew into some of the world's most distinguished buildings and changed lives forever. An article in the *New York Times* described the terrible day.

And by 10:30 a.m. all that had gone. Lower Manhattan had become an ashen shell of itself, all but a Pompeii under the impact of a terrorist attack involving two airliners that crashed into the World Trade Center and then brought its twin towers down...office workers at the World Trade Center, caught in the collapsing lattices of glass and steel, and the unbelieving passengers aboard the second airliner as it swooped below the smoke in the north tower, already burning, and plunged into the southern one ("The War", 2001, p.26).

This is only a description using language that could never truly describe the horror in New York that day. Millions of people experienced great loss and suffering. Catastrophe is a time when people search for answers and direction. People turn to their families to find support and meaning. Just like many before them, the families that survived September 11<sup>th</sup> overcame the hardships. Clinicians and researchers need to have an understanding of resilience so that it can be accessed and used therapeutically during times of stress and crisis. A better view of how resilience works could help clinicians with prevention and interventions.

One group of Americans that was particularly affected by the attacks was Arabs. The media reported a backlash by American civilians against Arabs in the United States since the terrorist attacks.

People of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent - or even those who appear to be - are increasingly becoming the targets of harassment and violence by civilians and of intense scrutiny by police officers under pressure to track down suspects in the terrorist attacks. From Texas to Chicago to Long Island, there have been reports of arson, personal attacks and the police stopping men in Middle Eastern-style head coverings. (Goodstein & Niebuhr, 2001, p. A14).

These reports struck fear in the hearts of many Arab-Americans who worried about their safety and their freedom. For many families, this fear was isolating. Fear and isolation can limit the amount of support Arab Americans have or perceive to have during a time of crisis. Individuals turn to their families and couples turn to each other for support. During times of stress and crisis, a couple has to define itself with regard to the changing situation and make adjustments to their relationship (Ben-David & Lavee, 1996). They must make meaning of the stressful events as a couple.

This is not the first time in the history of the United States that a group has been the focus of anger and retaliation because of their race. In February, 1943, President Roosevelt signed an order forcing the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from Western portion of the United States (Nagata & Takeshita, 1998). More than 110,000 Japanese Americans were placed into internment camps. This was shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Many Japanese-Americans were the victims of rocks being thrown at them as well as a decrease in business patronage. Those who were put in camps were subject to dehumanizing living conditions. Interviews with 30 former internees found that most former internees went on to lead productive lives (Nagata, 1990). Researchers found that specific cultural values, such as perseverance, obligation, and self-restraint, were particularly important to coping while in the camps. The way

the United States government handled the events of the internment camps was also identified as important to coping and resilience. A commission began an inquiry into the internment camps during which many former internees came forward and shared their stories (Nagata & Takeshita, 1998). The narrative process of disclosure was described as an important part of the coping process.

### Study Rationale

Resilience has been defined as “the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and adversity” (Walsh, 1996, p. 261). For many years the focus by clinicians was on the dysfunction or problems that resulted in a family from a crisis. Only recently has there been more of an emphasis on how a family survives and even overcomes a crisis. A resiliency based approach helps to identify interactions that enable families to withstand challenges (Walsh, 1996). The resiliency-based approach involves organizational patterns, communication, problem-solving processes, community resources, and affirming belief systems. Through this knowledge, clinicians can foster change by helping the family access resources already available within it.

Researchers in the past have studied stressful events and their effects on individual personality characteristics (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986; Kliot, 1987; Steinglass & De-Nour, 1988; Steinglass, Weisstub, & De-Nour, 1988). Studies of stressful life events from the perspective of the marital dyad or the family are scarce (Ben-David & Lavee, 1996). The ways in which families cope with these stresses can be important to the understanding of people working with these families. These professionals can then use the information to help families access these specific resources.

Another important focus of this study was a structural lens. A structural lens allowed me to examine situational differences that have distinguished Arab Americans from other groups.

These differences are based on social organization in Arab families that were responses to economic, political, and social conditions. A structural approach examines the connection between the internal family and the external conditions (Baca Zinn, 1994). Social and religious persecution in both the Middle East and the United States have contributed to flexible and resilient Arab American families. A recent poll found that Americans are generally in favor of racially profiling (Zogby, 2001). Further, the poll revealed that many Americans are nervous about sitting next to a Middle Eastern person. This study investigated the resiliency of Arab American couples in the face of social, political, and economic turmoil.

Lastly, Arab-Americans have been severely neglected in the marriage and family therapy research. There have been several studies done with Arab families in the Middle East but little done with Arabs living in America. Due to such issues as acculturation, generalizing research from Arabs in the Middle East to Arabs in America can be risky. Overall, the lack of research on Arab families, in the Middle East and America, is detrimental to therapists' ability to work with these families. Arab-Americans are estimated to be nearly 3 million people (Abudabbeh, 1996). Considering the growing numbers of people of Arab descent in the United States, family therapists need to be informed about this population. Further, research on different cultural groups will serve to strengthen theories of marriage and family therapy. As Pinsoff and Wynne (1995) state, "Although efforts have been made to study marriage and family therapy (MFT) with different populations, much more research needs to be done in different cultural contexts before a comprehensive and culturally informed theory of MFT can be developed" (p. 608).

#### Purpose of the Study

Two areas in the study of the family that are lacking are addressed by this investigation. The first is the small amount of research that has examined family resilience, particularly

couples' resilience. According to Walsh (1998), there is a need for "studies of well functioning families and what enables them to succeed, particularly in the face of adversity" (p. 22). There is an increasing need for a more positive focus on how families succeed rather than simply why they struggle.

The second area is the little research that has been done on Arab-American families, particularly couples. To date, only two studies have been conducted with Arab-American couples (Bin-Manie, 1985; Kulczycki & Lobo 2002). The first is an unpublished doctoral dissertation. The sample of this study was Kuwaiti citizens attending school in America. The other study was an examination of interracial marriage patterns which examined census data. There was no direct contact with couples.

The purpose of this research was to examine resilience in Arab-American couples following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers. This objective was accomplished using a phenomenological approach. This approach allowed me to gain an understanding of the experiences of these couples following the terrorist attacks from their perspective in their real world.

#### Historical Overview of Arab-American Experience

There have been two major waves of Arab immigration to the United States (Suleiman, 1999). The first lasted from the 1870s to World War II in 1940. The second extended from World War II through present day.

Most of the immigrants of the first wave were from the Greater Syria region of the Middle East and were predominantly Christian (Suleiman, 1999). Christians, in the Middle East, were under a tremendous amount of religious persecution from Muslims. Most of them became peddlers once they arrived in the United States. This was an attractive profession for them

because it did not require much training or knowledge of English. A majority of this group was uneducated.

Before World War I, issues that were close to Arabs in their homelands were also very salient in their new home. Many remained connected to the issues that were plaguing their countries of origin (Suleiman, 1999). One of the major issues was the rule of the Ottomans. There were both supporters and opponents of Ottoman rule. The oppressive Ottoman regime was the motivation for many to leave their countries.

World War I cut off Arabs living in America from their homelands. This was mainly due to decreased communication and therefore information. This isolation was furthered by the introduction of quota systems. Quota systems introduced limits on how many immigrants from different countries could enter the United States. These factors increased the sense of isolation for many Arab Americans. Soon after, there was an increase in socialization and participation in American society.

The second wave consisted mostly of people with college degrees or those seeking them (Suleiman, 1999). An increase in civil war and conflict in the Middle East forced many to immigrate to America. One of these conflicts was the Palestinian War of 1948 between Israel and the Palestinian people. As a result of clashes, there were reports of 700,000 to 900,000 refugees (Vidal, 1997). Many of these refugees made their way to America.

During the decades of the second wave, there were also improvements in communication and transportation. This group originated from all over the Middle East. The religion shifted as well. Most of the people in the second wave were Muslim.

A factor common to both of these waves was an emphasis on family as the most important institution (Abudabbeh, 1996). Despite the many difficulties encountered by Arabs in

the move to the United States, family remained an important part of their culture. Ajrouch (2000) discovered this in a study of first generation Lebanese adolescents living in Detroit. The findings revealed that family relations are still important to Arabs living in America and these relationships form the foundation of their value system. The particular values identified were sticking together, helping one another out, caring for one another, and respect for the elderly.

### *The History of Arab Race Classification*

A large part of the immigration policies of the United States government has been classification by race. Immigrants arriving in the United States were immediately placed in a racial category. Arab Americans have had a long process of back and forth race classification which has played a big part of their identity process. The back and forth has teetered between Caucasian and Asian race classification (Samhan, 1999).

In 1870, a law was passed that made immigration illegal from any countries where people were not white or African. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arabs in America were classified as originating from “Turkey in Asia” (Samhan, 1999). Following the turn of the century, Arabs were reclassified as Syrians, a sub-category of white, possibly because of the large amounts of Turks still coming into the country. Following soon after, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization attempted to decrease the number of groups that could be eligible for naturalization. There was a question as to whether Arabs should be considered white or Asian based on their appearance.

In 1909, cases were brought before the courts challenging the citizenship rights of Arabs (Samhan, 1999). A case in Georgia was won which denied the rights of Arabs to obtain citizenship based on the principle that Arabs were not white or of African descent. A group of Arabs living in America went to the courts to appeal and had success in overturning the decision.

In 1910, the Census Bureau reclassified Arabs as Asians because of the location of their countries and by directives ordering courts to reject citizenship from those not white or African (Sahman, 1999). This was further supported, in 1914, by a South Carolina judge who ruled that Syrians were not free white persons that Congress had intended to have the privilege of citizenship. Arab community groups again rallied to their cause. The judge was strong in his belief that Arabs were of mixed blood which disqualified them from being considered white. The case was appealed and in 1915 the court accepted the findings of the Dillingham Report of the Immigration Commission which said “physically the modern Syrians are of mixed Syrian, Arabian, and even Jewish blood. They belong to the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race, thus widely differing from their rulers, the Turks, who are in origin Mongolian” (Sahman, 1999, p.217).

This was the final action of the courts except for a few unsuccessful attempts to change the ruling. Since then Arab Americans have been considered white in the census, government programs, and the education system. There is an ongoing debate among groups within the Arab American community as to which is better for their future, continuing white majority status or a minority Arab status.

#### Self of the Researcher

A discussion of my investment in this research is an attempt to acknowledge my own biases. “Qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect that their own subjectivity may have on the data and papers they produce” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 33). My hope is that my experiences shaped and enriched the data.

My cultural background has not played such a large part of my research interests until recently. For many years of my education, I was a passive learner. I questioned nothing and

assumed everything. When I started my doctoral work, I began to realize how important my culture was to my research. The realization started with a class on research in marriage and family therapy. I decided to take an opportunity to examine research on Arab-American families. When I went to look at the literature, I found very little. Most of the research done was on Arabs living in the Middle East. I knew right away that this was a problem because I knew that Arabs were a growing part of the American identity. I knew this because I am an Arab-American.

### *My Cultural Background*

My father was born in Damascus, Syria and my mother was born in Illinois. My father immigrated to America when he was 18. My mother's family line is a combination of Scottish and English descent. They met in college and got married soon after. The culture of the Middle East has always had a strong influence on me, perhaps because of the patrilineality of the Arab culture. I am the only male child in the family and it seemed like I sought out the Arab culture more than my sisters. I loved many aspects of the Arab culture, including the language, the food, the strong emphasis on family, and the celebrations. My wife is Syrian and together we cherish being Arab-Americans. Our culture is an integral part of our identity.

My love of my Arabic heritage influenced my desire to study Arab families. I was very disappointed to find very little literature on Arab families but I was not surprised for three reasons. The first is that there are few Arab researchers in the field of family studies and MFT. Secondly, the lack of Arab researchers is most likely due in large part to the fact that most Arabs do not utilize mental health services and do not trust them (Savaya, 1998). Thirdly, Arabs are classified as "white" by the government (Samhan, 1999). Arabs living in America are not considered a minority in the government and many social institutions. In addition to the way this affects perception, the white classification also bars researchers from access to minority funding

and initiatives since Arabs are not classified as a minority. During my endeavors to find funding for this project, I discovered that grants geared towards minorities were initiated for those classified as minorities by the United States government.

*The Aftermath of the Terrorist Attacks on New York*

I turned on the television on September 11, 2001 to a picture of horror. Planes had been crashed into the World Trade Center. Both towers fell to the ground and great pillars of smoke and debris covered the skyline. My first reaction was shock. My second was anger. My most intense reaction was fear. I heard that Arabs had hijacked the planes and I knew the act was going to further vilify every man and woman who possessed Arab physical features. For many years, Arabs have been depicted as terrorists and evildoers in the media. Unfortunately, our society likes to hurt people because they are different and this act would put every Arab-American into more danger. There were reports of violence against Arab-Americans across the United States.

My wife had a difficult experience with a person who treated her very coldly after the attacks. We had to work through the situation together and even though we never confirmed that the reason she was treated differently was because she is Arab, it was scary enough that the reason was a possibility.

As time put some distance between the attacks and America, tension decreased in the Arab communities. Two things stood out for me. The first was the overwhelming amount of support that was shown for Arab-Americans. People across America were reported to be reaching out to Arab-Americans to show their support. The second thing that stood out for me was the fact that Arab-Americans, like many other groups under scrutiny before them, were enduring the struggles.

As a family therapist, my first question was how much did the cultural emphasis on family help Arabs to cope? Did Arab-Americans use their families as a bigger source of support during this difficult time? What resources did Arab-Americans use to endure? Did spouses look to their marriages as a source of meaning and comfort?

### Research Questions

The following research questions were influenced by my own questions about Arab Americans and by my investigation of the existing research literature. They guided the study:

1. How have Arab-American couples made sense of the attacks on the World Trade centers, which took place on September 11, 2001?
2. What has been their experience of their relationships with their communities since the attacks?
3. How has the marital relationship of Arab-American couples been impacted by the attacks on the World Trade centers?
4. How have couples developed the resilience they needed to cope with the backlash against Arabs living in America?
5. How has the experience of immigration affected the resilience of Arab-American couples?

### Summary

The attacks against America on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 will be remembered by millions of people. The tragedy affected people all across America. Arab Americans were impacted by the terrorist attacks. They were attacked as Americans who lost their friends and family. They were also attacked by Americans who saw them as the enemy.

Arabs have had a long history of conflict and violence. Just as they survived this history of terror, they survived the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the aftereffects. The examination of how they survived can be valuable to therapists and helping professionals. An understanding of the process can be used for future generations of Arab Americans.

This study contributes to both the literature on family resilience and on Arab Americans. Both of these areas lack extensive empirical support. Resilience can be valuable to clinicians who are working with families who are in crisis. Resilience approaches are especially applicable to Arab families in America who continue to face social and political stress during this period of uncertainty.

In this chapter, I discussed the rationale and purpose of this study. I also described the history of Arab American immigration and race classification. I tied in my own experiences as an Arab American and I discussed the research questions. The next chapter will examine previous literature on resilience and Arabs.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by three theoretical frameworks: systems theory, social constructionism, and a family resiliency model. This allowed for an examination of resiliency from a systemic perspective in the participants' time and setting. These three models will be discussed with regard to how they guided the study. I will also review the literature on Arab families and resiliency. This review will show the scarcity of research on Arab families.

#### *Systems-Constructionist Lens*

In systems theory, parts are understood in the context of the whole (Bertalanffy, 1968). Behaviors are understood in cycles of interaction, meaning causality is circular as opposed to linear. Parts of a system interact in predictable, organized ways moving towards stability. Emphasis is on the process of relationships versus the content of events. "Research on resilient individuals has increasingly pointed toward the importance of a systemic view" (Walsh, 1998, p. 11). Systems theory changes the view of individual coping and adapting to a view of broader transactional processes in larger systems (Walsh, 1998). Understanding resilience from a relational standpoint is supported by the research of Werner (1993) who found that resilient children almost always had a supportive adult who believed in them and with whom they could identify.

Systems theory contributed to this study by allowing for an examination of the interaction between Arab families and larger communities around them. Individual theories are limited in the scope of their viewpoints. A systemic outlook allows for a larger variety of interventions by community agencies, government programs, and other larger systems. I chose systems theory

because of the importance of understanding Arab Americans in their structural and social relationships.

Social constructionism is connected to systems theory by placing emphasis on context and interpersonal processes. The emphasis by systems theory on context has been a more recent development (Hare-Mustin 1991). Feminist theorists, for example, have been exploring families and dominant structures. Both theories acknowledge the importance of power and the exchange of ideas (Dallos & Urry, 1999) Social constructionism emphasizes that conversations are based on mutual influence and feedback which is a systemic term.

Social constructionism is a form of inquiry that is “concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world...in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). This approach supports the understanding of how a group of Arab-Americans make meaning and sense of the events and experiences around them. Social constructionists place “more emphasis on social interpretation and intersubjective influence of language, family, and culture” (Hoffman, 1990, p. 2). A social constructionist approach validates a phenomenological research method.

Phenomenology is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and that truth can never be objective (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). This seems particularly relevant for many families facing crisis but especially so for an event like the attacks on the World Trade Center which was so catastrophic. A postmodern approach would allow for the social construction of reality through such means as an interview (Kvale, 1996).

### *Family Resiliency Model*

McCubbin and McCubbin (1993) developed a Family Adjustment and Adaptation model of resiliency (FAAR) based on the ABC-X model developed by Reuben Hill (1949). The ABC-X

model looks at stressors, resources, the definition of the stressor and the actual crisis. The resiliency model McCubbin and associates developed

Emphasizes the family's relational processes of adaptation and the family's appraisal processes involving ethnicity and culture which facilitate the family's ability to institute new patterns of functioning and achieve harmony while promoting the well-being and development of its members (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1995, p. 5).

The model has two distinct phases, the adjustment phase and the adaptation phase.

During the adjustment phase, several variables come into play. These are the stressor itself, the family vulnerability, established patterns of functioning, family resources, appraisal of the stressor, and problem solving and coping strategies. According to the theory, families are continuously balancing the demands of their environment. When the demands exceed the family's capabilities, they make changes to adjust. When they are unable to adjust, families experience crisis at which point there must be changes to restore the balance. This is the beginning of the adaptation phase.

The adaptation phase is the movement to initiate change in functioning to deal with the stressor. This phase starts if the family is unable to adjust to the stressor. This can occur if the event or hardship demands more significant changes in the family system. The adaptation phase can be influenced by pileup of demands, family resources, appraisal of the situation, family paradigms, family sense of coherence, and family schema. Family adaptation is defined as restoring balance between capabilities and demands at two levels, within the family and between the family and community (Patterson, 2002).

This model incorporates the concept of family schema. Schema seems particularly important to the study of violence and aggression. Family schema is a "generalized structure of shared values, beliefs, goals, expectations, and priorities, shaped and adopted by the family unit, thus formulating a generalized informational structure against and through which information

and experiences are compared, sifted, and processed” (McCubbin et al., 1995, p. 23). A schema evolves over time and is used to evaluate crisis situations and validate established patterns of functioning. This structure functions to develop meaning in the family and involves the creation of family stories used to help with adaptation (McCubbin et al., 1995). These meanings go beyond the stressor and place the crisis in a larger context of experience.

For Arab-Americans, schema will be especially important since there is such a strong emphasis on family support. Families become a source of meaning when faced with adversity such as tension and hostility directed toward them by the dominant culture.

### Review of the Family Literature on Arabs

#### *Who Is an Arab?*

If asked to define “the Arab Nation”, most Arabs would say it includes all peoples who speak the Arabic language and claim a link with nomadic tribes of Arabia, whether by descent, affiliation, or by appropriating the traditional ideals of human excellence and standards of beauty (Abudabbeh, 1996, p. 333).

The research on families of Arab descent has clear problems with sampling. There is no clear definition of Arabs within the research. This lack of a clear definition results from the diversity of peoples from the Middle East. From an anthropological standpoint, an Arab could be defined as anyone born in the Middle East or anyone who speaks the Arabic language and claims a connection to Arab culture (Young & Shami, 1997). Even definitions of what makes up the Middle East differ from one researcher to another. With such broad definition of who is considered Arab, researchers are open to using diverse samples without regard for differences within groups.

The fields of anthropology and sociology have studied “the family” for many years. Anthropology recognizes that there are variations on who constitutes Arab families (Young & Shami, 1997). These variations are based on legal, social, geographical, and heritage analyses. The implications for marriage and family therapy research are critical. Researchers must be careful to clearly identify who is in their sample and must be cautious about statements of generalization.

A further sampling issue is the little variation in samples of Arabs in marriage and family therapy research in terms of country of origin or definition of Arab. Most commonly used are Arabs from the West Bank or Israel (Al-Krenawi, 1998; Al-Krenawi, 1999; Al-Krenawi, Maoz, & Reicher, 1994; Feldman, Masalha, & Nadam, 2001; Friedman & Pines, 1992; Haj-Yahia, 1998a; Haj-Yahia 1998b; Lavee, Ben-David, & Azaiza, 1997; Lavee & Katz, 2002; Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999; Lowenstein and Katz, 2000; Mikulincer, Weller, & Florian, 1993; Saleh, 1989; Savaya, 1998; Savaya, 1995). A majority of the studies conducted on people from the Middle East in the family therapy literature were based on Arab families from Israel or the West Bank, both within close vicinity of each other. Are these results generalizable to anyone other than those living in those areas? Considering the number of different countries that constitute where Arabs originate from, it seems the answer is no. Other Arabs found in the literature were from Kuwait (Qasem, Mustafa, Nafeesa, & Shah, 1998) and the United Arab Emirates (Alnajjar, 1996). At the time of this study, there were only two published studies in the family literature conducted with Arabs living in America (Faragallah, Schumm, & Webb, 1997; Kulczycki & Lobo, 2002).

There is no question as to the differences in the many countries in the Middle East. For example, Arabs living in Israel have experienced a completely different lifestyle than those in

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Arabs in Israel and the western section of the Middle East have lived very close to war for many years. Arabs living in Saudi Arabia and the western section of the Middle East, have not had to endure many wars. They are also more likely to have a higher income (Suleiman, 1999). These very differences alone must be taken into account by researchers studying Arabs. The results from a study composed of Arabs from Israel cannot be generalized to Arabs from another country in the Middle East or even Arabs in America because of the differences between groups. Arabs from Israel live in a country predominately inhabited by Jewish people. Researchers cannot assume this is the same experience as Arabs living in Syria or Jordan where Arabs are the majority of the citizens sharing the same customs and traditions. Arabs from Israel are also in a different situation than Arabs living in the United States who might live in a region where the people are from several different cultures and countries of origin.

Arabs living in the United States have unique challenges that are not present for Arabs in other parts of the world. For example, acculturation is a major task for Arab immigrants in America. Faragallah, Schumm, and Webb (1997) surveyed 39 Arab Americans living in Missouri, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, Florida, Maryland, New York, and Washington D.C. Twenty-seven were Christian and 12 were Muslim. The authors examined what factors affect satisfaction with life in the United States, family life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and parenting satisfaction. Results showed that Arabs who immigrated to the United States and who had greater acculturation reported reduced family satisfaction. Muslims reported significantly less satisfaction with life in the United States. Family satisfaction declined as participants spent more time in America. Family life satisfaction was positively correlated with age at immigration.

Another design issue is that some samples in the research mixed Moslem Arabs in with Christian Arabs (Al-Mosharraf, 1990; Alnajjar, 1996; Bin Manie, 1985; Mikulincer, Weller, & Florian, 1993; Qasem et al., 1998; Saleh, 1989; Savaya, 1995; Savaya, 1998). This assumes that there are no differences due to religion. Mixing the sample assumes homogeneity that clearly misinforms the reader and does not recognize religious diversity. Further, the sample will not reflect the differences within groups of Moslems. Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi (1999) highlighted this point when they separated their sample by religion and found differences between Druze, Muslims and Christians. Faragallah et al. (1997) also found differences in acculturation experiences between Muslims and Christians.

Arabs are so widely defined in the literature that the results should only be generalized to the specific population being studied. Variations result from differences within the samples used in the research such as religion, socioeconomic status, and country of origin. These differences could skew results and make them ungeneralizable to any Arab population. More studies need to be done using a multitude of Arabs from different parts of the Middle East. The results could then be analyzed to see if there are differences between Arabs from different countries in the Middle East.

There is valuable information in the sampling problems mentioned. Research conducted with Arab families needs to be sensitive to issues of identity and language. The term "Arab" becomes misleading because the term attempts to reduce a group of people into a category. Arabs have a large range of characteristics making it impossible to characterize them into one group. A researcher must have an accurate assessment and description of religion, country and state of residence, and country of origin. Readers of the research should be cautious about using

the information to generalize to any group than the one studied. Further, the literature points to a need for research with Arab-Americans.

### *Arab Families*

There is scarce research on the “Arab Family”. Some of the research has concentrated on Arab women, especially mothers (Friedman & Pines, 1992; Haberer, 1985; Savaya, 1995; Savaya, 1998; Haj-Yahia, 1998b), some researchers focused on children (Alnajjar, 1996; Mikulincer, Weller & Florian, 1993), and some studies have examined whole families (Al-Mosharraf, 1990; Al-Krenawi, 1998; Al-Krenawi, 1999; Al-Krenawi, Maoz, & Reicher, 1994; Bin Manie, 1985; Fedida, 1984; Feldman, Masalha, & Nadam, 2001; Lowenstein and Katz, 2000; Qasem et al., 1998; Saleh, 1989). Researchers have differed on whom they have considered family. Al-Mosharraf writes, “The Arab family has been described as traditional, paternal, extended, authoritarian and occasionally polygamous” (Al-Mosharraf, 1990, p. 21).

Al-Krenawi (1998) conducted family therapy with a multiparental/multispousal Arab Muslim family in Israel with 69 members, a husband, 8 wives and 60 siblings. The husband was paying little attention to his seven senior wives and their children. There was also high competition, hostility and jealousy among the wives. The author/therapist met with the school system and healthcare system. The intervention consisted of a meeting with all the systems, individual meetings with the seven senior wives, and group therapy with the wives. As a result of the intervention, the husband began to take more interest in his children and his wives. There was increased communication between the husband and his wives. The children were more friendly to each other as well. The wives developed a social support system. The author also met with the eighth wife who lived with the husband and reported how her help was crucial to the intervention.

In another study, Al-Krenawi (1999) saw a father, mother and 5 children in therapy sessions. Al-Krenawi was treating the 30-year-old Arab father in Israel. He presented with physical symptoms of fatigue and loss of appetite. He reported hating his wife and children. He suspected that his wife was having an affair. The wife denied it in session and as a compromise, both agreed to go to a traditional healer. The healer initiated a ritual which involved the wife licked a red hot metal rod as a means of substantiating the accusation. If the tongue is harmed, then she is guilty. If not, then she is not guilty. The wife was found not guilty. The author stressed the necessity of being familiar with a client's culture and belief systems and the use of cultural rituals.

One of the most important themes to come out of the research is a strong connection to the family of origin even after marriage (Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999; Al-Mosharraf, 1990; Bin Manie, 1985; Haberer, 1985; Fedida, 1984). Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi (1999) conducted the first study to look at differences between religions in their findings. They surveyed 94 men and women from Arab villages in Israel. The participants were split equally between Muslim, Christian, and Druze. Founded in the early 11th century, the Druze faith is based largely on the dogma of Hamzah ibn Ali ibn Ahmad, a minister of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim. Based initially on the doctrines of Shi'a Islam, the Druze believe that, through Hakim, God made a final appeal to humanity to redeem themselves before he returned to rule. The Druze are found primarily in Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Jordan.

The surveys focused on how mate selection, potency, education, attitudes towards love, and expectations regarding marriage influence marital satisfaction. Findings revealed that the level of autonomy in mate selection is correlated with marital satisfaction. There was a stronger orientation towards the extended family among Muslim respondents than the other groups.

Education was significantly positively correlated with marital quality for Muslims and Christians but not Druze. Marital quality was higher among Druze and Christians than Muslims.

Participants reported a lower rating of marital quality if they had a high sense of independence from their families of origin. The researchers also checked for differences between religious groups and found that the connection between marital quality and independence was not found for Druze Arabs as opposed to Muslims and Christians. This finding speaks to the earlier mentioned risk of assuming homogeneity that has been taken by researchers combining religions within Arab samples.

This theme of close ties to the family is seen throughout the literature on Arab families and its implications for this research on resilience is important. This finding supports the idea that Arabs will turn to family as a support system. Also, there is an implication that as the central unit in an Arab person's life, the family is one of the first places a member will look for meaning and strength. Close ties also speak to the importance of a shared meaning of events within the family.

### *Structure of Arab Families*

An understanding of what Arab families look like is valuable to those in helping roles as well as those studying Arab families. Each gender has its own roles and rules which are rigidly structured (Al-Haj, 1989). These roles can give insight into how a family member will react to a stressful event or crisis.

*Male Roles.* In cultural overviews, Arab families has been shown to be mainly patriarchal (Haj-Yahia, 1998). This perspective advocates male dominance and directly and indirectly supports the inferiority of women. Researchers have interviewed all members of the family and

have found that the father is generally accepted as the ruler of the family and the member who has the ultimate power to which the mother and children must respond.

Haj-Yahia (1998a) surveyed 489 Palestinian married men from refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ninety-four percent were Muslim and 6% were Christian. The surveys examined beliefs about wife beating. Results showed that Palestinian men are most likely to justify wife beating in cases where the wife is perceived as sexually unfaithful or if she insults him in front of friends. Almost half agreed that women are to be blamed for the violence against them.

Haberer's (1985) studies in Israel found that males and females of all ages reported that the man was the economic decision-maker and head of the family. Haberer quotes one male who described the man as head of the family because God made him that way. She also found that it was unacceptable for a woman to go shopping without her husband and that her tribe frowned upon her if she did. In spite of this, Haberer did discover that there were some women who went shopping by themselves despite the criticism. Shopping was seen as more acceptable if older women accompanied younger women. Participants reported that more recently men have begun to spend more time with their children. Many stay at home in the evenings with their children and supervise their studies.

Fedida (1984) conducted a study in central Israel to observe everyday life. Fedida found that there is belief in the physical weakness of women in Arab culture. This has led to a custom that it is necessary for men to protect women. He also found there are beliefs that men have stronger sexual desires, sexual relations are more important to men, men's words are taken more binding and believable. "The active role, played by the man in normal sexual acts, reinforces his self-identity and social identity as a virile man" (Fedida, 1984, p. 25). Men who are unfaithful to

their wives are only seen to have committed minor sins where women who have been unfaithful could be subjected to death. Polygyny is also accepted as a normal custom.

*Female roles.* Due to the patriarchal nature of Arab families, women have been forced into a submissive role. Haj-Yahia (1998a) writes that one of the major reasons women have been lowered to this inferior status is because of many Arab's interpretation of the Koran. The Koran is a book of sacred writings accepted by Muslims that guides their living. For example, the Koran states that "the men are placed in charge of the women, since God has endowed them with the necessary qualities and made them the breadearners. The righteous women will accept this arrangement obediently" (Haj-Yahia, 1998a, p. 537). This statement validates the role of submission for every woman who lives in the culture, though research does reveal how women resist this insistence on inferiority.

Haberer (1985) conducted an ethnographic study in Israel where she formally interviewed twenty Arab women. She also solicited essays from school children from grades 10 through 12. Haberer observed that women seem to be stuck in a status of inferiority because alternative economic opportunities did not exist. Women's attempts to make changes by exerting their influence in decision making failed. The world outside the village is hostile to women, and men often used threats and violence to maintain their power. Haberer states that a man might even reduce the amount of money allotted to the woman for spending if she does not meet his expectations of her role. Most of the day is spent doing housework. The mother is primarily responsible for the care of the children. Most of the women report that they find satisfaction in their life when they accept the idea that there are few alternatives to their lifestyle.

The position of women in this village was not accepted by all. There was some difference in the viewpoint of teenage girls living in the village. Haberer (1985) reported that these females

seemed “restless” and expected more equality with men and seemed determined to modernize their societies to look more like Israel and the West. Further, Friedman and Pines (1992) studied 60 Arab middle class women of different ages, living in Israel. Those women, aged 45 and above, had a higher sense of perceived power and felt significantly more security and inner strength than women under 45 years of age. This finding suggests women of a higher socio-economic class and age may be less likely to fall into the traditional roles of Arab women.

### *The Changing Family*

Three studies point to the changes beginning to take place in the traditional Arab family. Lowenstein and Katz (2000) conducted the first study in which they interviewed families with a chronically ill homebound elder living in Israel. The families were 30% Christian and 70% Muslim. Four members of the family were interviewed. The four people were the elder, his/her spouse/primary caregiver, the son or daughter and their spouse. The goal of the study was to examine the family caregiver functioning within Arab culture, study family coping patterns and the decision making processes regarding choice of caregivers, and analyze patterns of formal service use. The authors’ belief is that the Arab traditional family is changing due to the fact that there are increasing numbers of families where there is a chronically ill elder. Female elders were more agreeable in accepting assistance and usually chose the daughter-in-law. Sons reported that it actually improved their relationship with their parents to have their wives provide care. The daughter-in-laws usually felt obligated. Also, they saw it as avoiding marital conflicts. Further, these families preferred an extended family member who works for a formal service agency versus a stranger.

The second study examined families where both spouses were working, a phenomenon not found in traditional Arab culture. Feldman, Masalha, and Nadam (2001) surveyed 100 Israeli

Jewish couples and 62 Israeli Arab couples. The goal was to look at parents' functioning in the work and family roles in traditional (Arab) and modern societies (Jewish) at the transition to parenthood. Results showed that Arab women had an easier readaptation to work after childbirth. This was attributed to the higher amounts of childcare available through the extended family. They were more satisfied by the quality of childcare and found it more affordable. Arab parents also had more experience with caring for infants while they were growing up. Arab women were also more likely to see their career as financial need versus a career and self-fulfillment.

The authors of the third study examined the census to determine if there were high rates of Arab Americans marrying outside the Arab culture. Kulczycki and Lobo (2002) examined the 1990 U.S. Census data on 6,837 men and 5,399 women to determine the ethnic identity of their spouse. Seventy- nine percent of Arab males and 73% of Arab females had non-Arab spouses. Results also revealed that the higher the education of the participant, the more likely they were to marry a non-Arab. The same follows for income.

These three studies show changing Arab families. The Arab women in the second study were the first generation of working mothers. Arab Americans are marrying outside their culture. The research also validates the idea that extended family is very important to Arab culture.

#### *Methodological Characteristics and Critique of Published Research*

An examination of the literature on Arab families shows the need for more diversity. In reviewing the literature for research on Arab families, I started by using keywords in PsychInfo such as Arab, Middle East, Lebanese, and Egyptian. I then browsed these titles noting all titles that used words that made reference to family such as family, couple, husband, wife, children. I then obtained and read the articles. I, also, scanned the references of the articles to find any studies I missed and located those articles.

In my search, I found 8 research articles in top tier family journals. Studies were conducted primarily with samples from Israel. As mentioned, this is a major criticism of the research on Arabs. Arabs are a diverse group with regard to country of origin. Generalizing the literature from Israel ignores this diversity.

A majority of the samples were Muslim and ages ranged all over the lifespan. Participants were middle to upper class and came from a westernized part of the Middle East. This also speaks to the limited nature of the generalizability of these studies. The literature seems to reflect mostly those Arabs who are Muslim, middle to upper class, and living in Israel.

The dominant methodology of the published literature was qualitative consisting mostly of interviews and case studies. There was a focus on the importance of having a cultural understanding of Arabs when working with them. Two themes emerged from the research. The first was the importance of extended family in this culture. The second theme was rigid gender roles. Clearly, Arab culture is portrayed as dominated by the males. Violence against women is accepted as a means of punishment for perceived infidelity.

## Literature Review on Resilience

### *Individual Resilience*

Most of the early research on resilience concentrated on the individual, particularly children. Resilience was usually identified as inborn (Walsh, 1996). People who made it through difficult times were seen as having a strong personality. Few examined the family as a source of that resilience. Most saw the family as only an area of dysfunction and cause of a problem (Walsh, 1996).

Most of the research in resilience has focused on children raised in aversive situations. Researchers in the 1970s and 1980s focused on resources that promoted resilience (Cohler, 1987;

Dugan & Coles, 1989; Garmezy, 1991; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1985, 1987; Simeonsson, 1995). Felsman and Vaillant (1987) conducted a longitudinal study with disadvantaged inner city high school boys. Many of the men revealed lives in which they maintained significant relationships and employment. Felsman and Vaillant, after seeing the results, wrote “the events that go wrong in our lives do not forever damn us” (p. 298). Wolin and Wolin (1993) examined healthy adults who grew up in dysfunctional, alcoholic families. The researchers described characteristics of resiliency in these adults that enabled them to cope with their environments. These characteristics were insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality.

From a cross-cultural perspective, Dugan and Coles (1989) examined such areas as small towns in Brazil and camps in South Africa. Many children who grew up in these areas endured the struggles to make it safely into adulthood. Werner and Smith (1982) studied 700 impoverished children in Hawaii for 30 years. They found that by 18-years-old, one third had developed the capacity to work, love and play and at 40, these individuals found love and happiness.

Some of the individual traits used in stressful situations have been identified (Walsh, 1996). Some of these are happy, easygoing temperament, and higher intelligence. In their study of Hawaiian children, Werner and Smith (1985) found that resilient children had better reasoning and reading skills. Further, these children had a more positive self-concept.

One of the most significant responses to stress has been a high level of self-esteem. This is combined with a realistic sense of hope and control. Rutter (1987) studied maltreated women who were institutionalized in childhood. Rutter found that the two experiences most influential to resilience were successful accomplishment of important tasks and secure love relationships. He

discovered that self-concept is not set in childhood but is modified throughout life. Further, healthy relationships can bolster self-esteem.

People have been dealing with the effects of disaster and external stressors since the beginning of existence. There have been such events as hurricanes, tornadoes, and volcano eruptions throughout time. There have also been wars and terror in many areas of the world. Researchers have investigated resilience under some of these conditions. Garmezy (1991) examined the individual risk and resilience in some individuals living in poverty. Garbarino (1992) studied those living in conditions of community violence. There has also been research that has examined particular stressful events (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986; Kliot, 1987; Sagy & Antonovsky, 1986; Steinglass & De-Nour, 1988; Steinglass et al., 1988). Grinker and Spiegel (1945) wrote about men under the stress of war. Helmreich (1992) tells narratives of resilience in the experiences of survivors of the Nazi holocaust. Helmreich interviewed a randomly selected group of 211 survivors and compared them to a U.S. born group of 295 Jewish people. Data suggested that some of the survivors not only managed to resume their lives but also tended to be more successful than other U.S. born Jews of a comparable age. According to Helmreich, the resilient traits, such as adaptability, initiative, and tenacity, that enabled Jews to survive the Holocaust may have also accounted for their later success and such characteristics may have been passed on to their children.

### *Family Resilience*

Walsh (1996) discusses how there are two important reasons why resilience should be examined from a family standpoint. The first is that more and more studies are showing the significance of relationships in accessing resilience. The second is to address the developmental nature of experiences over the life cycle and through generations.

Werner (1993) discovered that all of the children in studies of resilience had a close, caring relationship with an adult who was close to them. This adult usually believed in them and gave them strength to endure their hardships. Sometimes people need more than just a strong personality to get through struggles. A trusting relationship can provide us the resource needed to make it through.

Studies of children have found that the most significant positive influence on their lives is a close, caring relationship with a significant adult who believed in them, who was a source of identification, and in whom they could find strength (Walsh, 1996). Conger and Conger (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of 451 families in Iowa. The researchers examined family discussions, discussions by the teachers of the children, and school performance measures in an effort to understand the effects of economic adversity. Results showed resilience was promoted by marital support, effective problem solving, and a sense of mastery. Children were especially helped by parental support and adults outside the family.

Resilience has to be understood within a developmental context (Walsh, 1996). Often, survivors of horrific, childhood events cope and endure for many years to become healthy adults. For example, studies have shown that most people who survive childhood abuse do not grow up to be abusers themselves (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987). These individuals survived and adapted for many years before becoming adults themselves.

Another example is children and families who endure through divorce. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) have taken a very pessimistic view of families of divorce focusing on the dysfunction. Theorists who subscribe to this school of thought fail to see the adaptation over time as well as the post-divorce functioning and well being of family members (Ahrons & Rogers, 1989).

Some researchers studying divorce have concentrated on the terrible effect on a couple that can result from the loss of a child. Research has shown, though, that the loss of a child can actually strengthen a couple's relationship. Paul and Grosser (1991) studied 50 families where there was either a schizophrenic or psychoneurotic member. Their findings showed that a "corrective mourning experience" could actually bring a family closeness.

Lavee, Ben-David, and Azaiza (1997) conducted a large study that examined coping in Arab and Jewish families soon after the Gulf War. The researchers interviewed 52 Arab males and 39 Arab females to determine sources of stress, coping patterns, and the effect of the stress on the family. The findings showed that respondents had security concerns, political concerns, family-well being concerns and uncertainty. The two biggest coping responses reported by these participants were being patient and keeping routine life. Participants expressed a sense of hope and control throughout the adversity.

There is a lack of research linking cultural and ethnic factors to the ways in which families respond to and cope with catastrophes, as McCubbin et al. (1995) note:

Working with ethnic families under stress cultural and ethnic sensitivity alone is no longer adequate; professionals must also be ethnically and culturally competent, that is, be able to recognize, respect and engage ethnic diversity in a way that leads to mutually desirable outcomes (p. 3).

Further, when dealing with the same stress, families of different cultural backgrounds react and cope differently (McCubbin et al, 1995).

One group that has been neglected in this research is Arab-Americans. Some studies have been done on Arabs in the Middle East. Few have examined Arabs living in America. Arabs are

an important group to study since they are a growing minority within the United States. Their emphasis on family also makes resilience an important part of their culture.

### *Family Resilience and Arab-American Couples*

There are many advantages to studying Arab-American couples in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. The study of resilience is relatively new and has been primarily conducted with Western populations. Would other resilience factors be more salient in Arab-Americans or other cultural groups? McCubbin et al. (1995) propose that family schema in many Native American Indian and Hawaiian families differ from those of Anglo families in their emphasis on spiritual beliefs, group over individual resources, and present time orientation. Similarly, certain specific characteristics of African-American families such as strong kinship bonds, the elasticity and adaptability of household and family roles, and the central role of spirituality and religion seem to buffer youth against the negative effects of urban violence (Littlejohn, & Darling, 1993). What are the family resilience factors for Arab-Americans who successfully coped with the terrorist attacks on New York City and the aftereffects? How does their experience broaden the understanding of the variation of resiliency across cultures?

Another advantage to the present study is that, through focusing on the recent attacks on the World Trade Center, a number of broad cultural, temporal, political and other contextual factors were constant across the participants. Family resources, coping strategies, and shared family beliefs, were asked about in terms of a specific event in one city with political, geographic, and cultural similarities for all participants.

### Summary

I combined the theories and literature review to form my research questions and develop

my methodology. Clearly, there is a deficit in the research on Arab American families. Most of the research has concentrated on Arab families in the Middle East. The research displays a traditional, conservative culture with defined gender roles as well as a changing family structure.

The resilience research has begun a shift toward examining families under stress. There is growing research in the area of Arab couples in Israel under war time stress. The current study will contribute to the research on couples who survive conflict.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology utilized in this study. I describe the sample characteristics and how the data was analyzed.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Generally, research follows either a quantitative or qualitative methodology depending on the decision of the researcher. According to Creswell (1994), researchers should look at five criteria when deciding which method to utilize: the researcher's worldview, training and experience of the researcher, researcher's psychological attributes, nature of the problem, and audience for the study. I selected a qualitative research design for this study because I am a part of an Arab-American community and I wanted to interact closely with the couples through interviews. I also wanted flexibility in my ability to tailor interview questions to meet the responses of the couples. With little research and information on Arab-Americans available, there needs to be exploration versus verification. A qualitative researcher enters the world of people and records what is observed or reported (Bogden & Biklen, 1998).

In this chapter, I describe the methodology of the study. I discuss the reasons for utilizing a phenomenological approach. Further, I describe the sample and how they were recruited. Finally, I report the method of how the data was analyzed.

### Rationale for a Phenomenological Approach

I chose a qualitative approach using phenomenology as the guiding method. "Because marriage, family, and close relationships are so integral a part of everyday life, phenomenologists believe they should be studied as phenomena in that context...and from the actor's own perspective" (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996, p. 84). Qualitative methods have the advantage of allowing patterns, themes, categories of analysis and cultural nuances to emerge from the data, and are thus well suited to explore complex social phenomena such as reactions to violence and terror (Ben-David, & Lavee, 1996; D'Avanzo, Erickson, & Froman, 1994; Miller,

1996). According to Walsh (1996), qualitative methods hold greater potential than quantitative methods for exploring family belief systems and narrative processes that influence family coping and adaptation.

Phenomenological interviewing is a method of interviewing based on phenomenology, which is the study of experiences and the ways in which they are developed into a worldview (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This approach includes “entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomena; and looking for the meaning of the participants’ experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p. 31). Phenomenology allows a rigorous approach to qualitative research using systemic procedures. The development of specific methods for studying human experience is one of the primary contributions of phenomenology (Valle, King, & Hailing, 1989).

Since the terrorist attacks was a non-normative stressor, I believe there is great benefit to understanding the experience and meaning of Arab-Americans who lived through the attacks and tense period of time that followed. A phenomenologically based research design examines the meaning of experiences based on the idea that people make sense of their lives (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology provided a framework to understand what it was like for Arab-American couples to experience the attacks and their consequences. The phenomenological model described by Moustakas (1994) was heavily utilized because it "offers a way of interrelating subjective and objective factors and conditions, a way of utilizing description, reflection, and imagination in arriving at an understanding...that...opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge and action" (p. 175).

## Method

### *Preparing to Conduct the Study*

As I began this research, I was conscious of the implications of being an “insider” because of my status as an Arab American and as part of this community. As I grew up, I gained exposure to the food, the attitudes, and the traditions. I eventually gained exposure to the language and spent more time at social events. Daly (1992) suggests “insiders...are unique in the degree to which their taken-for-granted realities shape their expectations” (p. 109). My personal experience shaped the kinds of questions I asked and when and how I said them. Further, my background helped me to form questions as I found myself thinking about my life experiences during the interviews. Insiders are able to do this because of their vast experiences and resources on which they can draw to enhance the interviews. One possible limitation is that insiders have a threatened objectivity because they are too close to the topic resulting in prejudgments.

In the phenomenological approach, the process of setting aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated is known as the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994). The process is described as a "state of freshness and openness" (p.41) wherein the researcher attempts to eliminate everything that represents prejudgments and presuppositions in order to not be "threatened by customs, beliefs and prejudices...habits...or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience" (p. 41). Epoche requires intent listening, seeing things as they appear and as they are, not judging them, and learning to describe experience.

### *Recruitment of Participants*

After I had chosen my topic, I knew that I could access a sample of Arab Americans in the New York area because of my connection to that community. I had long discussions with my

father and my wife's parents about how I could begin recruiting a sample. My wife's parents were convinced they could help me obtain a sample, and they became the gatekeepers for this study. Her parents are active members of the Arab-American community of that region. They carried out the recruitment of participants. They identified and screened couples within the community to find out if they would be interested and if they met the selection criteria. First, they wrote a list of all the couples they knew in the New York area. Then, they removed names of couples who did not meet the selection criteria. The selection criteria was that both spouses had to be immigrants from a country identified as Arab. Religion was not a criteria. Interviews were offered to Muslim and Christian couples. They contacted those couples who met the criteria and discussed the details of the study and whether the couple would be interested in participating. Finally, I contacted those interested and discussed the purpose of the study. If the couple met the criteria and they agreed to participate, they were scheduled for an appointment. All participants were interviewed in their homes. All were offered a neutral place other than their home to conduct their interview but none chose this option.

The only criteria for participation in the study was that both members of the couple be an immigrant from a country in the Middle East or a country that is identified as Arab such as Egypt, Sudan, or Algeria. I screened 30 couples, identified by my wife's parents, over the phone in the first two weeks of February 2002. Interviews were conducted in the third and fourth weeks of February 2002. Two couples contacted were not interested in commenting on such a sensitive topic. Some couples, who were screened, discussed their caution about the topic of politics. They did not want politics to be an area of discussion. These couples were assured that there were no political questions and the only opportunity to discuss politics would arise if they brought it up.

### *Description of the Sample*

The participants in this study were 18 Arab-American couples (18 husbands and 18 wives) living in either New York or New Jersey. Couples came from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Tables 3.1 provides the characteristics of the couples.

Table 3.1

## Characteristics of the Couples

<b>Couple</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Education/ Highest Degree</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Years since Immigration</b>
Mohammed	Syria	High school	3	18
Najat	Syria	College		18
George	Egypt	Professional	2	21
Clare	Egypt	College		21
Elias	Egypt	Masters	2	27
Nadia	Egypt	Masters		27
Nabil	Egypt	Masters	2	22
Leena	Iraq	College		22
Shafik	Egypt	High School	3	22
Nisrene	Egypt	High School		18
Firaz	Egypt	High School	0	16
Aleen	Jordan	College		30
Marcel	Egypt	College	4	32
Zaana	Lebanon	Associates		32
Maurice	Lebanon	Masters	2	18
Hala	Syria	Associates		18
Oumad	Lebanon	Masters	2	23
Sameera	Lebanon	Masters		17
Ibrahim	Egypt	College	2	28
Manar	Egypt	College		28
Zareef	Syria	Bachelors	4	37
Muneera	Sudan	High School		42
Fadi	Syria	Associates	2	28
Sarma	Syria	High School		28
Fouad	Palestine	High school	2	42
Nashida	Palestine	College		14
Sami	Egypt	Professional	0	33
Randa	Saudi	College		17
Hani	Jordan	College	1	5
Nuha	Jordan	College		5
*Fakhri	Lebanon	College	2	23
Nawal	Lebanon	High School		14
*Mahmood	Syria	Associates	1	16
Houda	Syria	Masters		5
*Marwan	Palestine	PhD	2	21
Sousan	Palestine	Masters		21

\* denotes a Muslim couple

## *Procedures*

Data came from several sources, including: (a) literature related to violence and resilience, (b) in-depth individual interviews with participants, which were audiotaped, translated and transcribed, (c) contact summaries that I completed shortly after the interviews, (d) field notes related to my observations within the individual interviews, and (e) my written self-reflections.

All couples were informed that I would be removing all identifying data, including name and any description. Couples were also be informed that they were free to withdraw at any time (see Informed Consent, Appendix A, B). The informed consent was translated into Arabic and offered in English or Arabic which was translated by my cousin in Syria.

I started with the names and appointments for 25 couples. I found that by the 18<sup>th</sup> couple, I had reached theoretical saturation, which is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the point when no new information is discovered. I felt that by couple 15, I was hearing the same information repeatedly. For example, there was repeating descriptions of previous terror and the same coping resources were being discussed, such as accessing their religious community for guidance and support. I called the remaining couples and thanked them for their help and explained to them that I had gathered the information I had needed but that I would come to their house if they felt they wanted to share their story. The remaining couples declined this offer.

All couples were interviewed together and I conducted all of the interviews. All interviews began with an opening statement:

I am interested in Arab-American couples and how they have coped with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade center and the aftermath. I am particularly interested in what resources couples have used to help them cope. I am hoping to understand the effects of the attacks and their aftermath on their marriage.

This provided a standard way of opening the interview and repeating the purpose and intent of the interview. The interviews were conversational. Open-ended disclosures were

accepted and supported, and clarifications were made as we went along. With Nabil and Leena, for example, I was confused about their experiences living in an American neighborhood and asked for further clarification.

Interviews were offered to be in Arabic or English but English was chosen for all interviews. This may have been for a few reasons. If the interviews were in Arabic, a translator, unknown to the couple, would have been brought into an interview because my Arabic is not proficient enough to conduct a complete interview. This may have made couples uncomfortable. The second reason is that couples may have been afraid to speak to a stranger about such sensitive topics. Couples also utilized each other during interviews when struggling to find a word in English.

The importance of self-reports was emphasized so that the couples understood that their contributions provide an illumination of meanings and are valued as new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). I was cognizant of Allen's (1994) caution of "not...pushing respondents to tell more or probe in ways that are not exquisitely close to their own words. Caution and respect for another's reticence about self-disclosure are paramount to the trust we develop in conducting research" (p. 107).

The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Questions varied depending on the participants' stories and descriptions. I utilized a general interview guide (See Appendix C) if the participant's story did not sufficiently access their experience. For example, Mohammed and Najat went into a discussion of religion after being asked about the attacks. I followed with a question about the details that stand out the most. At the end of the interviews, 20 to 30 minutes were set aside to reflect on what had been revealed and learned. All participants were offered a second interview to review the data. None of the couples accepted the second interview.

The primary methodology consisted of in-depth open-ended interviews exploring individual and family resources, coping behaviors, and shared beliefs around their experience during and after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. Through open-ended questions, I encouraged participants to speak freely about any aspects of the attacks and their own thoughts and actions during or after that time that were most relevant to them. As Patton (1990) writes, "The truly open-ended question allows the person being interviewed to select from among that person's full repertoire of possible responses" (p. 296). In addition, couples were asked about their ideas regarding what they learned about coping with the effects of the violence and how that might be useful to other Arab-Americans facing adversity because of their physical appearance or racial identity.

Through the interview protocol, the perspectives of the participants on the resources, behaviors, and shared beliefs were brought to bear in relation to any effects of the attacks that they believed might have been cast on them. Resilience could include any actions they might have felt in their communities, specifically towards them, and how they had to adjust because of those changes.

Since couples were interviewed together, there were two different views on certain topics. When analyzing data, it is important that the phenomenological researcher does not feel the need to smooth out or fix these discrepancies or inconsistencies (Boss et al., 1996). Differing views in the interviews were checked for meaning within them. "What positivists call anomalies or statisticians call outliers, phenomenologists call reality, even though the sample size is small or the time spent together brief" (Boss et al., 1996, p. 91).

A contact summary form (See Appendix E) was used (Miles & Huberman, 1984) following each interview to summarize relevant information gathered from the interview and my

insights. Brief field notes were recorded during and after each interview. These field notes described the context or setting, as well as the atmosphere in the interview.

Throughout the study, I also maintained a journal of self-reflections, a common method of data collection in phenomenological and qualitative research (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989). Such a journal allowed my subjective experience to become another source of data. A journal is an important way to identify researcher presuppositions and biases, and capture an insider perspective on the evolution of the research. The journal becomes especially important since I am a member of the community being researched. The interpretations and links developed by the researcher can be influenced by their own biography and family history (Boss et al., 1996). The awareness of this impact can be increased by using the journal. The following is an excerpt:

This was a difficult interview because the wife seemed very stressed and I felt like she didn't want to be there. The house was chaos with babies crying, phones ringing, people interrupting and coming into and out of the room. Eventually she opened up as the interview went along as seemed to be the case with most couples. There is a lot of distrust around this subject especially talking to someone who appears to be white, even if they are an Arab American. As with most couples, this couple wanted to discuss this from a political and historical point of view as well. It was difficult to stay with the conversation at times, as they constantly interrupted each other. I often felt my two attentions competing. On the one hand, my Arab American part had me always acknowledging the man first if they spoke at the same time. My more liberal side had me acknowledge the women first if they spoke at the same time. Who am I to be the one to decide who should speak? Am I the most powerful one at the table? The power dynamics are evident as the husband is the one to overspeak his wife.

### Data Analyses

Data analysis and data collection are intertwined in phenomenological research (Boss et al., 1996). Each one informs the other. Hess and Handel (1959) describe this as a back and forth movement from one kind of data to another, looking for meanings that connect and meanings that diverge.

I transcribed my own interviews within one month of conducting the interviews. This allowed me to remain connected to the experience of the participants. Also, I found it easier to generate codes. I wrote preliminary codes as I transcribed the interviews. The tape of one couple, Maher and Nuha, was undecipherable for a large chunk of the interview. Both tapes were apparently too far from them. I transcribed whatever was understandable.

The analysis was guided by the study's conceptual framework (family resilience framework grounded in systems theory and a socially constructed perspective), the research questions, a phenomenological method of inquiry to see how the participants lived and made meaning of their experiences, and my own understanding and life experiences. This management of these qualitative data was a synthesis of various procedures recommended by Allen (1989), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Moustakas (1994).

Transcripts of each couple were read the first time to gain an overall impression of their content. During the second reading, I looked for themes pertaining to the research questions and the challenges the participants experienced, how they made meaning of their challenges, and how they rose above and developed a sense of strength or resilience. Then, I listed the theories that were related to each theme. I began to make a list of coding categories.

As I read the third time I sought all possible frames of reference about resilience and the meaning the participants made of their experience. I then listed the themes that seemed most significant and tried to get an overall description of their meaning and the essence of resilience for each couple. At that point, I had developed a preliminary coding scheme that included 40 coding categories grouped into 6 coding families. After applying the codes to the interviews and a discussion with my advisor, I felt that some of the codes were too broad. As a result, I revised the coding scheme to include 27 coding categories and 5 coding families. I began to read through the transcripts and apply the new coding scheme.

At this point my dissertation advisor announced that he was retiring. We had a long discussion and came to the decision that I should look for a new chairperson and make him a committee member. Dr. Allen had been my supervisor while I was teaching. Her work includes extensive writing on conducting qualitative research in family diversity and ethnic minorities and I felt that she could help contribute to my work.

I sent my coding scheme and all of my data to Dr. Allen. We spent many months in back and forth discussions. Dr. Allen questioned how I developed each code and I defended my reasoning. After we discussed the progress to that point, I, then, compared my codes to my research questions. This process helped to revise the codes once more to include 24 coding categories and 5 coding families. I also changed the names of the codes themselves to more accurately reflect the nature of the data. For example, I changed “experience of the attacks” to “the shock of 9/11”. For each code, I placed every statement that corresponded to it on a separate piece of paper. I then used those statements to write Chapter 4. I used statements that most accurately reflected the data but made sure to include all participants. The latter was done to ensure that more outspoken couples did not dominate the results section.

### *Validity*

In phenomenological research, it is not appropriate to assess validity in the positivist sense of the word (Parker & Addison, 1989). It is more important to check for relevance and accuracy of description (Daly, 1992). Lincoln and Guba (1985) substitute that notion of "trustworthiness" for that of validity. They argue that qualitative researchers must inform what they do by concepts of "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability" (pp. 289-332).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss two ways of establishing trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking was achieved by sending transcripts back to the

couple's for review and suggestions. No couple contacted me and the couples I saw in the community reported they believed the transcripts were accurate.

Peer debriefing was my work with my chairperson. The process of our back and forth dialogue was intense at moments. Dr. Allen challenged my thinking and my assumptions. She examined my coding schemes and results and questioned the process I used to arrive at them. I defended my reasoning and final product. I revised my coding schemes several times to make them more concise and organized. I changed codes to more accurately reflect the participants. I struggled to claim my voice and the voice of the couples within the codes and results as she pushed me to look from my own lens. For example, I changed "perceptions of Arabs" to "this didn't help our cause". I stopped several times within the process to step back and think about the interviews and what impression they left on me. I poured over the my journal, my field notes and contact sheets in an attempt to reimmerge myself in the interviews. I began the process in a passive, generic voice and ended with an active voice in which I now look at the data and codes and see my fingerprint on the pages.

### Summary

A phenomenological approach is suited to the nature of the topic of this study . We can appreciate and be more sensitive to Arab-Americans' experience of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the tension that followed. Phenomenology allows access to the experience of Arab-Americans during the time after September 11. This can be particularly helpful to marriage and family therapists helping Arab-Americans.

Qualitative methodology is useful when there is little research on a topic (Creswell, 1994). This research is a step forward to helping to strengthen the information base on minorities such as Arab-Americans. The findings will add to the literature about family resilience. The

more we know about these two areas, the more prepared we will be to work with Arab-American families. We will also be more informed about the concept of resilience.

In this chapter, I discussed the reason for utilizing a phenomenological approach. I also described the sample, the recruitment of the sample, and how the data was analyzed. In the next chapter, I will present the content of the interviews.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Introduction

This experience was a process of immersion for me. These couples invited me into their homes and shared their most intimate stories. I found 18 couples who had survived more than I could ever imagine. Their stories of fear and courage were eye opening. They were eager to tell their stories and to share their pains, yet, underneath it all were larger issues of identity and cultures, a dominant culture and a minority culture. Many of these couples have struggled for many years to make a life in the United States. They are proud of who they are and how far they have come. Who they are is intimately connected to the history of the Middle East. There is a strong connection to the survival of terror and war experienced in their countries of origin.

This study is based on in-depth interviews with 18 couples from the Middle East who are currently living in the New York/New Jersey region. The questions were designed to explore areas of resilience that couples accessed during the period of tension that followed September 11. Resilience has been discussed in a predominantly white, European, individual context. The goal of this study was contribute to the literature by examining Arab couples.

I have chosen to present their stories by following the structure of the interviews. The structure was established based on the direction of the couples. All interviews followed the timeline of discussing the attacks, subsequent events, and resources that were accessed. The experience of immigration came up as an offshoot of the discussion on coping resources.

The analysis is organized around five general sections. In the first section, Perceptions of the Terrorist Attacks, I present accounts of the couples' experiences of September 11<sup>th</sup>. This includes where they were that day, their reaction to finding out it was Arabs flying the planes, and the aftereffects. The Backlash Against Arabs in America is the theme of the second section.

This section included experiences of the backlash, changes during the backlash, and a discussion about the connection between the backlash and Arab-American identity. The third section is entitled Identity. Issues of identity focused around the negotiation of where they fit into the dominant culture, which they perceived was pushing them to take sides after the attacks. Their perception was that America blamed all Arabs. The fourth section is labeled Coping During the Backlash. Coping tools used during the backlash are explored. These included determination, acculturation, and community support. The fifth and final section is Immigration. The section discusses couples' experiences of immigration and how this transition helped to cope with the backlash.

#### Perceptions of the Terrorist Attacks

The couples were asked about their experiences of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, including their memories from that day, their experience of the aftereffects, and their feelings about the fact that men of Arab descent committed the acts. The appraisal of this event from a dyadic viewpoint can be valuable to understanding resilience. "How families make sense of a crisis situation and endow it with meaning is most crucial for resilience" (Walsh, 1998, p. 55).

#### *Memories and Experiences of 9/11*

All of the couples were in shock and disbelief about the terrorist attacks on September 11th. There were a wide array of reactions and experiences. Nashida was so upset about what happened that she became tearful during the interview and had to stop for a minute to clear her throat. There were other women who had to pause in the interview so they could take a minute to reflect. Some spouses were at work and some were at home. These couples knew people that died in the towers. Zaana describes her experience:

I was trying to get ready to go to work, my son called me, he said are you watching TV, what happened to Manhattan, it's burning mom, I said what, I opened the TV, I saw what

was left but I thought this happened somewhere but not in New York, I turned up the volume, and I heard about what happened, I was shocked, I was scared, at once I thought about the people who work there, I thought about all of the young people working there, all of these ideas came to me because I have children around the same age, and my kids go early to work, so I was trembling, and I was shaking, is my daughter there or somebody I know, I cried, there wasn't anything around me, I was only watching the TV, I was hoping it was not Arabs, I stayed at home all-day and I heard that my work was shut down, so I stayed home waiting for news, I was calling my office but nobody was answering, so I didn't know what to do, I was isolated from my work.

Maurice used to work in the World Trade Center. He was actually in the vicinity of the attacks in New York and recounts his memory of the day:

When this took place it was an impact, it was quite a shock, that day it happened, I looked up and I saw something going on before I knew it was a terrorist attack, I picked up the cell phone to see what was happening and as I was making the call the building collapsed, I shut the phone off, put the phone back in my pocket I figured if they're still there they're gone, and if they made it the phones are dead anyway, so luckily most of the people I knew survived, a few that I knew were killed, it's a scar, I miss the place, I worked for the complex for nine years, it's a chunk of my life, luckily most of the people I knew are fine now, but it'll always be gone.

Couples reported shock that an act like 9/11 could happen in the United States.

This feeling seemed particularly important since couples reported leaving the Middle East because of terrorism in their countries. Their reactions of shock were based on the belief that they came here thinking that America is impenetrable. Zareef and Muneera reported their shock at the failure of the United States to protect them:

M: I'm still shocked that it actually happened, I can't believe that it actually happened, the things that had to go wrong for something like this to happen, the CIA, the FBI, the whole thing, so many things had to go wrong and all of them went wrong, and I'm shocked that it actually happened, because we always thought that they would never be able to do anything to this country, that nobody would be able to do anything in this country, you say that many times.

Z: that they would not dare.

M: yeah, it was always like they wouldn't dare to attack us, and to actually do it is like wow, what happened here, something went wrong here, in the government something went wrong.

Couples reported that they left their country in the Middle East to get away from terrorism. These couples were shocked that it had followed them to the United States. They had the impression that the United States was free of terrorism. Chafik and Nisrene said they felt that it would not follow them because the United States is so powerful. Nabil spoke about his experiences of losing family members to terrorist attacks in the country he grew up in:

That's why I left the Middle East, because the same extremists were there and they killed some of my family too, so the same feeling they have towards them I have also, just like the people that lost family here, I lost family too for the same reason, these people look at anyone who is not Moslem as allowed to be killed, so any of my customers who wanted to talk about it I was willing to talk about it, actually it gave me some relief, it was a problem inside me, because I lost three of my family members of the same reason, they were killed because they're Christian, in that part of Egypt we have a lot of extremists that have control, they killed a lot of people there including some of my family, so the same feeling people here have towards them, I have the same feeling.

The experience of terrorism was a common occurrence for Egyptian couples. Couples from the northeast region of the Middle East were more likely to have been exposed to the terror of war. Mahmood described flashbacks of the wars he lived through in the Middle East. He was not alone in his story as other couples from that region detailed their experiences of the wars with Israel. Mahmood explains the memories that the terrorist attacks brought back for him:

It brought memories to my mind, because I lived through the war of 1973, when Damascus was under attack, I remember I was downstairs playing and we saw the airplanes over our heads, they dropped a bomb two blocks over, my mother was yelling come upstairs, come upstairs, I was seven years old, I was very scared, I didn't see my father for four months, his gas station that he owned became a army defense, bottom-line, it brought a lot of memories.

When they heard about the attacks, there was a fear that Arabs were responsible even before the identity of the terrorists was announced. Some were shocked and upset at how fast the community around them accused Arabs before the perpetrators were identified. Sami described his reaction to hearing about the attacks:

Someone came running into the office and said you won't believe it you won't believe it, a second plane crashed into the World Trade Center, first thing I thought was oh man it has to be the Arabs, I thought the first thing they would do was round up every Arab in the country.

### *Reaction to Arabs Flying the Planes*

When asked about their reaction to finding out that the men flying the planes were of Arab descent, couples reported different reactions. Overall, feelings of anger permeated the interviews that the terrorists had committed these actions. These couples knew what the terrorists were capable of bringing to the table. Terror and horrible acts taint the history of the Middle East (Barakat, 1993). Ibrahim and Manar suspected it was Arabs before it was announced:

M: I suspected it, to be honest with you, because I know what the fundamentalists are like, in Egypt we have them, I'm so sad to say that but it is always the Arabs that do something, for a long time Arabs have hijacked planes, it has become like a complex, and when they said that a plane hit the World Trade Center, I kept saying what airline, what airline, but you must remember they're not all Arabs, the group is not all Arabs, I was in shock.

I: it is sad, Ben, that in our days right now we are labeling everything, I am not saying that the whole thing isn't wacky, wrong, inhumane, but when you say Arabs, or when you label Islam, this is the insensitivity, we are Christian by the way, there are great people who are Arab, excellent people, Islam, there are great people, good religion, but whatever you do, in every religion, every culture, you're going to see the bad, the good, the ugly, so if we're talking about a small percentage of fundamentalists, proportionately they were Arab, it is very hard to label this to all Arabs, or to all Moslems.

Anger was also directed at American society for assuming it was Arabs before the identity of the hijackers was confirmed. Firaz was upset when Arabs as a whole were identified as the terrorists. He discussed his anger but could not help becoming defensive as well:

One of the things I don't like, is to be accused, you know when they said that it was Arabs, you cannot accuse a people or a nation, because every nation has good and bad, even every religion has good and bad, for us it's quite different, by us I mean Christians, I remember all the accidents that happened in Egypt, and all the times we were attacked by Moslems, we are really good Christians, we believe in every word in the Bible, we know that the Bible says not to respond to the people who attacked us, but to forgive them, at that the same time I don't accept any accusations from anybody, like to accuse all the Arabs, all the Arabs are not the same, even the Moslem people.

Fakhri and Nawal seemed torn about the attacks. On the one hand, they did not want this to happen to their country but on the other hand they know there is great suffering in the Middle East. This sentiment was representative of all 3 Muslim couples but was not typical for the Christian couples. Whereas anger was the dominant feeling for the Christian couples, Muslim couples were mixed about the attacks. Fakhri and Nawal were not surprised it was men of Arab descent flying the planes:

F: it was a very sad day, not only did we feel the attack here in our adopted country, we also felt the attack on us as a community by the Americans who retaliated against us, one thing must be clear though, the suffering that we feel must be connected to the suffering that our relatives feel back in the Middle East, this has been going on too long, I don't know how I feel about what happened, I don't know if there was anything else they could do, when your country is fighting with rocks and stones against an army what can be done, these guys flying the planes were there with a sense of desperation.

### *The Aftereffects*

All of the couples experienced strong feelings and physical symptoms for months after the attacks. Three couples even felt the effects at the time of interview, 6 months later. There was a preoccupation with financial setback and fears about the economy. George and Clair discussed the feelings they experienced as a couple:

C: We were watching the news 24 hours a day.

G: I was watching the news more than 24 hours a day, we became addicted to it.

C: We couldn't eat out, we couldn't go out to.

G: (interrupting) We weren't in the mood.

C: We were deeply saddened, we couldn't do anything, we couldn't eat, I couldn't go shopping, I haven't been to the mall in a long time, we have only been to the city one time since that has happened, it was a week ago, we used to go so often, on the weekends, it's scary.

All of the couples reported that they stopped flying after the attacks. Some would

only drive if they needed to travel out of the state. Fouad described his feelings about traveling:

I would say that we were more cautious, I never really had a reason to go to the city, but now even if I wanted to go to the city I wouldn't go, maybe you can call it caution, maybe lack of interest, at Christmas time I really wanted to go to see my daughter in Pittsburgh, I was thing about flying but we decided not to, so we drove.

Couples reported spending more time with their Arab communities. Hani and Nuha, who were hesitant to go out after reports of the backlash began, reported that a few months after the attacks they spent more time with Arab couples:

H: We were still afraid of what might happen to us so we did what was safe which was spend time with Arabs. We knew that this way we would be safe. We stopped spending time with our American friends and even lost some friends because we became so isolated. We just felt that it was our safest plan.

N: With our daughter, we just couldn't take any chances. She was upset because she couldn't spend time with her friends but what could we do. We lost a lot during that time after.

### The Backlash Against Arabs in America

All of the couples acknowledged hearing about the backlash against Arabs living in America. Half of the couples reported experiencing some type of negative behavior towards them because of their ethnicity. One couple reported that they were scrutinized by airport security because they were speaking Arabic. One couple was identified as cousins to the man who was killed in California because of his Arabic features. The couples who did not report any direct experience of the backlash acknowledged that it changed their sense of safety.

#### *Perceptions of the Backlash*

Nabil and Leena experienced discrimination while they were traveling. They were detained by the United States government after their last name was identified on a watch list.

Nabil describes the experience:

N: Yes, we went to Vegas for a vacation, and they stopped us in the airport, because our last name was on a list of suspicious last names, I knew something was wrong when we

got off the plane and they were there waiting for us, they held the whole family for a couple of hours, the FBI came in, they contacted immigration, because of a FAA regulation there are certain names in the computer, then somebody from the FBI came and cleared our name, and apologized, everything was fine, that was after two months or so, I think there were looking for somebody and it happens that all the Arabs names sound alike, but this happened only once.

B: What was that experience like for you.

N: Actually in the beginning I felt like it was kind of discrimination because of names, I made jokes about it standing there with the police and the FBI, they said for next time you might change your name, it occurred to me that just like people that think every black is a criminal, think every Arab is a terrorist, I don't blame anybody.

Nabil seemed to handle it with patience and understanding. He identified that he understood that this type of scrutiny was going to happen if these type of security methods were going to be employed.

Mohammed and Najat experienced some problems on a more individual level which could have affected their business. They believe they were slandered because they are Middle Eastern. They were criticized by someone in the community. The situation worked out for them though because they had established a reputation in the community which will be discussed further at a later time:

N: Yes it is very bad, I hired someone to work with me, she worked with me for two or three weeks, she asked me where are you from, I said I am Lebanese, my husband is from Syria, she tried to, she hurt me, she talked to the parents and said Najat is not good, Najat doesn't feed the kids, Najat doesn't play with them, but they said we have been with Najat a long time, they came and they told me that, so I said please don't come any more. They didn't support her, they supported me because they have been with me a long time.

Fakhri and Nawal prepared themselves for some mistreatment before they traveled. They exemplify the mindset of many Arab Americans following 9/11 who felt they had to prepare themselves for the worst:

F: After 9/11, my first major trip was to London, and I was expecting some mistreatment during the trip by the workers or FBI but I was surprised because there was nothing, the only problem we had was on the way back from a trip, they went through her purse.

N: Its because they heard me speaking Arabic, I have an American passport and I had my hair back, I could pass for Italian or Greek but when she heard me speaking Arabic, she searched my purse.

This is an excellent example of the level of defensiveness that was present for Arab Americans during that time.

Oumad shared an experience of being a victim to a anti Arab comment. Oumad believes that education is crucial to ending incidents like this one:

I was sitting in a restaurant, I was sitting at the bar with a couple of friends, and the bartender was talking back and forth, about what's going on, it was right after September 11, a guy sitting there said did you know that all those towelhead stores that are by the World Trade Center were closed that day, this is somebody who's shooting propaganda, I was sitting there, I didn't say a word, I could have gotten into an argument with the guy, but it doesn't mean anything, this guy is launching poison, he knows what he's saying, and the bartender answered him, he said don't worry, Afghanistan first, Palestine next, I'm sitting there listening to these people go back and forth, they're so ignorant, can you educate the bar, this was a bigger task then I was prepared to do, one of the persons I was with felt embarrassed, when we left the bar he apologized, he said these people aren't nice.

All of these incidents involve contact with larger systems, whether it was the government or local communities.

### *Changes After Backlash Began*

Couples varied in their reaction to reports of the backlash. This finding was discovered after examining the data for themes and applying the literature and theories to the data. Ben David and Lavee (1992) found these 4 coping types in their data. There were some differences between the characteristics of their types and the types of this study because their description were based on Israeli families who were in sealed rooms during missile attacks. The four coping types they identified were anxious, cautious, secure, and indifferent. The four in the present study had slight differences and therefore had slightly different names. Further, these reaction types were not exclusive as in the previous study. Some couples may have moved as they

adjusted to the crises. Four coping reactions emerged from the findings,

Table 4.1

Four Reaction Types

<b>Reaction Type</b>	<b>Level of Interaction</b>	<b>Emotional Intensity</b>	<b>Number of Couples</b>
Withdrawing	Minimal to none	Fear	2
Anxious	Minimal to cautious	Apprehensive	7
Secure	No change but more caution	Confident	6
Indifferent	No change after backlash	Calm	3
Total			18

The first type of reaction was a withdrawal reaction which was spurred by extreme fear and caution. They were influenced by the media’s reports of the violence in the United States. Their interaction with the community decreased and consisted of only necessary contact such as shopping. Hani and Nuha exhibited this type of reaction:

H: After we heard about the backlash we started double checking the door at night. We locked the windows which we weren’t doing before. There was an incident that happened to an Arab friend of ours that wasn’t reported in the paper. She was spit on by a person in a local food store. She was wearing a veil and robe. Even though we are Christian, our features are Arab, so we are afraid for our life. We stopped talking to people in the neighborhood that we didn’t know too well. These types of things. You just don’t know what will happen.

N: I just felt a general fear. As a woman who is alone all day I can say that it is scary to know that there are people out there who want to hurt you because of the way you look. I don’t know how the police will respond if something happened to me, maybe they will hate me too. As a result, I think I went out less during the day.

Another type of reaction was an anxious reaction characterized by fear and caution without complete withdrawal. This reaction was not isolating but there was less interaction. These couples usually continued their interactions in the community but took more precautions.

Precautions included traveling less, not disclosing their ethnic identity, and avoiding large crowds. George and Clair described this type of reaction:

C: We're more tired.

G: It to me three or four weeks to recover, to resume regular sleeping habits, if I went to bed at 12, I would wake up at 1 and watch the news until I went to work at 4.

C: I found myself watching CNN all day as well.

G: During the week after 9/11, when the backlash started, in our own community we were afraid that people would know who we are, you think maybe there are American people that are looking at you, deep inside your asking yourself are they looking at you because you're a foreigner or because this is normal, if I speak with an accent are they going to talk to me back or are they not going to talk to me, you really begin to doubt yourself, am I going to be discriminated against, is that a look of discrimination.

B: Doubt in yourself, what does that mean.

G: If I asked them a question are they going to answer me or just ignore me.

C: People aren't as friendly as they used to be.

G: Yes they are not as friendly, they are afraid of you more.

B: How do you deal with that.

G: I don't talk to anyone, for example, if I am in line at the theater, I would talk to the person behind me and make conversation, now I won't do that, I am afraid of how they are going to answer me back, they might be aggressive, I am afraid to mix with them, it makes me doubt myself.

A third type was a secure reaction exhibited by a recognition of the events of the backlash but a feeling of confidence and security. These couples were not confident that nothing would happen to them as much as a confidence that they could overcome. Their interaction with the community might be more cautious but there was no change in the amount of contact. Fouad and Nashida were representative of this type:

N: I think it changed the whole world, it at least makes you look different at the world, to see things in a better perspective, but did it change our way of living, no, we're still the same people.

The last type of reaction was an indifferent one. This type was characterized by a feeling of certainty that there was no danger. These couples were accepting of whatever was going to happen. Activities and interactions remained the same as before the attacks and backlash. Fadi and Sarma did not change their behaviors:

F: I didn't, I didn't care about the reports of the backlash, what is going to happen is going to happen, some people don't travel because of what happened, but no I am not afraid, I have not changed anything, we cannot change things every time people want to hurt us because of our looks.

S: This is part of our life. We have been dealing with it for many years. We can't run anymore. We have to live our life.

#### *Effect of Backlash on Children*

Egyptian couples were more concerned and restrictive of their children than other couples following the reports of the backlash. Those couples who weren't more restrictive reported that they didn't feel their children were in danger, mostly because they had not experienced anything to date. George and Clair felt that their son might be hurt by revealing his ethnicity to prospective colleges:

G: My son is filling out applications to college, and it says what do you like as a club, he said should I put religion club, I said no you can't write that, because somebody's going to think of you suspiciously if you write that down because your name is different.

B: Were you more concerned for your kids after 9/11, did you do things differently with them, were you more protective.

C: The people asked them where they were from, I told them to answer honestly, yes I was concerned something would happen to them.

Elias and Nadia restricted their daughter even a few months after the backlash began:

N: Sometimes, but they don't listen, my daughter on New Year's Eve said to me for the first time, can we go to New York City, and I said over my dead body, we are going to church, so she went to church.

E: I'm sure if this wasn't the circumstances and things were normal we would not have said no, we just asked our son to be careful, stay away from deserted areas, don't go into dark places.

N: Our son is very helpful, to the point he can be taken advantage of.

Hani and Nuha were the most restrictive of their child. They were fearful that something might happen to her so they kept her out of school for a month:

N: I wasn't willing to take any chances. When I heard what happened to the lady at the store, I was afraid for the whole family. I pulled Her out of school until I was sure that nothing would happen. Some of our friends told us it was too much but I didn't want to find out I was wrong after something happened. The school was very helpful and understanding. It was difficult to explain to her but she made it and returned after I saw that nothing was happening in this area at least.

### Identity

Issues of identity were present in the couples' struggle to find their place in American society and in their perceptions of America. Their identity as Arabs was grounded in their families, their religion, and their culture. Their identity as Arab Americans was a process of negotiation with the dominant culture. This relationship was a part of the discussions.

#### *Who Are We?*

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the interviews was a struggle for identity. There was a sense in the interviews that these couples were struggling to find out who they are in the midst of all the pressure to take sides. Christians felt the need to distinguish themselves from Muslims and Muslims felt compelled to separate themselves from the sects of Muslims that supported these attacks. Sami discussed the burden placed on Arabs by the media:

S: Then they put out the news about Atta and the other Egyptians, I was thinking this is not good, we go to this yogurt place by our house, I started having this fear about the fact that they knew me in there and now I felt like I was going there for the first time, because now I felt like we were going to get looked at differently and treated differently than before because now we were the enemy because that's how the media was portraying us, they were showing this picture on TV of an Arab guy saying this is the face of evil and I was thinking that's what I look like, because that's what every Arab guy looks like, it wasn't a good feeling, every time I went somewhere I was thinking what is this person

thinking about me, and some people weren't saying anything and some people were, I had this guy my office saying look what your people are doing, my people, I said, what do you mean my people, you've known me for 13 years, I'm just as American as you are, it pissed me off, it really made me angry, heres someone I've known for about 13 or 14 years and he asked as if I was on the plane, the fact that I was Christian or that I spent so much time here didn't matter, I had people actually ask me do you support the U.S., I pay my taxes, I don't get in trouble, so why am I so different all of a sudden, I will never forget when the guy who works in my office who said to me be careful when you go out.

Fakhri, a Muslim, discussed his feelings about identity:

At a certain point comes a crisis of identity, of being an Arab and an American, it is a little stronger with my wife, and I noticed it is even worse with the kids...there are certain realities in your life, its one world is what it boils down to, the events of September 11th don't really go that deep into the ethnic challenge of who you are, of what you are, you end up at one point or another deciding yes I am an Arab American.

Nisreen struggles with her identity. She distinguishes herself from Muslims when she is in the community:

Before 9/11 we had no problems at all, we used to tell them we were from the Egypt, they would say oh that's beautiful, we wish we could have a chance to go and visit, now we're afraid to say it, to say I'm Egyptian, now if we say we're Egyptian, we also say we're Christian, we have absolutely nothing to do with what happened, they should know that, Christians have nothing to do with what happened.

Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, Arabs were struggling to make their identity in the United States (Suleiman, 1999). Part of this struggle involved an attempt to fit in as Americans. The attacks, as seen in the comments by Sami, were a reminder that Arabs are still seen as outsiders or as Arabs living in America rather than Americans.

### *Perceptions of Society*

Couples reported that their perceptions of American society during the time after the attacks was negative. Couples voiced intense anger about the perception of Arabs in America. Most thought that America is generally uneducated about such issues as the difference in religions and geography. Most couples also felt that Americans assume all Arabs are evil.

Firaz and Aleen were very angry about the fact that Arabs were being grouped into one

category:

A: We were upset, highly upset, I think we were affected more than American people because we were affected twice, because we are Arabs and we live in this country, and people don't have any idea that there is good and bad, they just assume that every Arab in this country is Moslem, they have no idea that there is Christian people out there, they're not educated about difficult cultures, different religions, they assume everybody out there is one religion, it affects me, I consider this my country, we are Christians, also there are a lot of good Moslems, I think even the news people need to get educated, they just put out the worst in people don't put out the good side of people, I'm sure you experience that yourself, as for me it's like, be careful, you don't know who your neighbor is, and I mean the people that did this thing were neighbors of people live in the U.S., they never thought anything like this could happen.

F: I remember all the accidents that happened in Egypt, and all the times we were attacked by Moslems, we are really good Christians, we believe in every word in the Bible, we know that the Bible says not to respond to the people who attacked us, but to forgive them, at that the same time I don't accept any accusations from anybody, like to accuse all the Arabs, all the Arabs are not the same, even the Moslem people, I cannot say all the Moslem people are bad, there are a lot of Moslem people that are good.

Marcel and Zaana also had strong feelings about the perception of Arabs by Americans:

Z: I think after 9/11, Americans became more curious about who the Arab is, how they think, and there was more concentration on Arab Moslems, which is very wrong, it's not right to think that all Arabs are Moslems, so they were concentrating on the Koran, and study the language through the Koran, and they think that this is the Arab.

M: The first impression of the attacks by America was that this was done by Palestinians, or Arabs, without even knowing anything about the accident, this gave a bad taste of how things are looked at in the United States, after words they found out that these were Arab nationalists, it wasn't a good feeling to see Americans point at Arabs or Palestinians, any group, when they don't have the background or they don't know anything about it, this right away put Arabs in a corner, that they are always the aggressors, always the terrorists, which is not true, the second thing is, when they started talking about Arabs, it's the Moslems, the Arab world has a good percentage of Christians, to this day this is not seen because of the media, it's not seen, it's not understood by the American people, we are Christian, we're coming from big families that are there and are Christian, we would like this to be heard and understood, this will change the view of American people, everyone dreams to come to America, and to explain to the American was very hard to do, and don't believe that the Arabs are very happy, and they are dancing in the streets, this is something that was made up for the media, don't believe that, I was very sure that the Arabs were not this joyful, we don't like to hurt people, but when we're hurt, of course, we're going to defend ourselves, and American doesn't know that we are very kind of people, when they did this act they had a purpose, to show the world that they are

alive, it was a chaotic time, you tried to express yourself but they don't want to accept that, I have lived all my life around different nationalities, some people understand and some people don't, some get mad and they criticize you and they say that they should put all Arabs in concentration camps, like they did in the past with the Japanese, so you get frustrated because it's not my fault, it's not my fault to be an Arab, it's not my fault to have this act against us, so I think the American people should know more and read about the Arabs.

Fakhri and Nawal brought the view of a Muslim couple to the experience:

N: It doesn't matter if you're Christian or Moslem, or where you're from, whether you're from Saudi Arabia or Palestine, you're considered an Arab, a barbarian, some people see Muslim people as the ultimate evil, they don't want to get to know us, they just see us in the supermarket with our veils and they judge and they whisper, don't they think we know they are whispering about us, do they know that people are under the veil, people who have feelings, people who have a God, in a way, it was good that people took an increased interest in the Muslim faith after 9/11 but it was also bad, it caused even more misunderstanding because people were hearing the media's version of the Muslim faith.

F: I think part of it was that there was pressure on Moslems because everyone was saying all Moslems are terrorists, I have a feeling she felt this pressure too.

### Coping during the Backlash

Couples seemed to cope with the backlash in a variety of different ways. One of the issues that continually came up from the first interview was the fact that all of these couples have been in their communities for a significant amount of time. This factor alone has been crucial in dealing with crises such as the backlash. As mentioned earlier, couples emphasized that Arabs in the Middle East have been dealing with terror and conflict for thousands of years. These couples reported having lived through some type of conflict and believe that the experience has made them more prepared to deal with the backlash.

### *Acculturation as a Coping Tool*

Couples identified that the fact that they had been in their community for such a long time had helped them cope with the backlash. Immersion in the American culture from the earliest point in America helped the acculturation process. During their interview, Nabil and

Leena made it a strong point to reiterate that they felt safer because they were part of their community:

N: No, in this area everybody knows us, because I have worked here in this area for about seven years, we never speak a different language in front of them, all kinds of activities we are involved in, we have our kids in the same school.

L: We have lived in the same community for more than 10 years with the same people, when you know somebody that long you can't just change our opinion,

N: their kids have been raised with our kids, we always socialize with them, I see them if I'm doing the lawn, we talk about the weather, its nothing like this guy is Arab stay away from him, that is not the case.

Manar made it clear that she has been involved in her community since her children were young:

I used to go to meetings in school for my kids, I participated in activities in school from kindergarten with my kids, sharing birthday parties with other kids from all families, and neighborhood, kids from class, my kids were invited also, my husband also does not want the kids to be isolated from society, we preserve our culture, in the right way not the extreme way, they're like regular Americans raised in an American society, I was part of society, I adjusted myself, and we watched the kids from far, we did not dominate them, my husband was very open to American culture, he did not push our culture on our kids.

Marwan and Sousan, one of the most active couples in their neighborhoods after

September 11<sup>th</sup>, were very involved in their communities as their children grew up:

S: What I have seen in the 21 years we have been here, all of the gatherings, the social events, the friendships, they are all concentrated around Arab communities, I haven't seen many people getting involved in the town where they live, we do, we are always in the town hall, we participate in inauguration day, community service, volunteering in the school while our kids were in school, we feel we are Americans.

M: I believe that where ever you live, if you want your life to be good, you have to get involved so you can make a difference, this is your surrounding, this is your community, this is what you built.

### *American Community Support*

A surprise to some, couples reported that their immediate communities were very supportive of them after reports of the backlash began. Ibrahim and Manar were astonished when

the phone calls of support and concern started coming in. When asked if they experienced any incidents of animosity or anger they reported:

M: No, on the contrary, they called me up and said are you OK, we love you very much, is everything all right, really nobody bothered me, they're very nice.

I: No, I work in a company, they were so helpful, they set up many programs to help the employees, people opened their homes to us, they really provided wonderful assistance, I haven't faced any negative remarks from anybody.

Elias and Nadia also found great support from other staff at their places of employment:

N: I had phone calls coming here, friends of ours that are Irish and German, they're very good friends, we have known them 25 years, since we've come to the country, they're son is our son's age, they grew up together and she called me and she started crying on the phone, I think she woke me up, and my voice was a little down, nobody was really up or good about what was going on, so when she heard my voice like that she started crying, she said is somebody upsetting you, did anybody say something to you, we're coming over, I said I am really OK (laughing), she made me swear that nobody was bothering us, do you know what I got walking through the hospital where I work, everybody came to me and said are you OK, everybody thought that I would have problems because I was Arab, I got a call from my ex-boss, that I worked with 10 years ago, he said is everything OK with your family, I said yes we are fine, I want to make sure you guys are OK, apparently they have a deli down the street from his business, he's Lebanese, they attacked this store, I said we're fine, it was the total opposite, people wanted to make sure we were OK

Shafeek and Nisreen didn't experience any support from their community. When asked about whether they felt any support from the immediate community they reported:

N: Not really, no.

S: They're a lot of people that are nice to us, they have known us for a longtime.

N: But they cannot hide their feelings and we don't blame them, they have to show what's inside them.

S: (interrupting) It's bad even for us too you know.

N: But they also have to understand that we don't agree.

### *The Marriage as a Source of Support*

Couples reported that their marriage was stronger or unchanged when asked how the

terrorist attacks and backlash affected their marriages. Couples had similar beliefs and worldviews on issues around September 11<sup>th</sup> and the backlash. Ben-David and Lavee (1996) propose that couples, who agree on most issues, feel that they are a team in their fight against an external threat and therefore strengthens their relationship. Every couple who suffered physical symptoms, during that time, experienced them together. George and Clair describe their encounter together:

C: We were depressed for a while, you were depressed a lot, even one time we walked outside, as we were walking and I said lets go home, and that has been what it's been like, we walk around and we don't feel like doing anything, we come home and we watch the news, its depression, it makes you depressed, I haven't felt the same for a while, it affects you no matter what.

B: Did you have to rely on each other more?

C: We relied on TV more (laughing) and the broadcast on the news, we both were watching the TV more, we could escape together, B: what do you think it was about the TV?

G: The repetition, hearing the same thing, anything that was a little bit new, we're anxious to see when we were going to get revenge, we watched TV every day, when was this going to happen, we could both absorb it together, we could both escape together, it was also a time passer, we could watch and time would just pass, time as things got back to normal.

Elias and Nadia reported that they grew closer as a result of the events:

E: We definitely got closer.

N: But that's because the kids are out of the house. (laughing)

E: A time of emotions like that, with all of the suffering, and things didn't feel right, but everybody hurting, at any time you might disappear, it gives you motivation to improve your relationships, I think the fear also makes people become closer and closer.

N: We stay home a lot more which might have an effect, we used to go to the movies once a week but we stopped doing that because I don't want to sit in a large theater anymore.

Hani and Nuha talked about how they felt more isolated in their community:

H: It was difficult for us because all of our Arab friends and family don't live in our community. We were forced to rely more on each other. I spent most of my days going from home to work. We even stopped going to the supermarket as much.

N: I felt it especially as a woman because I was home alone all day. When I heard about the incident with the lady being spit on, I refused to go out unless necessary. I was very restrictive of our daughter. It was very difficult because we were isolated for over a month.

H: All we had was each other. I would have to say that I was more appreciative of our relationship.

### *I Already Know What Terror Feels Like!*

Couples reported that they had lived through a war or some type of terror and that has helped them get through an experience such as September 11th. Nabil and Leena experienced forms of terrorism in Egypt. They believe living through the terror has prepared them for experiences such as September 11<sup>th</sup>:

N: We came from a very small society in Egypt where war and crime were part of our life, what we were forced to do was leave the country and go to a place where everything was freedom, or you can practice your religion freely, back there we cannot, I remember certain days where we were supposed to go to the church and they would cut the power on us so we would have to leave the mass without finishing, there are a lot of things which are small things for you or for anybody, for us it was a big deal, there is nothing we could do back there, they killed my brother, what am I going to do, nothing I can do, in terms of 9/11, emotionally I wasn't shocked, because I went through it, so for me it wasn't shock that some of these people did this, this is normal for them and for us.

L: When you're used to killing it becomes a normal routine.

Oumad and Sameera grew up during wars and shared that the experience gave them the skills necessary to get through this crisis:

O: I tell you resiliency, because we have one thing in common, we have all come here from oppressive regimes, we have all made sacrifices, we have to remember what the alternative is, the alternative is far worse than what we have to endure now, I would say we are being put to the test, and it is up to us to be able to identify with our fellow Americans, I believe that we, the children of war, war definitely had a major effect on me, it taught me resiliency, and it taught me self-reliance.

Marwan and Sousan lived through a wartime as husband and wife and shared an experience they

went through that demonstrated how they had to cope with adversity as a couple:

M: I remember when I was working in Israel, the university was run by a church, the main campus was in a church, so one day I was working, it happened in 1987, the students were demonstrating against occupation, the students had gone out to the schoolyard to protest and were chanting Palestine, it was very moving, it didn't take the Israeli soldiers long to get in, and to start shooting, I think one or two students were killed, they asked the faculty were asked to go up to this faculty room and soldiers were shooting at us through the windows, no telephone lines, so I was trapped, they opened a telephone line but you could only call through the military station, so in another words, a military officer would be listening and he would have to give you permission to connect, so I was able to call, he opened the line, he said why are you calling her, I said to let her know I am trapped.

S: And we had an agreement, the lifestyle over there at the time, and I can not imagine it now, at that time it was on the mild side compared to what is happening today, we had an agreement if one of us was stuck somewhere, we would say we were ok and that we would be late, he called and said that and that was enough for me to know he was ok.

M: Later I made it home.

### *Religion as a Support*

Couples identified that their religion was a support during the backlash. Both the Muslim and Christian couples discussed their religion. The Christian couples mentioned their religious communities while the Muslim couples mentioned their religious beliefs. Firaz and Aleen described their how their church was a support:

F: In my church we are all like one family, we all know each other, the church gave a speech about what happened, giving support to all those families that lost people.

A: There were some churches that lost members, that had members that lost members of their families in the 9/11 accident, it hit home as well as anywhere else.

F: Our church was a big support to us during that time, we looked to our church for guidance, we knew it would be the one place where we would be accepted without question, I felt like the other members felt the same way.

Nashida also identified the importance of their church community during that difficult time:

I would like to mention something, we like to think of our church community as our community, we feel like they are a second family to us, problems arose after the Sept. 11

attacks, we felt like we had to solve those problems as a community, especially for our teens, we know that they look to us for support, I think it brought the church community closer, everybody I talked to needed to go to church, whatever the religious background, just to be there, not necessarily just to pray or to have someone pray with them, probably they needed to feel close to God at that moment, so it did strengthen us with the church community, the backlash had a positive and negative effect on us, every experience we go through in life changes us somehow.

Fakhri and Nawal discussed the support they got from their religion as well as the difficulty they had being a Muslim during that time:

F: George Bush announced you are either with us or you are with the terrorists, my son came to me and said dad who are we with, I said we are with the Americans, he said I don't know dad, they say the Muslims are terrorists and we are Muslim, so are we Muslim, are we terrorist, or are we American.

N: It was very difficult for our children to understand, we looked to Allah for protection and guidance during that time, during times like that you become even more dependent on your faith to help you.

Religion also served as a reminder for Arabs. Religion reminded these couples of the differences that exists between Arabs, particularly Muslim and Christian couples. Maurice and Hala had difficulties with friends who are Muslim:

H: Instead of the Arabs getting together everyone had different opinions, people were fighting about it, and I think the problem with the Arabic people is that they never get along.

M: Prime example, with their own friends, that we have, most of them are Moslems, my wife had a clash with one of them

H: It wasn't a clash, it was a conversation.

M: Right a conversation, it was settled peacefully, but it became a heated conversation, with her sister for example, it became heated, but it wasn't settled, it's good you asked that question, even with my own friends right now I have to be a little cautious, for example I was talking to you, and I slipped and I said that I am a Christian, I don't have problems with these people, but I'm cautious, and sometimes I know if I voice my opinion it might offend them, so I just ignore it, because I know some of them don't view 9/11 like I do, but for the sake of friendship I don't talk about it, but I made it clear to some of them that if you want to continue with this relationship as friends, let's just not talk about it, because it might cause conflict, but it's there.

H: But I said, if we're going to talk about it, then it will break up to relationship, but with everything else it's good, but after that incident it was very tense in the beginning, for the first two or three weeks, now we just don't talk about it, it really could have broken the relationship, and still till now, and I really like them in all different aspects, it's just when the attack the US.

One finding that emerged was that these Christian couples did not have an easier time during the backlash than Muslim couples. Though the number of Muslim couples was small, they were not more likely to report incidents against them. Further, both groups reported concerns about their safety.

### *Determination*

Couples described their determination to succeed in America. This determination was a resource that these couples brought with them from the Middle East . Determination is connected to the belief that if they came to America, these couples could make a better life. Huseby-Darvas writes “most immigrants-old, new, and contemporary-believed in the Constitution, in the marvelous notion that all people were created equal” (1994, p. 13). Firaz and Aleen discussed determination:

A: I think that one thing that helps us as a culture is that we are determined, we are determined to succeed, we were determined to come here and be successful, we are determined to keep our family together, we don't give up we just work harder, this is one reason why a backlash as they call it, could never truly hurt us, we have seen too much and have experienced too much to be discouraged or hurt

Marwan and Sousan reiterated the belief of Firaz and Aleen that determination is a very important tool that Arabs use to cope with adversity:

S: I think the family, family ties, believing in yourself, optimism, and the heritage that we learn from our families that if there is a will and you have the motivation, things will work out, and I think that rebuilding initiative that our parents planted in us, that although we lost many things we should be able to start again, and I think we really do have that family entity, the hospitality, the way we deal with people, the smiley face and you greet your neighbor, and you respect your neighbor no matter where they are coming from, values, especially the determination.

B: You mention the determination, where do you think that comes from?

S: I think it was planted in me from my parents, after all my father was all alone, he lost his father when he was four years old, and his mother was sick and he had to work hard to pay his medical bills, he also lost his older brother, leaving a widow and his daughter who was 3 years old, he sent us to private school when we were young and to him it was more important than building a home and he always told us if you want to do it you can do it.

M: The Palestinians are suffering more and are losing their motivation to improve, my father lost both of his parents when he was younger, he was the oldest, his mother was killed by an Israeli military jeep who killed her when she was trying to cross the street, they didn't even stop, his father lost his land to Israel and when that happened he actually lost his mind, the Arabic culture, regardless of where the person came from has two eyes, one is looking to the future and one is looking back, they are looking back at the success of the Arabic culture, they want to replicate that.

### *The Arab Family*

All of the couples discussed how Arabs cope with adversity on an everyday basis. Family was discussed as an integral part of the Arabic culture. "The Arab family continues to be the most significant agency of socialization of the young as functioning members of society"

(Barakat, 1993, p.118) Firaz and Aleen discussed how family is central for Arabs dealing with adversity:

A: I think our emphasis on family helps us with difficult situations, I feel like for one thing Arabs take marriages more seriously, we don't get divorced at the first sign of trouble, we depend on each other greatly, let me give you an example, if you notice, in a lot of American families, the children are pushed out of the house after high school, many parents encourage their children to become independent even if they're not able to do so, there is almost pressure to get married, in our culture, you won't see a child being asked to leave the home, they are allowed to stay as long as they want, the parents do not see this as a inconvenience or unhealthy, another example is that you don't see the same divorce rate in the Arab culture as you do in the American and other cultures, after 9/11, I was very scared, I think my husband was too even though he won't admit it, but we knew we had each other, it was almost like a constant in our life, I knew when I came home from work that he would be there.

B: What do you mean by have seen too much?

F: It means that Arabs have been through years and years and years of pain and terror and

conflict and death, there is nothing that surprises us, we have been conquered, we have conquered, but we have come too far to be hurt or sent back.

A: And like I was saying our families have been strong throughout it all.

B: Can you tell me more about how families help during difficult situations?

A: I can try, after 9/11, people, all people, were looking for direction or safety, for Arabs, our families are our safety, we looked our families for rules, for direction, for safety, our families provide our foundation, a sense of togetherness, a sense of calm, I'm not sure what else to say, does that help.

F: I just want to add that our culture is very helpful, we have a lot of rituals and traditions that we rely on for our identity, me and my wife, have tried very hard to keep connected to the culture.

Fouad and Nashida spoke about the importance of family and religion:

N: I think the fact that we are a close family culture, Arabs tend to depend on their families for every problem that occurs in their lives, marriage, death, whatever, many people came as a whole family to this country, being brought up to have close family ties helps a lot, especially if you have your family around you, I think it is something beautiful that they brought to this country, another thing that I can think of is our dependency on religion, for example as soon as I leave the house I make the sign of the cross, because I was brought up that way, I do it without thinking, the Moslems say on God we depend or something like that, which many times is misinterpreted by Americans as something bad, but that gives them strength, so I know everything is going to be okay today when I make the cross.

F: I came here because I heard so much about it, I heard this was the place to be, I got used to the country, I got used to the people, the dream that thought that I would go back never came true, I got married, had children, I am not sorry that I stayed.

Couples discussed how important having a dream of the way they wanted their life to look like and using that dream to motivate them. Four couples discussed how they believe that Arabic families are very resilient because of sacrifices each member makes for others. For example, what was often discussed was the idea that wives stay home with their children for several years after the children are born. Couples also mentioned the fact that they have made sure to keep their homes open to their children for as long as they need it. Muneera described her son's difficulties with living at home because of pressure from society to move home:

When we were in the Middle East, there were adult children living with their families, one of our adult children came with us, he lives at home but he gets a lot of pressure from his friends, that he should move out, and why is he still living at home, he actually likes living at home, for him it's easy, he said to me while we were there, look at this everyone seems to be happy living at home, and nobody says to them why are they living there, and so he came back and he was happy, but here it's like society says if you're 18 or 20 years old you have to go out, move away, everyone's on their own.

### Experience of Immigration

During the first few interviews, couples were continuously discussing their immigration to the United States. These conversations were an offshoot of our discussions about how Arabs cope with adversity. Couples conversed about how their immigration experiences were extremely difficult and that the experience gave them the tools to deal with future tribulations. As a result, questions about the immigration process were incorporated into the interviews. Couples mentioned how their immigration experience affected their life in the United States.

Some couples had great difficulty transitioning to the United States. Those who reported that they did not have any problems were those that reported that they knew English before they came. Fadi and Sarma described the difficult experience they had and how much they left behind:

F: It was a very big change, I can say that we cried everyday and we cried every night, we said why did we come to the United States, at one time we wanted to go back, the problem was that we sold everything there, and we sent our things to the United States.

B: Were you married already when you came?

F: Yes.

S: You know America is a big opportunity, but it is not for us, it is for young people, it's not for old people like us.

F: I had a good job with a pharmaceutical company.

S: American company.

F: Everyone was saying why do you want to leave, but you're like a king here, we came here on our honeymoon before we moved here, and her brother was here at the time and he said why don't you come, he said I am going to apply for you, it came in right away, there was a war at that time, and we said lets go, we thought it would be easy to go and live for five years, but it doesn't work that way (laughing), then we got used to the life, but it was very, very hard, now we feel it more.

B: How did you make it through those first years that were so difficult?

F: We did it with the idea that we couldn't go back, her aunt helped us a little, she would help us buy things we couldn't afford, in the Middle East it's different, our lives were different, everyday we had people with us, family, friends, or we would go to see them, every night there was entertainment, here you don't have it, America is work, you work until the end of the week, then you can go out and do something.

Fadi and Sarma exemplify the difficulty Arabs found when they tried to bring the traditions of the Middle East to America. Fadi and Sarma are very concerned about who their children will marry which was more easily controlled in the Middle East.

Fouad and Nashida also had a difficult transition. Nashida was helped by the fact that she studied at an American University in the Middle East:

F: The transition was difficult for me, I was very young, I don't even know why I came here, I thought this was the place to be, for a while I felt like I missed home and I made a mistake, I took it day by day, month by month, year by year, I experienced difficulty in the beginning at work, some people looked at me and called me camel rider, I remember what I looked at me and said what are you camel riders doing in this country, I adopted to it but I never let go of where I came from, my family, who I left behind, I was young and I was alone so I had to make the transition.

N: In some aspects it was difficult, in other aspects it wasn't, I studied in an American school in Palestine, so I was somewhat familiar with the culture, there were foreigners at the school from all over the world, so I didn't have a problem adapting to the culture, it was difficult for me to be away from my family, I was surprised with the way that people looked at me, I don't know they were thinking a Palestinian should look like, but I still here it, you don't look like a Palestinian and I say what is a Palestinian supposed to look like, as open as society is you expect people to know about other cultures.

Marwan and Sousan had an easier transition than many of the others. They were very well educated and had established themselves in the Middle East before they arrived here:

M: We were born in Israel, so we grew up in Israel, so we had the Palestinian culture and the Israeli culture, and we learned English in grammar school, when we came here I was about 31, and at that time we were already established in Israel, we were doing well except that we had a child, and we began to notice that the political environment was not good, the tension was increasing everyday, and the schools were segregated, we wanted our children to grow up in an environment of freedom, I never felt like I was an immigrant, this was my life and this was my home, I just have to work a little harder, so we feel at home now.

S: As he said before English wasn't a problem for us, we also had our professions and years of experience, when we moved here I was pregnant, I decided to be a mom, I don't know how many couples would leave a good established life, I think we came with a lot of tools to work with..

M: And a lot of motivation.

### Summary

One thing that was obvious from these interviews was that all of the couples were affected in some way or another by the terrorist attacks and subsequent backlash. Some couples had direct experiences of the backlash while others were afraid of what could happen. These couples reported many different coping skills for dealing with 9/11. Many of the couples had previous experience dealing with terror and conflict. Several couples had a difficult transition to America which helped prepare them for adversity. Religion and family closeness and sacrifice seemed to be the coping factors that seemed to be mentioned the most.

All of the couples were upset about the attacks. Some were not surprised when they found out it was Arab men flying the planes. There was some couples who were affected several months after the attacks. There were stories of flashbacks to previous wars that had been lived through. Couples stopped flying and some even restricted driving. There was some conflict with friends over the benefit and purpose of the attacks. These couples were affected in many ways by what happened on 9/11.

There were stories of experiences with the backlash. One couple was stopped by the FBI

after their last name came up on a watch list. Others experienced anti-Arab comments and hatred. Many changed their lives after reports of the backlash began. The fear of something happening seemed to put these couples on the defensive resulting in interpreting any strange behavior towards them as hate. One couple was so fearful that they pulled their child from school.

This group of couples exhibited a broad range of coping skills. The experience of having been through previous conflict was believed to be helpful in coping. Religion was reported to be a strong support. Support from spouse and overall family closeness were identified as important factors. Many couples believed that the fact that they had lived in the community for a while was a crucial piece of their survival. Calls of caring from American friends and co-workers were valuable.

Finally, many reported the experiences of immigration and acculturation were helpful in coping. There were some similar experiences of hate and alienation from the community during the early years in America which desensitized them to any animosity experienced currently. All of these couples were touched in some way by the attacks and subsequent backlash. They were able to draw on the strengths of dealing with years of conflict as well as a strong culture.

In the final chapter, I discuss the literature and draw conclusions. From those conclusions, I discuss theoretical and clinical implications of the data. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study and future research directions.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine resilience in Arab American couples in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York City. The goal was to access the voices of these couples and contribute to the scarce literature about Arab Americans. These conversations explored a host of issues facing persons of Arab descent living in the United States. The issues encompass topics such as discrimination, immigration, assimilation, identity, and relationships with larger systems. Resilience is tightly connected to the process of transition from the Middle East to the United States. Overcoming adversity and the struggles to become American citizens is a testament to their fortitude and perseverance.

The couples who participated in this study discussed a wide variety of coping skills developed through their experience of living in the Middle East as well as the challenges of America. Their narratives provided insight into the specific resources accessed by Arab American couples during the backlash after September 11th. They reported incidents of the backlash either experienced by them or by friends and family. They talked about living in terror and war in the Middle East. They left behind jobs, families, and strong social networks for dreams of economic security, freedom and peace. Partners reported crying for days after they immigrated with thoughts of their home countries. They persevered in spite of insults, jokes, language barriers, and loneliness. Through it all, they developed the resilience demonstrated in their interviews and revealed in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I discuss the major findings of the study and connect how these findings contribute to the research literature. I present the conclusions drawn from the study and discuss the theoretical and clinical implications, limitations, and future research suggestions.

## Discussion

Analysis of the data uncovered four key conclusions: resilient marriages, larger systems, a process of identity, religion that unifies and divides. Marriage was a source of meaning and comfort during adversity. Resilience came out of their relationship with their partners as well as their relations with larger systems. Their perceptions of society dominated our discussions and they identified areas where their interactions with larger communities was influential. For these couples, identity is connected to their relationship with the hijackers, the impetus for the backlash, and what tools they used to cope with feelings of animosity. Religion is a major influence on their identity. Religion is an aspect of their identity that they carried with them from the Middle East.

### *Resilient Marriages*

One of the most significant findings was that these couples brought a history of living through conflict and terror with them to America. The history of Arabs in the Middle East is marked by war and conflict. These couples described stories of surviving wars and terrorism. Many lived through the wars in Israel while others in Egypt were constantly plagued by the acts of terrorism. During these acts of war and terror, these couples developed coping skills that helped them keep their families intact.

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Arab couples found themselves in terrible circumstances. They reported incidents of violence around them and tensions between them. They were afraid for their children and their jobs. They felt tension whether it was real or imagined and yet the most ironic part of it all was that they left this way of life behind. They fled this environment of the Middle East to find safety and make a better life. To their disbelief, the terror followed them and

yet they were able to persevere using the same coping skills they developed in the past. They applied a schema of determination and perseverance created in the past.

Couples also used the coping they learned during their immigration to survive the backlash. For example, Fadi and Sarma were married in the Middle East. Two years after their marriage, they immigrated to the United States. They left behind their jobs and families to find a better life. They described the struggles that were a part of the transition. Their marriage was the only constant in their lives. This carried over into future adversity such as September 11<sup>th</sup>.

In an empirical investigation of Japanese American families, Nagata and Takeshita (1998) found that their participants identified that they had been dealing with discrimination before the internment camps and that was a huge factor in their resilience. They were able to better cope because they had already been through similar experiences. The findings of this study support the premise that families have more success when there is similar experience with a stressor.

Though these couples used many of the same resources, they did not react the same way. Couples reacted to the reports of the backlash in four different ways. This supports the research of Ben-David and Lavee (1992) who found that families typically fall into four categories of response when coping with war stress. These types are anxious, cautious, secure, and indifferent. These findings add to the research by showing such patterns of reaction with a different stressor and a different cultural sample. Further, these findings revealed that regardless of reaction type, a couple can succeed in overcoming adversity as these couples have shown.

A clear strength of these couples was the agreement of their ideologies regarding the attacks and the backlash. Many of the conversations flowed because of the consensus of the couples. Some interrupted each other because they were so eager to voice their opinion. Ibrahim

and Manar, for example, went back and forth in conversation as they discussed the attacks. George and Clare were so close during the backlash that they experienced many of the same physical symptoms. The united front of these couples was also helpful to their children who absorbed the togetherness. Fouad and Nashida had to calm their children who called many times after September 11<sup>th</sup> to ask about what has happened.

Every couple reported no change in their relationship or being closer after the backlash began. All of these couples had strong beliefs about the attacks and the backlash. This foundation of similar ideologies nurtured their relationships. For withdrawing couples, isolation contributed to their closeness.

These findings support the research of Ben-David and Lavee (1996), who found that couples had more cohesive relationships under the stress of possible war when they had similar viewpoints. The couples who I interviewed reported closer relationships which may have stemmed from their similar ideologies about the attacks and backlash.

### *Larger Systems*

These couples were in contact with systems of differing sizes. Each spouse interacted with their partner in a system. Their relationship with their children comprised another system. Their communities of worship were systems. They were connected to systems of government, both here and in the Middle East.

The interaction between Arab Americans and the United States government has been increasing. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, there was a rise in the interaction between Arab Americans and the FBI. There were multiple reports of Arabs being questioned by the FBI (Salari, 2002). This increased scrutiny made couples more cautious and careful, thereby increasing stress and tension in these couples.

The support of local communities was a large part of their coping. This finding is consistent with the research of Kupst and colleagues (Kupst et al., 1982, 1984, 1995) and the research of McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Frierdich, and Byrne (2002) who found that social support from several sources was a key factor in resiliency. The findings of the present study add to the previous research because they show the importance of immigrant couples integrating themselves into support groups.

The fact that these couples integrated themselves into American society was crucial to their success. Since they immigrated to America, they have made an effort to assimilate into American society. This finding strengthens the research of Fargallah, Schumm, and Webb (1997) who found that Arab American immigrants had greater ease with acculturation if they had more American friendships and observed American cultural practices.

Lavee, Ben-David, and Azaiza (1997) found that Palestinians were more likely to be passive in their coping with such attitudes as being patient. Couples in the present study exhibited some passive coping but this focus neglects the success of those active couples. Couples can be very powerful influences in their communities. They can be involved in their government and civic groups which can help them feel like they are contributing to building relationships and healing emotional wounds.

#### *A Process of Identity*

Arab identity is comprised of several different groups with differing identities based on such factors as country of origin and religion. Within this sample, there was a clear struggle for these couples to define their position in American culture. Both the Muslim couples and the Christian couples perceived the pressure of American society to choose between identifying as

an American or as a terrorist with no room for flexibility. The three Muslim couples seemed to express more anger about the divide but Christian couples clearly felt the hostility in America.

Couples varied in terms of their identification. Some were quick to say they were Americans while others stressed that they were Arab before anything else. Couples who clearly identified as Americans were less likely to report pressure to identify themselves to American society. For example, Zareef and Muneera were very defensive of America and spoke out against those who would use terrorism. They felt little pressure to take sides. Couples who struggled to identify themselves or who reported that they were Arab above all else were more likely to be struggling with this burden. Fakhri and Nawal, who identified as Arabs, exemplified the tension about choosing sides. Faragallah et al. (1997) found that immigrants who identified with American culture and used American cultural practices were more satisfied with life in the United States. This research supports those findings. Further, these findings show that early attempts at acculturation can lead to an easier transition to America.

In general, couples were in accord about many of the issues discussed in the interviews. Their agreement strengthened their cohesion as partners and as parents. Many of the interviews seemed to flow with regard to the conversation between the two spouses. The report that their marriage was strengthened as a result of the events seemed to come out of their agreement of their ideologies about the terrorist attacks, the backlash, and coping.

The experience of living in America is still very new for Arabs. They did not begin their immigration until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Suleiman, 1999). The nature of their race classification by the government has changed their American identity back and forth from Asian to white. Their current classification as white has made their differences less visible in American society and may have even allowed them to blend into the dominant culture. As a result, their process of

identity may have been slowed down because of the lack of pressure by the government and institutions to remember they are Arabs. The anger of these couples at Americans for believing they were connected to the terrorists could have resulted from their assumption that America saw them as white before September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Ajrouch (2000) found that Arab American ethnic identity is founded on social relationships. Ajrouch demonstrated that living in an Arab American community can help with the process of identity as a result of similar values, traditions, and beliefs. This finding could have implications for this research. Since the couples in this study are living in American communities, they might have more difficulties negotiating their identity. They might be lacking the support necessary to negotiate identity. Therefore, they are forced to rely on their American communities for guidance and support which could lead to feelings of tension. This suggests that their religious communities become even more important in their identity development.

#### *Religion: Unify and Divide*

From the beginning of the interviews, religion was a dominant topic that cut across all of the discussions in these interviews. Although this sample had mixed religions and mixed countries of origin, they described similar experiences and coping skills. All couples had concerns about their safety and the possible ramifications of the terrorist attacks. Regardless of religion, couples felt some pressure from American society to choose sides.

Christian couples expressed anger at Muslim extremists. They told stories of incidents of terror while they were living in the Middle East. Some of the anger from those previous incidents carried over into today. Christians have had difficulties living in the Middle East where the governments are primarily Muslim. These difficulties are connected to the reason why these Christian couples left the Middle East. Christian couples used the cross as a symbol. They

believed that it shows American people who hold negative views of Arabs that they are not the same as those who flew the planes and bombed the embassies. They believed that Americans knew that Christians were not capable of these acts.

Christian couples discussed the importance of their religious communities in their coping. Fouad and Nashida, for example, made it clear that their church was a crucial part of their resilience. They found strength and guidance in the church community. Their description suggests that their church was a valuable part of the identity process for Arabs who live in an American community.

The Muslim couples in this study did not differ greatly from Christian couples with regard to perceptions of the backlash and the resources accessed. One area that they did emphasize was the cause of Arabs suffering in the Middle East. Specifically, they recognized that there are many Arabs being killed everyday in Palestine. These couples believe that the terrorism of September 11<sup>th</sup> is representative of larger world issues. Whereas Christianity served as a distancer from the terrorists and their cause, these Muslim couples were connected to the hijackers by their religion. Fakhri and Nawal described it best when they discussed the connection they felt to the people suffering in their country of origin. These findings support the literature which found differences between Arabs differentiated by religion. Faragallah et al. (1997) did find differences by religion but their results demonstrated that Muslims were not as satisfied as Christians with life in the United States. I did not find this in the present study, but satisfaction with life in the United States was not a focus and my sample only included 3 Muslim couples. The Muslims in this study did seem very happy with life in the United States. Researchers should examine differences in participants by religion. Couples live in the context of their religion.

## Theoretical Implications

Qualitative interviews brought forth information about Arab American couples living in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York City. The theoretical frameworks of systems theory, family resiliency model, and social constructionist theory are applied to guide and interpret the findings. All three of these theories have an emphasis on the importance of meaning created through interaction. The theories complement each other by explaining different aspects of resilience and culture.

Systems theory provides a foundation in which to examine the relationships found in the Chapter 4. I applied general concepts from systems theory to explain the context of these couples. Family resiliency model includes a systemic perspective in its understanding of family coping (Patterson, 1993). Family resiliency model emphasizes that couples have a worldview, or a way of seeing themselves in relationship to systems outside the couple. In guiding this research, family resiliency model contributes to systems theory by focusing on resilience. Social constructionism also stresses interaction between individuals or systems (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Social constructionism contributed to the interpretation of the findings in the present study by emphasizing language and meaning. I found meaning through my dialogue and interaction with the couples in these interviews.

### *Systems Theory*

The findings of this study support the importance of examining the organization of parts resulting from their interaction (Bertalanffy, 1968). The couples in this study are in contact with systems that influence their identity and their coping. Some couples accessed their local communities for coping. Others found solace in their religious communities. One couple

withdrew from their community. According to the three models, their interactions influenced the meaning they created and their process of identity.

This study highlights the importance of studying couples within their structural and social contexts. These couples live in predominantly Caucasian neighborhoods with few social supports. They rely on their religious communities and some American and Arab friends within their communities. They feel angry towards American society and feel the same in return. They are being scrutinized by the government in the form of increased interaction with the FBI and security agencies. The effect of these contexts are circular as seen in couples who are spending more time at home and report depression and fatigue. Also, self-employed couples report business being lost which can also lead to depression and fatigue.

If I examined these couples in isolation, I would have missed the rich meaning that became apparent from their discussions of their communities and larger society. According to systems theory, every system is an open (Bertalanffy, 1968). The system maintains itself with a continuous interaction with systems around it with the intention of maintaining balance. Couples who are dealing with the backlash are struggling to maintain their homeostasis. Because they are in an open system, couples are using feedback from their families, the media, and their communities to constantly adjust their actions to survive.

The boundaries of these couples with outside society were constantly opening and closing as each couple saw necessary. The interviews revealed that building boundaries was a process of trial and error. For example, Hani and Nuha closed their family system from outside systems as a precaution and then opened up again as time passed. The interaction between media and these couples was critical to the understanding of their mindset, as Sami and Randa's

discussion of the news media's descriptions of the face of evil and its resemblance to many Arab males illustrated in Chapter 4.

Lastly, general systems theory provides a way to look beyond the terrorist attacks and backlash in the United States. As stated by some of these couples, problems are found in the organization and order of parts. These problems include the backlash against the couples, the terrorist attacks, the actions of the American government in the world, the actions of governments in the Middle East, and the ultimate suffering of all of these people must be solved.

#### *Family Resiliency Model*

The Resiliency Model of Family Stress, Adjustment, and Adaptation (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1993, 1996) follows the concepts of homeostasis and feedback from general systems theory very closely. The two crucial phases listed in the model are the adjustment and the adaptation phases. When faced with imbalance, couples move to a phase of adjustment and if the imbalance cannot be corrected, adaptation begins.

Couples entered adjustment or adaptation based on their appraisal of the backlash, their current strengths and resources, and pre-existing demands. Couples who were able to adjust felt the backlash the least, had a realistic expectation that they could overcome the tensions, and had resources in place such as a strong religious community. Couples who entered adaptation were those who felt the severity of the backlash, had great fear and uncertainty, and had existing strains.

Resilience researchers believe that families who end up in more vulnerable and high risk positions during their attempt at adaptation may have a history of difficulty coping with traumatic events (Patterson, 2002). The couples in this study who withdrew from society and isolated themselves may have had difficulty adapting to previous crises. The opposite belief is

that families who discover solutions and overcome adversity build protective mechanisms for the future. This idea is supported by the couples in this study who reported that they used resources from previous experiences with terror and conflict. They developed the skills necessary to survive war, terrorism, and immigration across continents. These same skills were mentioned in dealing with September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Family schema is an integral part of the family resiliency model. A schema is a family's belief system and functions as a way of sorting information (McCubbin et al., 1996). Schema is a useful concept to understand how the couples coped. I applied schema to explain the data. The couples in this study had been through the experience of war, terror, and social unrest before and had survived. This success impacted their views and beliefs about terror and violence. They made it through it together once. This was the belief that was conveyed to me in these interviews. This determination and confidence was a crucial part of their coping. Their schema affected all of the information coming in from the outside world. Reports of the backlash were given to them and for the most part they were able to resume their everyday lives.

A large part of their success was their internal and external resources. Couples who access their religious community and their local community overcame the hardship. Calls of support and concern after the reports of the backlash began were crucial to adjustment and adaptation. Couples reported spending more time in their religious institutions. Internally, couples accessed determination and previous experiences of terror.

### *Social Constructionism*

Social constructionism is based on the idea that meaning is created through social interaction, particularly language (Gergen, 1985). Couples have made meaning of the attacks and the backlash through their interactions with each other and their communities. Further, through

our interactions in these interviews, we shared ideas and found new meanings. I accomplished this by creating an arena of space in which I asked questions (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). I also created my own meaning of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and after. Through my dialogue with these couples, I began to develop my own worldview of the events that occurred.

These couples experienced terror in the past while living in the Middle East. These experiences greatly influenced the ways in which these couples created meaning of the attacks and backlash. Reiss (1981) believed that a family's construction of reality developed from shared process more than simple agreement. This shared process consists of dialogue, interpolation (one member filling in the gaps), and extrapolation (generalizing from one experience to another).

The shared meaning of determination and hope for some couples reduce doubt and uncertainty about the backlash. Couples who withdrew shared a meaning of fear and uncertainty. Patterson and Garwick (1994) argue this definition of the situation are critical in resilience. Couples who believe they can make a difference in their communities with regard to dispelling myths are likely to have successful adaptation. Couples who are connected to their religious communities and believe that they can find guidance in these communities adapt.

#### Clinical Implications

One of the purposes of this research was to increase the information about Arab American families available to therapists and those in helping roles. A difficulty in writing about Arab Americans is they cannot be grouped into one unified ethnic or racial category as these interviews have shown. My hope is those professionals using this information are sensitive to their diversity. Arabs from Egypt have different beliefs and rituals than those Arabs from Palestine or Lebanon. They do not even share the same dialect of language. Individual interventions can be tailored by accessing the information and stories of the clients themselves.

Further, this sample consisted mostly of Christian couples which should be taken into account when applying the information to their clients, although, Muslim couples had few differences from the Christians in terms of the resources they were discussing and the issues they were facing.

Arab Americans have many strong coping resources available to them. All of the couples interviewed brought the coping skills taught by their respective culture and used them to immigrate and face the issues of acculturation and development. These couples accessed family support, Arab and American community support, their history and familiarity with conflict and war, and religion. They utilized their marital relationships to find strength and they passed this strength on to their children. They expressed their beliefs in large families. They demonstrated great determination in their stories and practiced sacrifice for others. These findings support the literature stating that helping professionals working with Arabs should tailor their interventions to fit the culture (Al-Krenawi, Maoz, & Reicher, 1994).

When working with Arab Americans, it is beneficial to use the whole family as a resource (Al-Krenawi, 1998). Working with only an individual could be difficult because so many of their beliefs are family based. As shown by Savaya (1998), Arabs living in the Middle East tend to keep their problems within the family. This also applies to Arab Americans. If the individual did not have family support for counseling, it might be difficult for significant disclosure to occur. This issue would have to be discussed before therapy could continue, specifically, what would have to happen for the family to be involved or supportive. This might become especially difficult if the therapist was not of Arab descent. A referral would have to be considered if no progress could be made. At the least, a consultation with an Arab therapist or Arab community leader should be initiated by the helping professional (Al-Krenawi, 1999).

The concept of working with other family members also applies to marital problems. If the spouse is not present, it is likely that significant change would be difficult. Further, since the marital relationship is so strong for Arab Americans, it could be a great resource for the individual. Because of the close nature of the marriage, if only one spouse is seen, it is probable that there could be tension between the two spouses about the content of therapy. Al-Krenawi (1999) had success when working with couples together. There should be an effort made to see both spouses. If the therapist believes that the problem needs to be addressed on an individual level, there should be periodic conjoint sessions to keep the other spouse involved and respond to any of their questions or concerns. Overall, the marriage should be used as a resource for Arab Americans.

The findings of this study demonstrate that religion is another area of support. Many Arab Americans view their religious community as family. The religious community can be a valuable source of comfort and guidance for Arab Americans, especially the newly immigrated. The community can be a social center, a learning center for children, and a place to be reminded of the culture (Ajrouch, 2000). Though there were only three Muslim couples in the study, there was no indication that they did not find the same resources in the religious community. It can be extremely useful to involve religious leaders in any work done with Arab Americans. They can be a source of information and can assist a helping professional to have an easier time being accepted by the family.

Arabs have been in the middle of conflict and war for more than 3000 years (Suleiman, 1999). Every couple interviewed reported that they had either lived through a war or they lived in a tense environment because of the threat of war. This part of their culture came across during the interviews. These were very resilient couples who use whatever is available to survive. The

terror of September 11, 2001 was a familiar experience to them. They did report that they were shocked and saddened by the tragedy but there was a sense that they would get through it. Sousan called it a 'rebuilding initiative', a drive to keep going when things seem horrific and hopeless. Arab Americans can find strength in this belief.

If an Arab American presented in therapy with a sense of hopelessness or a problem that seemed insurmountable, the therapist might consider having them study the history of their ancestors. Just as I did, they could find a connection to the perseverance of the generations before them. This might start with researching their own family history. A sense that there are many generations of determination in their family history could help them work towards change. There have been times since I started connecting to my culture that I have faced challenges in my life that seemed too difficult where I have remembered my father's determination as well as my wife's father. They both conquered barriers of language and discrimination to make a life for themselves and their family. Awareness of their persistence gave me the extra strength I needed to keep going, and reminds me of this important aspect of Arab American culture for others as well.

A theme that seems particularly important for Arab Americans is that of integration. Couples who come to America with the intention of isolating from the American community could have great difficulty transitioning to America. On the other hand, families can integrate so far into American life that they lose their Arab identity. There is a balance between the two that helped so many of these couples. This balance concept could be very useful information for those working with recent immigrants and their families. For example, a new family could be helped to integrate by encouraging them to join school activities. This could include having children join after school clubs and sports. Parents could join the PTA or school committees.

Couples could also get involved in town events such as picnics and town meetings. With these recommendations, I assume these couples are fluent enough in English. Couples whose English is poor or those who do not speak English should be encouraged to learn English through classes so that it does not impede their involvement.

There are also implications for American Arab relations from this study. Couples in this study had a negative view of American support and understanding for their cause. This differed from their feeling of support from Americans during the backlash. Many felt supported during the backlash from the local American community. Couples had a perception that Americans do not understand the differences in religion, geography, or politics. Couples blamed the backlash on the ignorance of American society with regard to the situation in the Middle East. For one person to address these issues on an individual level is difficult but on a larger systems level there are possibilities. Some are already being instituted. President Bush's efforts to speak out for Arab Americans was praised by some of these couples. Arab American groups have made an increased effort to disseminate education about Arabs by local Arab American groups. America has made more of an effort to incorporate Arab Americans in national events such as the prayer service for 9/11.

Lastly, determination was also a trait that was identified as a coping resource. Determination can be a difficult trait to access because it is very abstract. There might be usefulness in having a family define and discuss it first. Examining the history of Arab culture could be useful here as well. Understanding the determination from the standpoint of the culture as a whole might be helpful to a family who is struggling.

These couples have shown many resources available to Arab Americans. The history of the culture has traditions and beliefs that are valuable to Arabs who are facing adversity. Also,

Arabs have persevered through years of war, and an understanding of this perseverance is crucial to all Arab families. A therapist working with an Arab couple will provide more useful services when equipped with an understanding of the culture and history.

#### Limitations

As a member of the Arab American community from whom I obtained respondents, I am in contact with many of these couples at local community events. As a result, I have a relationship with many couples outside of the interview room. This relationship could have affected the amount of disclosure in the interviews. If the couple felt that I was too close to them, they may have kept some things private that they may have told to a stranger. Further, my presence and relationship may have influenced some responses to be more socially desirable (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992).

This study consisted of 15 Christian couples and 3 Muslim couples. The Muslim couples are not enough to reveal all of the complexities of this group of Arabs. The sample was heavily Egyptian which should be considered when applying to other Arab nationalities. The high education and the long time since immigration are also factors that should be taken into account when applying the results.

#### Future Research

This sample was comprised primarily of Christian couples. Further research should examine Muslim couples to determine if differences exist between Muslim and Christian couples. On the surface, these couples discussed the same beliefs and coping skills but some differences did appear.

These couples did not appear as Arabs in terms of their physical appearance. None of the Christians wore any garments that are traditional to many Arabs in the Middle East. Some

couples have an accent and some have olive skin but they are considered white by the government. Further research should concentrate on Arabs who stand out in public because of their dress or because they live in predominantly Arab neighborhoods.

Finally, the coping skills discovered in this study could be further researched. More specifically, a research question that should be addressed is how do families apply coping from previous crisis situations to new crisis situations?

### Summary

The four conclusions found in this study were resilient marriages, larger systems, process of identity, and religion: unify and divide. These couples were examined in the context of their political, economic, and social conditions. These conditions affected their marriages and their identity. Their lives were examined within the context of the systems around them. Their religion was a larger system and a coping resource.

Research on resilience is important to understanding how families endure and cope with problems. Marriage and family therapists can utilize the information to help families access resources available to them. These resources can be internal and external. Resilience can also be a tool used in prevention. If a family is able to access their resources at will, they will be able to prevent problems from turning to crises.

Finally, Arab American couples in this study revealed that there are resources available to them such as a history of coping and determination. These findings contribute to the literature that supports the importance of family resilience and strengthens the research on Arab Americans.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Project

#### I. Purpose of the Research

You are invited to participate in a study of resilience. This research will explore how immigrant Arab-Americans couples have dealt with the backlash in the United States since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This study will attempt to examine how couples have made meaning of the attacks and what coping skills have been used to deal with the backlash against Arab-Americans. Twenty Arab-American couples will be interviewed from the tri-state area of New York.

#### II. Procedures

You will be asked to participate in an individual in-depth, tape recorded interview with me. The interview is projected to be approximately 2 hours in duration, and is being conducted in your home or another place of your choosing. A second interview, lasting approximately 1 hour, might be conducted to clarify some of your answers. All interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient to you. You will be asked to provide background information such as your country of origin, number of children, length of marriage, and length of time living in the United States. You will also be asked about your experiences of the terrorist attacks and the backlash against Arab-Americans that occurred shortly after.

#### III. Risks

There is a slight chance you might experience some emotional distress during or after the interview. This is normal. If at any time you experience any type of distress, you are urged to contact the principal investigator or any of the contacts below or your local doctor or community leader.

#### IV. Benefits of this Project

You are not being guaranteed any promise of benefits from this project. The project will be helpful in the understanding of Arab-American experiences of the attacks and subsequent backlash. Although no guarantee is being offered, you as a participant will provide information that may be helpful to other Arab-Americans coping with the effects of the terrorist attacks. It is possible that some of your coping skills might be beneficial to other Arab-Americans who are experiencing distress after the terrorist attacks. You will also have the opportunity to express your own thoughts and experiences the way you see them. You are free to contact me any time after the interview if you wish to obtain a summary of the research results.

#### V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your interview will be given the highest confidentiality. Audiotapes will be labeled with numbers. Any identifying information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed after the project is completed. There will be no identifying information on the tapes themselves or the recordings. At no time will I release the results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the project without your written consent. I will be the only person transcribing and the tapes will be erased after the information has been transcribed.

In some situations, it may be necessary for an investigator to break confidentiality. If child abuse is known or strongly suspected, the investigator is required to notify the appropriate authorities. If a subject is felt to be a threat to themselves or others, the investigator is required to notify the appropriate authorities.

#### VI. Compensation

Other than my sincere appreciation, there is no monetary or material compensation for participation.

#### VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. You also have the right not to answer any question.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic and State University, and by the Department of Human Development.

2/15/02  
IRG Approval Date

2/15/03  
Approval Expiration Date

IX. Participants Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the informed consent and instructions regarding this project. All of my questions have been answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. If I choose to participate, I understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## Appendix B

### جامعة و معهد ولاية فيرجينيا للعلوم التقنية:

طلب قبول المشاركين في إجراء مشروع تحقيقي.

موضوع البحث:

معرفة كيفية تعامل العرب- الأمريكيون مع الهجمات الإرهابية على مدينة نيويورك.

المحققين:

طالب الدكتوراه: بين بيتين Ben Beitin  
الدكتور: هوارد بروتينسكي Howard Protinsky

1- الغرض من البحث:

" أنتم مدعوون للمشاركة في دراسة ميدانية سيدرس هذا البحث كيفية تعامل الأزواج المهاجرين العرب - الأمريكيان مع ردة الفعل في الولايات المتحدة منذ الهجمات الإرهابية في الحادي عشر من شهر ايلول سنة 2001 . تهدف هذه الدراسة معرفة كيف نظر العرب الأمريكيون إلى الهجمات و كيف تعاملوا مع ردة الفعل التي نشأت ضدهم. ستجرى هذه الدراسة على عشرين زوج من العرب الأمريكيين و ذلك في المنطقة المتضمنة مدينة نيويورك و ضواحيها.

2- مراحل الدراسة:

سوف نطلب منكم المشاركة بمقابلة مسجلة على كاسيت معي أنا شخصياً.مدة المقابلة ستكون بحدود الساعتين وستجرى في منزلكم أو أي مكان آخر أنتم تختارونه. من المحتمل إجراء مقابلة أخرى (مدتها ساعة تقريبا) و ذلك للتوضيح أو الاستفسار عن بعض من أجوبتكم. سيطلب منكم الإدلاء ببعض المعلومات الأساسية مثل: بلد المولد, عدد الأولاد, مدة الزواج, و مدة إقامتكم في الولايات المتحدة. سيطلب منكم أيضاً الإدلاء بتجاربيكم و خبراتكم المتعلقة بالهجمات الإرهابية و ردة الفعل تجاه العرب- الأمريكيين التي حدثت بعد الهجمات.

### 3- المخاطر:

هناك احتمال خفيف أن تعانوا من بعض التأثير (الضغط) العاطفي خلال أو بعد المقابلة. هذا طبيعي. إذا شعرت بأي وقت بأي نوع من هذا الضغط، اتصلوا بالمحقق الأساسي في هذا البحث أو أي من المشاركين المدرجة اسمائهم لاحقاً أو طبيبك الشخصي.

### 4- فوائد هذه الدراسة:

لا نعدكم بأي فوائد مرجوة من هذا البحث. البحث سيكون مفيد لفهم تجارب العرب الأمريكيين مع الهجمات الإرهابية و ردة الفعل التالية لهم. على الرغم من عدم ضمان فوائد من هذا البحث، إلا أنكم أنتم كمشاركين في هذه الدراسة من الممكن أن تدلوا بمعلومات قد تفيد عرب-أمريكيين آخرين تعاملوا مع ردود أفعال الهجمات الإرهابية. سنتيح هذه الدراسة لكم الفرصة للإدلاء بأفكاركم و تجاربكم بما يتعلق بهذا الموضوع. لكم الحق بمراجعتي بأي وقت بعد المقابلة إذا كنتم راغبين بالحصول على ملخص لنتائج هذا البحث .

### 5 مدى السرية و الخصوصية:

ستعطى مقابلتكم السرية المطلقة حيث سترقم أشرطة التسجيل بأرقام خاصة، و ستحفظ المعلومات بملفات ضمن خزائن مغلقة حيث ستخرب بعد انتهاء المشروع. لن يكون هناك أي معلومات شخصية معرفة عنكم على أشرطة التسجيل. لن أسمح إطلاقاً بإعطاء المعلومات و نتائج البحث لأي شخص خارج نطاق العاملين بهذا المشروع إلا بموجب إذن خطي منكم. سأكون الشخص الوحيد المشرف على البحث و ستخرب جميع أشرطة التسجيل بعد نسخ المعلومات المحتواة فيهم. في بعض الأحيان سيضطر المحقق لخرق شروط السرية هذه، في حال وجدت حالة اضطهاد طفل أو اشتباه كبير بذلك، في هذه الحالة على الباحث إعلام السلطات المختصة. إذا شعر الباحث بأن، هناك تهديد ما لأحد الأفراد المعنيين بالبحث عليه أيضاً إبلاغ السلطات المختصة.

### 6 مردود الدراسة:

مع كل تقديري و امتناني لاشتراككم بهذا البحث إنه لن يكون هناك أي مكافأة أو أي مردود مادي منه.

### 7- الحرية بالانسحاب من العمل:

لديكم الحرية التامة بترك هذه الدراسة في أي وقت و لديكم الحق أيضاً بالامتناع عن إجابة إي سؤال في أي وقت.

## 8- الموافقة على البحث:

حصل هذا البحث و كما هو مطلوب على موافقة هيئة معهد البحوث المتضمنة المواضيع و القضايا الإنسانية في جامعة و معهد ولاية فيرجينيا للعلوم التقنية و على موافقة قسم بحث التطور الإنساني في الجامعة.

2002. تاريخ الحصول على موافقة الهيئة : الثاني عشر من شهر شباط سنة  
2003. تاريخ انتهاء موافقة الهيئة : الثاني عشر من شهر شباط سنة

## 9- واجبات و مسؤولية المشترك

أنا الموقع أدناه أوافق طوعياً على المشاركة بهذا البحث .

## 10- موافقة المشترك:

أنا الموقع أدناه قد قرأت و فهمت كل التعليمات و الشروط المتعلقة بهذا البحث و قد حصلت على أجوبة لجميع استفساراتي بخصوص هذا البحث .  
في حال موافقتي على المشاركة فأنا أعرف إمكانية الانسحاب في إي وقت و بدون أي غرامات .  
أنا أوافق على التقيد بشروط هذا البحث .

التوقيع

التاريخ

02/15/2002

02/15/2003

في حال وجود أي استفسار عن هذا البحث يمكنني مراجعة أحد الأشخاص التالية أسمائهم.

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التابع للهيئة الأبحاث قسم  
مكتب موافقة البحوث  
أبحاث الدراسات العليا .

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

Time of Interview:

Date:

ID:

Opening Statement:

I am interested in Arab-American couples and how they have coped with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade center and the aftermath. I am particularly interested in what resources couples have used to help them cope. I am hoping to understand the effects of the attacks and their aftermath on their marriage.

- 1) Could you tell me about your experience of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center that occurred on September 11, 2001?
- 2) Could you tell me about your experience of the backlash against Arab-Americans in the United States after the attacks?
- 3) Can you tell me how you endured and dealt with the experiences?

More specific questions to focus more:

- 1) Are there details of the experiences that stand out for you?
- 2) How much do you talk about the situation?
- 3) What are the issues most often discussed?
- 4) Could you tell me how these difficult experiences affected your marriage?
- 4) How have you as a couple brought meaning to the experiences?

- 5) Did you sense any changes in your own communities' relationship with you following the attacks? How did you deal with this? How did you feel?

Additional questions recommended by Moustakas (1994) when the story has not tapped into the experience with sufficient meaning and depth:

- 1) What dimension, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
- 2) How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
- 3) How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
- 4) What feelings were generated by the experience?
- 5) What thoughts stand out for you?
- 6) What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?
- 7) Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

## Appendix D

### Contact Summary Form

ID#

Date/Time

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?
2. Summarize the info you got or failed to get for each of the target questions you had for this contact.
3. Anything else that was important/impressions?

## APPENDIX E

### CODES

1. How have Arab-American couples made sense of the attacks on the World Trade centers, which took place on September 11, 2001?

Per-experience of the attacks (the shock of 9/11)  
Cha-changes related to the attacks (everything is different)  
Beh-behavior after the attack (Lets stay home)  
Per-a-perceptions of Arabs (This didn't help our cause)

2. What has been their experience of their relationships with their communities since the attacks?

Bac-feelings about the backlash (Terrified about the backlash)  
Beh-b-behavior during backlash (Looking Over My Shoulder)  
Bod- physical changes during backlash (I feel it in my body)  
Exp-direct experience of the backlash (Acts of Anger)  
Iden-identity (who are we?)  
Per-s-perceptions of Americans (The ignorant but supportive Americans)  
Per-g-perception of American government (God Bless Bush)

3. How has the family relationships of Arab-American couples been impacted by the attacks on the World Trade centers?

Mar-effect of marriage (Our marriage remains strong)  
Chi-effect on children (Careful eye on our children)

4. How have those couples developed the resilience they needed to cope with the backlash against Arabs living in America?

Sup-u-support from Americans (The pleasant surprise of Americans)  
Sup-a-support from Arabs (Our second family)  
Too-individual coping tool (I will get through this)  
Too-f-family coping tool (we will get through this)  
Pre-previous experience of conflict or terror (The terror followed us)  
Fut-beliefs about the future (Things will go back to normal)  
Rel-religious reference (Christian vs Muslim)

5. How has the experience of immigration affected the resilience of these couples?

Imm-experience of immigration (Coming to America)  
Too-I-tools to cope with immigration (I will make it in America)  
Con-connection to backlash (Difficulties connected)

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**EDUCATION:**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (1999-2003)  
Ph.D. in the Dept. of Human Development; Marriage and Family Therapy Program,  
Blacksburg, Virginia

Fairfield University (1996-1999)  
Master of Arts in Marriage & Family Therapy  
Fairfield, Connecticut

Fordham University (1992-1996)  
Bachelor of Science in Psychology  
Bronx, NY

**RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:**

Doctoral Dissertation (2002-2003) Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University  
“Resilience in Arab-American Couples in the Wake of the Terrorist Attacks on New York City”  
Qualitative study of 18 immigrant Arab-American couples residing in New York and New Jersey  
to understand their perceptions of the terrorist attacks and subsequent backlash against Arab-  
Americans as well as their coping skills and resources utilized.

Research Assistant (1999): Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University  
Research assistant for Dr. Shannon Jarrott. Research study on the effects of informal and formal  
support systems on caregivers of parents’ diagnosed with alzheimers or dementia. Primary  
responsibilities included setting up advertising to obtain participants, phone interviewing, SPSS  
data entry, and SPSS data analysis.

Research Assistant (1995): Montefiore Hospital, Bronx, New York  
Research assistant for Dr. Carol Weinstein. Research study on the effects of CPK levels on the  
brain. Primary responsibilities included literature reviews and assistance in development of  
methodology.

Research Assistant (1995). Montefiore Hospital, Bronx, New York  
Research assistant for Dr. Carol Weinstein. Research study examined different types of  
psychiatric emergency rooms. Primary responsibilities included literature reviews and assistance  
in development of methodology.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

### Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University:

Marriage and Family Relationships; HD 3342 (2 large sections)

(Fall 2000-Spring 2001)

Supervisor: Katherine Allen, Ph.D.

Montgomery County School District (September 2001-present): Substitute teacher for Junior High and High Schools in Montgomery County, Virginia, All Classes and subjects.

## **APPLIED CLINICAL EXPERIENCE**

### Assistant Director (Doctoral Internship)

**LMG Programs**, Greenwich, CT, Greenwich Youth Options

(September 2002-Present) Supervisor: Kathryn Niebuhr, LMFT, LADC

- Provide individual and family therapy for adolescents referred for substance abuse treatment
- Facilitated male and female outpatient groups
- Supervision of Masters student interns in MFT
- Facilitated prevention groups in the local middle schools
- Presentations on substance abuse to local community organizations

### Emergency Services Clinician

**New River Valley Community Services**, Blacksburg, VA, ACCESS Unit

(December 2001–July 2002) Supervisor: John Betzel, LMFT

- Emergency clinician responsible for responding to requests from local agencies and hospitals to evaluate clients for hospitalization who are threatening suicide or homicide.

### Prevention Specialist

**New River Valley Community Services**, Blacksburg, VA, Strengthening Families Program

(December 2001-July 2002) Supervisor: Rosemary Sullivan, LCSW

- Co-facilitator of a parent-child prevention group designed to improve parenting skills and family communication.

### Marriage and Family Therapist (practicum)

**The Family Therapy Center of Virginia Tech**, Blacksburg, VA

(January 1999-May 2001) Clinic Director: Scott Johnson, Ph.D.

- Provide marriage and family therapy for clients of the community

### Staff Therapist (October 1998-August 1999) and

Marriage and Family Therapy Intern (September 1997-October 1998)

**LMG Programs Inc.**, Stamford, CT; Supervisor: Cary Ostrow, LMFT

- Provide individual, marriage, and family therapy for clients at all levels
- Co-facilitated substance abuse intensive outpatient program.
- Co-facilitated multi-family group
- Co-Facilitated after-care men's group
- Co-facilitated early abstinence group

- Developed treatment plans pertaining to requirements of the managed care and JACHO.

Psychology Intern (September 1995-August 1996)

**Montefiore Hospital Psychiatric Emergency Room**, Bronx, NY; Supervisor: Carol Weinstein M.D.

- Observed case assessments
- Administered the mental status exam to clients entering the psychiatric emergency room.
- Assisted with out patient referrals.

### **COMMUNITY SERVICE:**

Junior Adult Advisor (September 1992-June 1994)

**Catholic Youth Organization**, Irvington, NY; Director: Fr. Timothy Scannell

- Chaperoned activities
- Counseled and advised group members

Big Brother (October 1991-present)

**Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America**, Yonkers, NY

### **MEMBERSHIPS and HONORS:**

Supervisor in Training for the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Effective 2001

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy: Student Member (1997-Present)

Arab American Institute: Student Member (1999-Present)

Newcomer of the Year Award, Liberation Programs Inc., 1998

Phi Upsilon Omicron, National Honor Society for Family & Consumer Sciences: Inducted in 2000

Psi Chi, The National Honor Society for Psychology: Inducted in 1995

Big Brother of the Year Award, 1992