UNDERSTANDING THE ISLAMIC CONVERSION EXPERIENCE OF
TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: A CASE STUDY APPROACH
TO DECISION MAKING TOWARD TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Islamic conversion among African Americans is a unique
20th-Century phenomenon. African Americans represent 42% of
the total Muslim population in America. This research study
describes the life experience and decision process of two
African American male converts to Islam. It examines
Islamic conversion from an adult education perspective,
addresses a gap in religious conversion literature, and
provides insights into understanding how two persons broke
previous socialization, accepted new beliefs and values, and
made a major life change.

The research questions primarily focused on the
conversion process as a decision, its corresponding learning
processes, and the social, cultural and historical
conditions impacting this phenomenon. Differences and
similarities between Islamic conversion among these two
African American males and general theories of religious conversion were examined. A model of Islamic conversion among these two African American males was developed.

Data collection and analysis followed qualitative research methodology. Participant interviews were conducted utilizing a focused life history in-depth phenomenological structure.

This study is significant for the practice of adult education because it describes learning processes involved in how individuals make the decision to change their core beliefs, values, behaviors, and lifestyles.
DEDICATION

All praise is due to Allah. There is no god but The God, One and alone. No partners has He. To Him is the Sovereign Authority, the right and power to exercise His will and to Him is the praise. He gives life and He gives death. And He has power over all things.

All praise is due to Allah. I praise Him. I ask for His assistance. I ask for His forgiveness. I ask for His guidance. I seek refuge with The One God from the evil of my own soul and from the evil of my deeds. Whoever The One God guides then he/she is rightly guided. Whoever The One God leaves astray, then for him/her there is no guide. I bear witness there is nothing worthy of worship except The One God and I bear witness that Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) is the Messenger of The One God.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm Conflict on Religious Conversion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion Motifs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex Nature of Conversion Process</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting Conversion with Social and Cultural Contexts</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticisms of Conversion Research and Researchers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap in Research Literature on Religious Conversion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHOD</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Gathering and Analysis</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
LIST OF FIGURES

Model of Islamic Conversion
Among African American Males .......................... 58
Preface

The decision to pursue a particular research project is sometimes connected to the researcher's life experiences. This study grew out of the researcher's personal experience as an African American male, who made the decision to become a Muslim 21 years ago, on March 3, 1975. This decision and the subsequent learning and development has positively transformed his life. Therefore, the issues considered here are directly and immediately related to the author. Furthermore, the continued growth of Islam in America among African Americans provides a context for understanding the process of conversion to Islam and what leads to the decision. This study does not reflect the actual experiences of the author. However, it does identify a process that can be verified by his own conversion.

The author's perspective as a Muslim African American convert has certain advantages and disadvantages. One liability is the potential biases that may have been developed, over the years, which could alter interpretation of the data. On the other hand, the author brings special insights into the process that can actually validate the interpretations. How can one fully interpret major life change of this magnitude if they have not experienced it at some level. The author is in a unique position to
understand what is and what is not meaningful within the data because his has lived it. Being a part of the process may be more of an asset, for this type of research, than a liability.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

African Americans have sought to liberate themselves from the physical, mental, and spiritual bondage of life in America, since the first slaveship landed in Jamestown, VA. in 1619. Hornsby (1991) identifies numerous historical movements such as Involuntary Servitude (1619-1860), The Abolitionist Movement and Underground Railroad (1849-1857), Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), The Nadir (1877-1900), The Niagara Movement and the Age of Booker T. Washington (1905-1915), World War I and The Depression (1918-1932), Black Consciousness Movement (1960-1979), Segregation and the Second Reconstruction (1945-1964), and the 20th Century Civil Rights Movement (1964-1973) as evidence of this desire. In addition, Estell (1994) identifies various leaders and organizations that promoted liberation through a Black Nationalist Movement (1787-Present).

Another path to emancipation, in more recent times, for some African Americans, has been conversion to Islam. An Islamic Movement has developed among African Americans during the 20th Century. The Moorish Science Temple, started by Noble Drew Ali in 1913, was the first group to use Islamic terminology such as Holy Qur’an, although they did not practice Islamic rituals (Rashad, 1985). Between 1930 and 1933, Wali Fard Muhammad recruited 8000 African American
converts to the Nation of Islam (Marsh, 1984), which combined Islam with Black Nationalism. Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, between 1933 and 1975, the Nation of Islam became the largest group of Muslims in America. Since 1975, most converts to the Nation of Islam adopted a more traditional practice of Islam, without ties to black nationalism. Today, Terry (1993) estimates the Muslim African American population to be between 500,000 and 1.5 million.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Islam Defined

Islam has a literal definition which is supported by values, principles, and behaviors. Islam comes from a root word meaning to enter into peace (Ali, 1973). It is defined as total, complete, submission, surrender, obedience to do the will of God (Allah).

In human life, Islam is established on the principle of belief and faith in the One God who has sovereign, absolute power and control over all natural phenomena; and the behaviors of prayer, charity, fasting, and performing the Hajj (pilgrimage to the Kabah, the house built by Abraham for the worship of the One God, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia). The behaviors of Islam promote underlying values of Unity for God, oneness of creation, oneness of humanity, God
consciousness, upholding what is right, just, clean, and consistently performing good deeds (Muhammad, 1986).

The values, behaviors, and structure of Islam, as a way of living, were established over a twenty-three year period, between 610 A.D. to 632 A.D., during the adult life of the Prophet Muhammad. During this period, Muhammad received the revelation, intermittently. This revelation, named the Qur'an (that which should be read, recited and practiced), was a catalyst for human and social transformation on the Arabian continent during that period of history. Islam was the driving force in one of the most successful, if not the most successful, example of social change in human history. Stanton (1990) writes that Islam and the Qur'an played a major role in the enlightenment of the world and the development of institutions of higher learning. Muhammad (1986) offers Islam as a new approach for dealing with problems in the African American community, and America, in general.

Islam in America

The growing ranks of Muslims in America is a 20th century phenomenon. Yet, archives and history books document the fact that many African Muslims were brought to America during the slave trade (Rashad, 1991). The story of Kunta Kinte, in Alex Haley's Roots, is evidence of this
fact. Myers (1991) writes about Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima, a Prince of the Fula Tribe from Fouta Djallon, Guinea who was sold as a slave in Mississippi in 1788. The dynamics of slavery, especially isolation, kept African Muslims from forming communities. It was not until the 20th century that Muslim African American communities began to surface.

Islam among African Americans grew out of black nationalism. Rashad (1991, p. 48) defines black nationalism as "repudiating the white man and his culture; the emotional acceptance and propagation of black culture or race pride." Major figures in the 20th century black nationalist movement were Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, and Elijah Muhammad. In 1916, Garvey organized the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York, and started a newspaper called The Negro World to disseminate his message of black racial pride and dignity. Between 1913 and 1928, Noble Drew Ali organized and administered the Moorish American Science Temples. By the late 1920's the deportation of Garvey and the death of Noble Drew Ali created a void in the movement. The Nation of Islam, under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, filled that void for the next 45 years.

Islam is growing fast and expected to be the second largest religion in this country within two decades (Hillery, 1988). Nu'man (1992), the American Muslim Council's Senior Researcher, estimates that over 5 million
Muslims live in America. He reports that approximately 42% of this population (over 2,100,000) are African Americans. Whatever the exact number, African Americans are the largest ethnic group of Muslims in America.

Over 60 full day Muslim schools operate in major cities and surrounding areas, which are heavily populated with African Americans, such as New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. (Goldman, 1992). Furthermore, over 1200 Mosques, Islamic Centers, and Associations are open throughout the country for religious and community activities (Nu‘man, 1992, p. 15).

A Social Reality Demanding Liberation

Muslim African-American communities gradually developed out of the social reality lived by African-Americans. Some of the movements mentioned earlier represent efforts to pursue human dignity. Yet, in the early 1900’s, as a result of World War I, black migration to the north and the depression, African-Americans continued to experience racial discrimination, unemployment, crowded housing, poverty, hunger, starvation, inadequate living conditions, prison, and class inequality. Furthermore, African-Americans had no vote and no political power. The door of freedom and benefits of democracy were closed to African Americans.
A response was to pursue freedom in the manner described by Maxine Greene in her book titled "The Dialectics of Freedom." Greene (1988) defines freedom as a way of orienting the self; opening perspectives and spaces; moving beyond the limits set by someone else; being aware, communicating, and acting to realize envisioned alternatives and possibilities. Greene (1988) posits that freedom is not individual, but can only be attained through a community of individuals who communicate about common "aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge - a common understanding - likemindedness . . ." (p. 18). Some African-Americans pursued freedom through black nationalism which led to the development of a Muslim African-American community.

**Nation Of Islam: 1930 - 1993**

The Nation of Islam (N.O.I.) was the largest community of African Americans influenced by black nationalism and Islam. Wali Fard Muhammad began the Nation of Islam in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan. One of his first ministers was Elijah Muhammad, who led the N.O.I. or "Black Muslims" for over forty years. The N.O.I. established a presence in the black community and a business industry that provided jobs for its members.

Adult education was an important aspect of Muslim community development. The N.O.I. represented a
counterhegemonic force, an extreme reaction to an extreme situation. A variety of methods were used to educate members, such as published materials, lectures, meetings, classes, radio broadcasts, LP albums, and annual conventions. Muhammad started the University of Islam, in 1933, which Ansari (1985, p. 255) calls a "means of Black Muslim indoctrination, an instrument to develop in the Blacks a sense of identity, to make them shed their sense of inferiority . . ." This institution did serve as a counterhegemonic force to transform the self-concept and behavior of the Muslims.

In 1975, the organization made a drastic change. Marsh (1984, p. 20) parallels the organizational transformation of the Nation of Islam from black nationalism to Islam with social movement development. Imam W. D. Mohammed, the seventh born of Elijah and Clara Muhammad, led the N.O.I. after his father passed in 1975. His knowledge of the Qur'an, in its original Arabic text, was critical to his personal transformation from black nationalism to Islam (Ansari, 1985). In sharp contrast to his father's obsession with black nationalism and separatism, Mohammed led an effective transformation of the organization into mainstream Islam and American life.
Development Through Adult Religious Education

The organizational transformation required a new perspective of the Muslim community. Imam Mohammed encouraged his followers to be productive American citizens. Adult religious education activities, such as classes, weekly lectures, and study groups helped members restructure their values and focus on the tenets and practices of the Islamic way of life: Faith in the One God, Prayer, Charity, Fasting in the Month of Ramadhan, and the Pilgrimage to Mecca. With these ideological changes, followers were encouraged to become learned in the Islamic religion for themselves. Heavy emphasis was placed on self-study and nonformal adult education activities through the local masajids (places of worship that used to be called temples). Some of these nonformal learning activities included Qur’anic memorization, leadership training classes, study of Imam Mohammed’s books and articles, public lectures, a national telephone hook-up on the 4th Sunday of every month, annual conventions with specific topic workshops, and educational fundraising banquets. Some followers accepted scholarships to pursue formal education in Arabic and Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Today, Islam is growing rapidly among African Americans of all walks of life, such as professional athletes, actors, judges, ex-prisoners, educators, social workers, lawyers,
and business persons. Persons who may have experienced one or more social problems such as poverty, racial discrimination, crime, incarceration, severe economic difficulties, drug addition, and alcoholism have accepted Islam and changed their way of living. Muslim African American communities are growing throughout America, especially in urban areas.

It seems that most converts make the decision to accept Islam between the ages of 18 and 34, during young adulthood before mid life crisis. For some, the conversion experience may include a perspective transformation, individual change, and learning processes for resocialization, thereby linking it to the field of adult education. An identification of this process of conversion or "reversion" to Islam among African American males and an identification of the social, cultural, and historical conditions that lead to conversion are essential to understanding the phenomenon.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Current research on religious conversion, in general, seem limited to new religious movements and Judeo-Christian traditions, while no research seems to have been conducted on the process of religious conversion to Islam among African American males. The social, cultural, and historical conditions prior to the decision to convert have
not been identified and evaluated. This current study was designed to address this gap in research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the experiences that led two individual African American males convert to Islam and become Muslims. Toward this end the following research questions were posed:

1. What was the process that these Muslim African American male converts went through prior to their decision to accept Islam?
2. What learning processes occurred during the conversion process?
3. What social, cultural, and historical conditions lead to Islamic conversion among these African American males?
4. To what extent is this conversion process consistent or inconsistent with perspective transformation as a model describing learning processes with adults?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Two theories guided this study. Both models describe processes of individual change through their respective fields. One is a process model of religious conversion introduced by Lofland and Stark (1965). They see religious
conversion as a problem solving process that involves seeking change and developing new relationships. The other model, perspective transformation, is a popular concept in adult education offered by Mezirow (1991). He views change as a choice to restructure values, beliefs, behaviors, self-concept, and world view after critical reflection and analyzing alternatives. Similarities and differences between the two models are outlined below.

**Model 1 - Mezirow**

**Model 2 - Lofland and Stark**

**SIMILARITIES**

| - A disorienting dilemma  | - Tension  |
| - Self examination with feelings of guilt or shame | - The turning point |
| - A critical assessment of epistemic, socio cultural, or psychic assumptions | - Type of problem-solving perspective |
| - Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change | - Seekership |
| - Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions | - Cult affective bonds |
| - Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships | |

11
DIFFERENCES

- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Provisional trying of new roles
- A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

- Extra-cult affective bonds
- Intensive interaction

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Conversion to Islam among African American males is a unique phenomenon that has been neglected in religious conversion and adult religious education literature. This study is important because of the uniqueness of the current African American male dilemma. This population, compared to their White male counterparts, is expected to live at a lower standard of living, be less educated, have greater numbers imprisoned, be exposed to greater health risks, and have a shorter life expectancy. This study examines a small segment of the African American male population who have decided on an alternative belief system and lifestyle.

This study contributes to the body of ongoing research in fields, such as religious conversion, adult education, Islamic education, and individual change and transformation.
This study's examination of conditions that lead to conversion provides insights into understanding how people break previous socialization and become resocialized to accept a new way of life. It is a pioneering effort on conversion to Islam in America and provides relevant information on aspects of the experience of two African American males. It will also be useful for Islamic educators by providing evidences of change and suggestions for efforts to educate Muslim converts. Furthermore, this study lays the foundation for the development of theory on Islamic conversion, in light of the social, cultural, and historical conditions of the African American male experience.

The field of adult education gains a description of learning processes that may result in individual change or transformation and resocialization among adult Muslim converts. The study adds to the body of knowledge of how adults adapt to life situations and the learning processes involved. Adult religious education and Islamic education gains an understanding of what preconditions to look for in individual religious conversion. Religious conversion literature gains a description of the social, cultural, and historical factors impacting conversion among a religious group not yet fully explored. It also contributes to Islamic education programs for adult Muslim minorities.
living in predominantly non-Muslim cultures.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to an ethnic population or to religious conversion as a process. It is limited to two African American male converts to Islam, not converts of other ethnic groups, female African American converts, or converts to other religions. This study concentrates on two participants who have already converted and are living the Islamic life.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The basic concepts to be defined are Muslim African American, Islamic conversion, sudden conversion, gradual conversion, transformation, influences, learning processes, social conditions, cultural conditions, and historical conditions.

1. Cultural Conditions. - The pattern of human behavior embodied in the thoughts, customary beliefs, speech, and action transmitted through succeeding generations.

2. Gradual Conversion. - An active conversion process that involved numerous events, over a long period of time, and was driven by an inner motivation.
3. **Historical Conditions.** - A series of life events as steps in a sequence of activities impacting the decision to convert.

4. **Influences.** - Any social, cultural, or historical event, activity, incident, happening, experience or person that impacted on one’s decision to become a Muslim.

5. **Islamic Conversion.** - Public declaration that there is no deity except the One God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, along with practicing the five pillars of Islam (faith, prayer, fasting, charity, and the pilgrimage to the Kabah in Mecca).

6. **Learning Processes.** - Any method or approach used to acquire information or knowledge, understand one’s past and/or present experience, and accept beliefs and values to perform specific social roles.

7. **Muslim African American.** - An American of African descent who identifies as a Muslim (one who surrenders or obeys the will of God) in accordance with Islamic tradition. This person may have converted to Islam from atheism, black nationalism, Christianity, Judaism or any other ideology or form of religion.
8. **Social Conditions.** - Conditions related to the interaction of the individual convert with other individuals and groups (Muslims and Non-Muslims).

9. **Sudden Conversion.** - A passive conversion process that occurred after a single event, over a short period of time, and was externally motivated.

10. **Transformation.** - The process of changing, altering, or becoming different in one's self-concept, behavior, way of being, and/or world view through restructuring beliefs and values.

The next chapter provides a review of related literature on religious conversion. This theoretical review delineates conceptual definitions of conversion; describes its nature; identifies contrasting paradigms of the process; criticisms of conversion research; and suggestions for future conversion research. This review establishes a need for this study. Chapter III discusses research methodology; research design; selection of participants; procedures of data collection, recording, processing, and analysis; methodological assumptions; and limitations. Chapter IV presents a discussion of research findings and chapter V presents a summary, conclusions and recommendations that might complement the research literature on religious conversion and adult education.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify the process of conversion to Islam among two African American males and identify the social, cultural, and historical conditions that drive this contemporary phenomenon. Toward this end a review of literature was conducted to determine what is known about the process of conversion, in general, and Islamic conversion among African Americans, specifically. This chapter reports conversion literature regarding the complex nature of religious conversion and the contrasting paradigms of conversion as a "passive" process or an "active" process.

This chapter also highlights the linkage between adult education and religious conversion as processes concerned with learning, individual change, transformation, and resocialization. Additionally, conversion research is criticized as only a reexamination of previous studies and as a reflection of limited perspectives and interpretations of researchers. Lastly, the chapter identifies a gap in conversion research regarding Islamic conversion and conversion activities of different ethnic groups, namely African Americans.
Paradigm Conflict on Religious Conversion

There is considerable disagreement on the definition and nature of religious conversion among researchers. No unified definition of religious conversion exists because it is a very complex phenomenon that occurs in different ways within a variety of circumstances for different people. Richardson (1985, p. 163) defines conversion as "change in a person's behaviors and beliefs . . . not limited to religious phenomenon." In general, scholars distinguish between different types of conversion and different processes of conversion. Substantive arguments center around two major paradigms: 1) the traditional view of conversion as a "passive" process (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989) and 2) the contemporary view of conversion as an "active" process (Lofland & Stark, 1965). Both paradigms represent a philosophical view of the nature of human experience and motivation.

The traditional passive paradigm dominated religious conversion research for over half a century, between the early 1900's and the mid-1960's. Conversion was seen as a sudden change; driven by external forces operating in a single event; and preceded by belief change during adolescence (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989). This perspective promotes conversion as something done to a person who has a passive attitude toward life experiences.
and an external locus of control.

On the other hand, the new active paradigm challenges the status quo, traditional, "consensus" view of conversion. It characterizes persons as active seekers, proactive about their choices, life experiences, and specific needs. The human being is viewed as capable of exercising their will and interpreting actions within a social/cultural context and being proactive about their personal development by seeking meaning, taking action, and developing relationships (Richardson, 1985). Therefore, conversion is viewed as a gradual ongoing process that involves rational decision-making, negotiating relationships and changing behavior and beliefs.

Since 1965, the trend in religious conversion literature has been toward active, seeking converts who accept an alternative perspective, learn the role of a convert, and change their identity. The seminal work by Lofland and Stark (1965), who studied the Unification Church, sparked the paradigm shift and twenty years of research on new religious movements in America. Lofland and Stark's (1965) process model of conversion included the following elements: 1) Tension, 2) Type of Problem-Solving Perspective, 3) Seekership, 4) The Turning Point, 5) Cult Affective Bonds, 6) Extra-Cult Affective Bonds, and 7) Intensive Interaction.
This general model may be played out in many different ways. However, a general definition of its concepts follows. Tension could be some discomfort caused by some physical, emotional, or psychological problem. Type of problem solving perspective is deciding to solve the problem through a particular method. Seekership is the attitude of proactiveness to identify an acceptable solution. The turning point could be the "big zap," some event or activity that triggers the decision to investigate change. Cult affective bonds is the new positive relationship that develops with members of the religious organization. Extra cult affective bonds is the positive perspective or at least not negative perspective about the religion, held by relatives or close friends, not part of the religious group. Intensive interaction signifies the importance of interacting regularly with the members of the religious group at meetings or other activities to learn the religion and transition into new roles.

Their model has been criticized as lacking empirical generalizability and theoretical soundness (Austin, 1977; Downton, 1980; Seggar and Kunz, 1972; and Snow & Phillips, 1980). Nevertheless, some researchers agree that two of the six elements, "affective bonds" and "intensive interaction" (Greil and Rudy, 1984b; and Snow & Phillips, 1980) and that close personal relationships with group members, are

Therefore, relationships with members and non members of the religious group seems to be a critical element to the conversion process regardless of the religion. Religious group members must welcome the converts through acceptance and support and close friends and family must be at least neutral and/or positive about the conversion.

**Conversion Motifs**

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) delineate key critical experiences as six conversion "motifs" (i.e., intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive). These motifs are defined as the principle ideas or features, motives or themes that may guide a person's conversion. An individual may use one or more of these motifs to orient their conversion. For example, a person who converts through the intellectual motif may have approached their decision to convert through self-directed learning and exploring alternative ways of being. This could include, but not be limited to, reading books, attending lectures and using mass media. The intellectual motif has roots in the active paradigm of conversion as the convert exercises an internal locus of control to satisfy their needs. The other motifs are briefly explained below.
The key motive in mystical conversion is a sudden event that follows a period of conflict and emotional turmoil. This is akin to the passive paradigm of conversion because it highlights a reactive rather than proactive position. Experimental conversion involves a theme of trial and error. Over a period of time the individual experiments with the religion and gradually comes to the decision to convert. Affectional conversion involves strong relationships between the person and a religious group member. Coercive conversion may include brainwashing and mind control techniques and revivalist conversion occurs in emotionally aroused crowds. In these last two motifs the person responds to outside stimulus. Brainwashing and emotional impulses can sometimes influence decisions.

Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) work imply that different motifs promote more understanding of conversion. Not only may converts experience different kinds of conversion, but conversion motifs may differ more significantly depending on the historical and social context.

Furthermore, Kilbourne and Richardson (1989) offer a typology that incorporates various types of conversion and conversion theories within the framework of each paradigm across the intra-individual and inter-individual levels of analysis. Their contribution adds to the perspective that it is impossible for one researcher to investigate all

22
factors impacting religious conversion. Consequently, research provides a limited view of religious conversion. Each researcher has a particular perspective (i.e., passive or active) within an intrapersonal and/or interpersonal level of analysis that determines what is seen and how it is interpreted. Therefore, they conclude that "conversion can be meaningfully understood, then, only, within a social context" (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989, p. 15).

Complex Nature of Conversion Process

The qualities and characteristics of a conversion process may be as varied and complex as the different definitions, persons, and circumstances. Generally, some authors (DeSanctis, 1927; Gordon, 1967; and Ullman, 1989) agree that contextual negativity exists as a precondition to conversion, in the form of needs, turmoil, and conflict. Additionally, researchers view conversion as a mental process (DeSanctis, 1927, p. 87); a process of seeking emotional stability, protection, peace, and happiness, (Ullman, 1989); and a process which results in change in a persons’ world view, perspective, and/or values (Glock and Stark, 1968). Consequently, no two people will convert exactly the same way. But they will change to overcome a problem they are experiencing.

In summary, various purposes of the conversion process
include individual change, transformation or growth; resocialization; resolution of psychological and emotional conflicts; life span development; role learning; cognitive balance; and response to organizational, social, cultural, and/or historical contexts. These various purposes link conversion to adult education as processes of change and adaptation to life situations. This section examines the research on these purposes served by religious conversion.

Individual Transformation

Since conversion can occur in various forms for many different reasons, some converts may experience individual transformation depending on their motivation to convert. Gordon (1967, p. 218) distinguishes three types of converts based on the causes and motivation of the decision to convert. These three types are: 1) Pro Forma Converts, 2) Marginal Converts, and 3) Authentic Converts. These categories describe persons who have an ulterior motive such as marriage (pro forma); persons who are "sitting on the fence," desiring to be in the new religion and partially in the old religion (marginal); and persons with internal motivation, seeking only to worship God (authentic). Although the authentic group represented about one-third of Gordon's sample, they are considered "true" converts with the potential to engage in transformation processes. These
categories may represent a continuum of degree of potential for transformation. For example, those who convert for an ulterior motive would represent a low potential for transformation. While those who convert to find God, truth and meaning in life may have a high potential for transformation.

Eliade (1987, p. 73) associates conversion with "personal metamorphosis" and transformation "the process of change manifested through alteration in people's thoughts, feelings, actions" (p. 74). In addition, she states (p. 77):

... authentic conversion is an ongoing process of transformation. The initial change, while important, is merely the first step in a long process, ... for conversion to be genuine, converts must change all other aspects of life in order to be totally transformed.

Several authors address conversion as a process of change including personal and identity transformation (Balch, 1980; DeSanctis, 1927; Eliade, 1987; Greil & Rudy, 1984a; Staples & Mauss, 1977; Straus, 1974; Travisano, 1970; and Wilson, 1984), reconstruction of social reality (Snow & Phillips, 1980), change in beliefs and behavior (Richardson, 1985), psychological growth (Morentz, 1987), and life change (Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989; and Straus, 1976). These types of changes may be closely linked with learning processes of critical reflection (Gordon, 1967; Poston, 1992) and an
"active" approach to conversion.

For example, Straus (1974, 1976) sees the conversion process originates through dissatisfaction or a specific problem within a constraining environment. Straus (1976, p. 256) gives examples of persons who look for opportunities and develop relationships that provide information toward their goal of life change. The person becomes a seeker to cope with their situation and, consequently, transform their identity, beliefs, and experience. Conversion occurs because the person actively seeks personal transformation in conjunction with others in a group. Therefore, conversion is a personal and collective accomplishment involving personal transformation within group contexts. This perspective highlights learning activities initiated by converts as essential to transformative conversion.

Learning Processes

Various learning activities may be required to promote conversion and transformation. Numerous authors link conversion to informal and nonformal learning processes that promote new social roles, ongoing growth, identity change, and redefinition of self and situations. Furthermore, learning in religious conversion through processes of self direction and critical reflection may have a direct linkage to adult education. Some of these perspectives are reviewed
in this section.

Straus (1974) found that seekers learn about the religion first through personal contacts, mass media, and other sources of information. Adult education would characterize these methods as informal. Secondly, they attend presentations, group meetings, and question group members. For Snow & Phillips (1980) attendance at meetings may be an attempt to reconstruct their social reality and experience. Adult education views these as nonformal learning activities. Thirdly, the seeker may experiment by learning appropriate language, perspectives, and behaviors of the group. Although these learning activities support the conversion process, Straus (1976) makes a distinction between the decision to convert and the transformation process. He argues that transformation occurs and is maintained through the daily living and continuous practice of group norms and behaviors. In this regard, conversion is an ongoing continuous process of seeking that promotes learning, change, growth, and development. These concepts are at the heart of most adult education activities.

Balch (1980) offers a view on dramatic changes and transformations in religious conversion that emphasizes learning new roles. The convert must learn to act appropriately within the religious group by conforming to behavioral expectations including no contact with outsiders,
giving up certain behaviors, and engaging in intense involvement with group members as partners. Converts must also learn the particular language and vocabulary of the group. Likewise, Staples & Mauss (1987, p. 137) support the view that conversion is a process of change in self consciousness and transformation into a new self that can be identified in the language and rhetoric of the convert.

Travisano (1970) distinguishes between transformation resulting from alternation and conversion. Alternation is moving between paradoxical systems of thought and meaning perspectives. Identity and specific roles reflect new definitions of self, behavior, and situations. With alternation there is no break, no reorganization of life, just an extension of the past. Conversion, on the other hand, is when a person breaks away from their past and reorganizes their life.

Conversions are drastic changes that reorganize one’s identity, meaning and life. It involves changing one’s "universe of discourse" and allegiance to that of a social group and may involve emotional stress and inner struggle. The key difference between conversion and alternation is identity change through reinterpreting and restructuring one’s universe of discourse. Alternations are transitions supported by the past universe of discourse. Conversions are transformations that reinterpret and restructure a past
universe of discourse for a new perspective. This type of restructuring and change cannot occur without substantive learning experiences. Some of these experiences may be effected by life stages and events.

Albrecht & Cornwall (1989) examine the effect life events and changes in relationships have on religious belief and behavior. For them, changes in belief and levels of religious activity are affected by socialization and life cycle developmental issues and changes such as taking on adult roles and responsibilities. Positive life events contribute to increased faith and religiosity. Negative life events challenge faith. Social support through group activity may help an individual cope with life events and develop a new self-concept and worldview.

**Resocialization**

Another direction in the research literature links religious conversion to socialization processes. Resocialization and attitude change are aspects of learning processes in conversion. Westman, Brackney, and Byliski (1992) concluded that religious beliefs are developed through socialization which they defined as learning a set of rules, beliefs, and attitudes for living.

Pitt (1991) argues that previous socialization of religious beliefs become unacceptable and results in inner
conflict and creates a cognitive imbalance. The stress and strain of disequilibrium causes one to change their attitude or leave a situation to move toward cognitive balance. Consequently, the person becomes a seeker of new information and beliefs. This religious resocialization process is a way to solve the inner conflict and achieve cognitive balance. A form of social approval in the socialization process occurs through relationships within and without one's personal network. A positive response to the new religion by new religious group members and other respected persons in one's own network result in conversion.

Likewise, Wilson (1984) studied converts to Yoga and highlights socialization and deconditioning as two related and connected learning processes of conversion. He defines socialization in religious conversion as committing oneself to learning the language, perspectives, values, and beliefs of the religious group and performing its roles and behaviors. Commitment grows as the convert becomes socialized to the group. He uses the term deconditioning to refer to a change in habits and perceptions of self and the world by unlearning and discarding previously socialized values and perceptions. Furthermore, Wilson (1984) argues that socialization may be a part of every conversion experience, but that deconditioning may only occur in groups that require conscious release of socially and culturally
induced values, goals, attitudes, motivations, and expectations.

Additionally, Long and Hadden (1983) analyzed socialization in the cult conversion of "Moonies" in the Unification Church. They suggest that the basic processes of religious conversion and socialization are the same and offer an alternative view of religious conversion as socialization to integrate brainwashing and social drift models of conversion. The brainwashing model combines force and deprivation to program the mind of new converts. In the social drift model, conversion occurs gradually through social relationships, initiated by the convert, especially during periods of personal difficulty. For Long & Hadden, each model describes part of the conversion process and two aspects of socialization include: 1) group efforts to change new members and 2) individual’s efforts to join a group.

Furthermore, Long and Hadden (1983) don't accept the assumption that socialization is a process of learning and internalizing values and norms of a social group. They see the underlying assumption of socialization as the interactive process between members and nonmembers (p. 5). They redefine socialization as "the social process of creating and incorporating new members of a group from a pool of nonmembers, carried out by members and their allies" (p. 5). Therefore, socialization emphasizes what group
members do to new persons, over a temporary period of time, within boundaries of organizational culture, values, norms, and behaviors. These elements guide the belief and decision of group members to confer status of group membership on new persons. Therefore, the key goal of socialization becomes membership. Socialization in religious conversion involves members and nonmembers as active participants in the process.

Connecting Conversion With Social and Cultural Contexts

Most conversion research to reexamine previous studies has been limited to analysis of individual processes. This may be due to the nature of conversion as a unique individual experience. In addition, Silverstein (1988) believes religious conversion relates to social context. He suggests comparative study of various forms of religious conversions to identify similarities and differences with traditional views of conversion as a sudden or gradual process. This study will identify the experience of persons whose conversion may have been active.

Silverstein (1988) sees conversion as both an intrapersonal event and a cultural and historical phenomenon because preconversion experiences are culturally induced, not necessarily aspects of the conversion process. For him, conversion occurs at a period in life when social and
cultural forces and the individual’s developmental needs require critical reflection or examination of the self, resolution of identity issues, and major life decisions. Silverstein calls for more awareness of socio-historical factors that influence religious conversion processes and types. All conversions are not fundamentally the same even though they may occur in similar socio-historical contexts.

This linkage of conversion to sociocultural forces, critical reflection, and life span development is directly applicable to dominant concerns in the field of adult education. Helping adults critically reflect on culturally induced values, adapt, and make responsible decisions during the life cycle are major themes in contemporary adult education.

The major research reported seem to indicate the transformative nature of conversion involving processes of change, learning, and resocialization within social, cultural, and historical contexts. This may hold true for the studies cited, but all religious conversion experiences within all religious groups have not been studied. Conversion research has been criticized for its lack of inclusiveness. The next section outlines the major criticisms of conversion research and its researchers.
Criticism of Conversion Research and Researchers

The paradigm shift to view conversion as an active process has initiated new research and expanded our view of religious conversion. Nevertheless, numerous criticisms exist of both researchers and the research. Thumma (1991) summarizes conversion literature from the 1980's and criticizes it as only a reexamination of previous studies, not original research. He also criticizes researchers for not being diverse in perspectives and in the religious groups and cultural contexts studied. Greil & Rudy (1984b) criticize conversion research as merely nonobjective, ex post facto accounts of experience.

The other major criticism centers around researcher bias (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989; Morentz, 1987; and Richardson, 1985). Limited perspectives of researchers result in limited interpretations of the very complex process of conversion. Lofland and Stark's process model has been widely criticized for being too rigid (Pitt, 1991) and being a model that explains only individual cases at a time, as well as implying that conversion is the same as recruitment to a religious group (Greil & Rudy, (1984b); and for being empirically unsound and ungeneralizable (Snow & Phillips, 1980). Furthermore, Richardson (1985) argues that researchers explanations are not always reliable because of inaccurate data from converts.
Criticisms of conversion research need to be addressed. However, the purpose of this study is not to resolve the ambiguities of conversion theory. Despite these ambiguities, our goal is to simply inform the literature about the conversion process in two individuals. By becoming more understanding about these two persons the literature will be more informed and contribute to the knowledge base about conversion.

**Gap in Research Literature on Religious Conversion**

The scope of conversion research has been limited by the religious groups studied. The focus on Judeo-Christian traditions and passive conversion dominated conversion research in the early to mid 1900’s. The shift to process models, active conversion and studies on new religious movements have been popular since 1965. Yet, there is considerable more to be learned about conversion as it applies to different groups and different time periods.

The study of the socio-historical context of conversion (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981; Silverstein, 1988; Thumma, 1991) and socialization and learning processes (Balch, 1980; Greil & Rudy, 1984b; Long & Hadden, 1983; Pitt, 1991; Straus, 1974; and Thumma, 1991) are two major thrusts for future research suggested by the literature. Ethnicity may be another factor in conversion that could be studied.  

35
(Richardson, 1985). Researching these aspects will advance the existing body of knowledge on conversion.

Furthermore, Rambo (1982) surveys the literature on religious conversion through different disciplines. His bibliography of 427 items lists religious conversion literature under the headings of anthropological (56), sociological (103), historical (60), psychological (65), psychoanalytic (43), and theological (100) perspectives. Each discipline brings a different focus to and interpretation of conversion research.

The anthropological perspective on conversion explores the importance of the role of culture in the conversion of people to new groups. The sociological perspective promotes a view of conversion as an integration of individual and group needs. For example, the individual convert seeks transformation in relationships to the religious group that is seeking new recruits. Historical studies of conversion acknowledge the importance of historical context as a factor in religious conversion. Psychological studies focus on the conflict, tension, and guilt that precedes conversion. It acknowledges different types and different theories of conversion. The psychoanalytic perspective sees conversion as a coping mechanism to resolve guilt and manage hostility. The theological perspective promotes conversion as an ongoing process of total transformation of the individual's
life through surrender to God.

Less than two percent of the literature reported by Rambo (1982) has anything to do with Islam or African Americans. None of this research addresses the current phenomenon of interest. Five of the 427 items reported on by Rambo (1982) are historical inquiries regarding conversion to Islam in the medieval period. An additional two anthropological studies examine Islam in Africa. One sociological study investigates Black conversion to Catholicism. Although Rambo's bibliography is not an exhaustive list of research on religious conversion, it seems to indicate a gap in religious conversion literature regarding conversion to Islam and conversion activities among African Americans. The contemporary phenomenon of conversion to Islam among African Americans has been ignored in the research literature on religious conversion. This study will address this neglected area of conversion research from an adult education perspective.

This chapter related the conflicting paradigms of conversion as either a sudden or a gradual process. Both have different views of human nature as passive and active, respectively. The recent trend in conversion research has been toward the active paradigm. Self-directed, proactive learning are concepts in adult education that seem to fit the paradigm of conversion as an "active" process. The
decision to convert to Islam seems to fit adult education’s broad notion of change and transformation, particularly for those individuals who convert solely to worship God and find meaning in their lives. Religious conversion is a very complex process that involves individual change, resocialization, learning, resolving psychological conflicts, and responding to social and cultural contexts.

There may be things still unknown about religious conversion. It is possible that failure to examine the conversion process of different religions and different ethnic groups may mean an important theoretical component to the conversion process is missing from the literature. Religious conversion may be situation specific. Examining the personal issues, external forces, and social and cultural context confronted by persons, may result in a significant difference in theory development about conversion. This is one reason why this study is concerned with African Americans.

Conversion literature seems to be incomplete. This research looks at African Americans converting to Islam, a group of people who have not been studied. The social and cultural context leading to their conversion may embody a different dynamic about the conversion process. This research effort will build a theory that reflects the particular people being studied. The unique experience of
African Americans is rich with the potential to inform us about religious conversion in a way no other group has in the past.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

Chapter II provided a theoretical study of literature on religious conversion which revealed that very little is known about the phenomenon of conversion to Islam among African Americans. This study is needed to address the gap in knowledge about Islamic conversion, since the current research on religious conversion, in general, seem limited to new religious movements and Judeo-Christian tradition. In addition the social, cultural, and historical conditions prior to the decision to convert have not been identified and evaluated. The reason for this study was to understand the process of conversion to Islam experienced by two African American males.

Qualitative case study research was conducted to study the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the individual conversion experiences and the learning processes that occurred in the resocialization of two Muslim African American males. The conceptual frame of reference was in-depth phenomenological interviewing developed by Seidman (1991). This method combines life-history and focused, in-depth interviewing.

Qualitative analysis was implemented using Ethnograph
software. The outcome of the study was identification of the factors, in the descriptive data, that led to the decision to convert. Data was gathered from two African American male converts, who described their conversion as a gradual process.

Participants were identified from Muslim African Americans in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. A series of interviews were conducted with participants. The research was conducted using qualitative research protocol including: data gathering, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, story line, and analysis.

The uniqueness of this study required a research method appropriate for the problem. The literature described the complex nature of conversion as a process that occurs differently depending on conditions and situations. The researcher was interested in finding some people who had converted under different circumstances. Therefore, a survey would not have been appropriate. This section presents information pertaining to the research method.

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative case study research was conducted to study the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the participants conversion experiences. The primary focus of the research was a full and complete description of the
social and cultural factors influencing the decision to convert to Islam. Research for these case studies included interviews as the major data collection method.

Since the study was designed to understand how the dynamics of conversion played out with Muslim African American males, a total of nine persons were identified as possible research participants. The researcher was not sure exactly how many persons needed to be interviewed to obtain a full description of the phenomenon of interest. Two interviews seemed to have been enough. The number of interviews conducted was determined by the amount required to get the full, thick description of the phenomenon.

The case studies examined the life history of persons who experienced conversion as a gradual process to identify the context and the learning processes leading to their decisions. This study specifically looked at the years prior to the decision to "convert." This inquiry resulted in understanding what social, cultural, and historical conditions and resocialization processes were involved in Islamic conversion among African American males.

The data from this unit of analysis was gathered through using a structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing proposed by Seidman (1991). The purpose of in-depth interviewing is understanding the experience of other people and its meaning. This method combines life-history
and focused, in-depth interviewing.

Three 90-minute, open-ended, focused life-history interviews were conducted with each case. In the first interview, the participant was asked how he came to be a Muslim or participate in the Islamic way of life? The participant was asked to reconstruct early social and cultural experiences in his life that may have contributed to his participation in Islam, i.e., experiences in his neighborhood, family, school, with friends, and at work. In addition, he was asked about any significant incidents or events that may have contributed to his becoming a Muslim, following the Sunnah (practices) of Prophet Muhammad.

The second interview focused on concrete details of his childhood socialization, between the ages 5 and 15. The participants were asked about the details of significant events, incidents, and happenings; specific relationships with family, friends, and school mates; and stories about their childhood experience as a way of eliciting details about the participants childhood socialization.

The third interview involved reflection on meaning of his decision to convert. This addressed the learning processes involved in accepting Islamic values and changing beliefs and behaviors. Some of the research questions this third interview explored were:

Given what you have said about your life before you
became a Muslim . . . and given what you have said about your life as a child, how do you understand your decision to convert to Islam? And the change you've made in your life?

What sense does it make to you?

These questions flowed from the interaction of the interviewer and participant.

The in-depth interviewing questions were designed to be broad and open ended. Since this study led to a grounded theory, the researcher wanted as much data as possible to come out, in the interviews, not excluding any possibilities. In addition to the questions listed above, two general topics or research questions, related to how the nature of identity comes into play in the conversion process, were important for exploring issues and guiding this study, not constraining it. First, to what extent did the conversion process contribute to their sense of self, particularly their search for identity and sense of being a male? Secondly, how did the conversion process contribute to their sense of ethnic identity?

In this country it seems that Islam has spoken primarily to African Americans. As mentioned earlier over 2.1 million African Americans are Muslim. That represents only approximately 6% of the African American population. However, it is a significant portion of the total Muslim population in America (42%). Native Americans, Whites,
Hispanics, and Asians have not joined Islam at a rate near that of African Americans. This leads to two general questions: What is it about Islam that connects with the African American experience? What is the relationship between the process of Islamic conversion and being a member of the black or African American community? The answers to these questions are not clear.

This type of qualitative research cannot be conducted effectively if constrained by particular topics. These generalized topics were offered only as a guide for exploring the issues of conversion and gender identity and conversion and ethnic identity. If these issues emerged during the first two interviews they were explored more fully in the flow of the interview. If not, they were added to the focus of the third interview.

Meaning came from having the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to the decision to convert to Islam. It also required they look at their decision to convert within the context of their life experiences in detail. Furthermore, they had an opportunity to reflect on the change process they experienced.

The researcher contacted the prospective participants, by telephone, explained the research project and data gathering format, and asked them to participate in the study. Telephone calls were used to confirm schedules and
appointments. The participant were interviewed at a place convenient for them and each of the three interviews were held within 1 week apart.

The three interview structure assisted in efforts to accomplish validity. First, it placed the participant’s comments in the context of a series of interviews. Second, interviewing over a 3 week period accounted for "idiosyncratic" days. Third, it allowed the researcher to check for internal consistency between the material in the third interview and the first interview.

Toward this end, a combination of sequential interviewing and simultaneous interviewing were utilized. The first interview was conducted, coded and analyzed to identify preliminary properties, dimensions, and categories from one set of experiences. This also provided an opportunity to determine if adjustments needed to be made in the research process. After discussion with the Dissertation Committee Chairman and Research Professor, additional interviews were done simultaneously. Each set of data were analyzed separately until the phenomenon was completely described.

B. DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

This section presents examples of the analysis of the interviews as a narrative summary with identified themes of
two case studies. These themes emerged from the transcribed interviews and coding. Each participant's experiences leading to conversion to Islam were different, yet there were patterns that portrayed commonalities between them. This resulted in building a model of Islamic conversion among African American males. The participants are identified as A and B throughout the discussion to protect their identities.

This study was designed to identify the process of Islamic conversion among African American males. Two in-depth qualitative case studies were conducted. The two research participants were contacted by telephone to arrange the interviews. Each individual was interviewed twice for at least 90 minutes per session. The data was transcribed and entered into the Ethnograph software. This software was used to organize the data for coding and analysis in accordance with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach.

**Coding Process**

The transcribed data was printed out into a document for review in the line numbered format organized on the Ethnograph software. Key phrases were identified in paragraphs that seemed important in the participant's experience. The main idea was rewritten in the right
margin. This initial review provided a focus on the relevant data to begin thoroughly coding and analyzing the data.

Open Coding

The researcher used a comparative method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to conceptualize and categorize data from the transcribed interviews. This stage in the analysis involved asking questions of each relevant phrase and/or paragraph. Questions were asked of each important sentence, phrase, or paragraph in an attempt to label the phenomenon. This was done by taking apart an observation, a sentence, phrase, and/or paragraph and giving each incident, idea or event a name that represents a phenomenon. This was the essential process of interpreting the data through constantly questioning each incident, idea or event -- What is this? What does it represent? This led to the development of labels related to dimensions and properties of the phenomenon.

These labels were interpretations that identified the meaning of words and phrases. The dimensions, properties, frequency, length of time, geographic area, places of occurrence, and age were all considered in this coding. Incidents were separated to identify their properties in relation to dimensional ranges. Then each incident was
compared with other incidents. Each incident was questioned what it was doing in each sentence and/or paragraph. This laid the foundation for categorizing the data.

Categorizing

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) categories have conceptual power because they are able to pull together other groups of concepts or subcategories. Similar labels and concepts relating to the same phenomenon were grouped together. This category or group of like concepts represents the nature of the phenomenon. For example, all labels and concepts related to incidents during childhood and youth were grouped together. They were analyzed and categorized given a more abstract name of childhood socialization. All related incidents and ideas were grouped around socialization because they passed on social/cultural values, and norms about life in the south and what is meant to be an African American in that environment.

Each concept was viewed through this labeling process. The question was asked: What class of the phenomenon does it relate to and how is it similar or different from the one before or after it? After labeling the data in this systematic manner many related concepts in categories were asked: What does this group of concepts seem to be about? Why is the participant doing this thing or concept? What is
he doing this concept in relation to? For example, Participant A was asking a lot of questions about his self identity, the condition of his personal life, and his ethnic group. This was categorized as the phenomenon of critical reflection. By asking this category the questions mentioned above it became apparent the reflection he engaged in was related to a period in his lifestage development. He began asking identity questions, after finishing college and leaving home, during his transition into adulthood. This represented a major transition period in his life. He was transitioning out of an identity as a student into an identity as an adult. Critical reflection and transition into adulthood could not be separated. Thus these two categories merged.

The next step in the coding process was to reconstruct all data under relevant categories. Each sentence, phrase, or paragraph was placed under the categories that formed through the analysis. Some of these categories were:

- growing up in the segregated south;
- personal and family encounters with racism;
- family values;
- social and cultural context;
- making decisions to deal with the pain;
- black consciousness;
- circumstances prior to the decision to convert; and
• inner psyche.

Appendix B is the transcript of interviews with Participant A. It shows how data was labeled and organized in these categories. The outline of categories and supporting data needed to be reorganized into theory through further analysis.

Theoretical Sensitivity

This stage in the coding process became a bridge between categorization of the data and developing a theory on Islamic Conversion among African American males. Theoretical sensitivity is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the ability to "see" with analytical depth what is there. By opening the data and thinking about additional potential categories and their dimensions, the categories and subcategories were reconfigured into a preliminary outline.

More specific questions needed to be generated from the categorized data. This was done by asking Who? What? Where? when? How? How much? and Why? This process helped generate more questions for the next interview that clarified or led to developing more specific categories, properties, and dimensions.

Some of these questions were:

• What does Islamic conversion represent in light
of racism experienced by African Americans in America?

- What were values taught in your family? For example, what did it mean to be a man? What was taught about being an honorable person?

- What did it mean, in your family, to be an African American, a black person or a black family?

- What does conversion to Islam mean in relation to being an African American?

- What does your being African American really mean in relation to your Islamic conversion?

- What do all of these experiences, all that you’ve said mean in relation to your Islamic conversion?

- How do you explain your Islamic conversion in light of the fact that you were/are an African American?

- What were all of these experiences telling you about who and what you were? What were you telling yourself about who and what you were based on these experiences?

- What did they tell you about your role and your place in this society? What were you telling yourself about your role and your place in this society?

- What was your family telling you about your role and place in society?

- How does Islamic conversion relate to this reality?

- How do you explain your conversion in light of your life experiences?

Questions began to emerge about how persons experienced being African American, the intensity of their experiences with racism, how they handled the pain of racism, and the
impact of these experiences on their self view and outlook on life. These questions were particularly useful in framing the questions in interviews with Participant B. They also helped guide the coding and analysis of data from interviews with Participant B, as well as conducting a cross comparison between the two sets of data. Before conducting the interviews with Participant B, axial coding of Participant A’s data became necessary.

**Axial Coding**

This stage of coding became critical in developing a model of Islamic conversion among African American males. It provided a structure for putting the data back together in new ways, making connections between categories, and establishing relationships within the data. The coding paradigm or structure used during axial coding was: causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences. Each stage of the coding paradigm and how it was used is explained below.

Causal conditions were identified by something that was said, events, incidents, happenings and certain behaviors that seemed to lead to development of a phenomenon. The phenomenon was the central idea related to the action described in the data. The context was the conditions or
specific set of properties pertaining to the phenomenon in which strategies were used. Action strategies were used to manage, handle and respond to the phenomenon. These strategies were driven or restrained by intervening conditions and led to various outcomes or consequences. Some strategies were a part of the process of change over time, with a sequence of movements. The consequences of action/interactional strategies involved people, places, and events. Some action strategies were purposeful or done to accomplish a goal. Others were actions/interactions that resulted in negative outcomes.

Categories were developed and linked together using this structure from causal conditions to consequences. Analytical steps included making hypothetical statements regarding the relationship between categories, subcategories, and the phenomenon. The main question leading to the development of hypothetical statements was: What are the conditional relationships of this study that can be written as hypotheses to be verified against other data, to either hold up or be modified? This question led to the following hypotheses:

* Under conditions of racism, one (the victim) feels powerless.
* Under conditions of powerlessness, one feels pain.
* Under conditions of prolonged powerlessness, one questions one's self and their humanity (What is wrong with me? What is wrong with us?).
* Under conditions of prolonged powerlessness, one
develops self doubts and a negative self concept.

- Under conditions of limited resources and powerlessness, one accepts and expects limitations.
- Under conditions of powerlessness and injustice, one feels pain, fear, and anger.
- Under conditions of pain, fear, and anger, one develops pain management strategies.
- Under conditions of dissatisfying consequences, one critically reflects.
- Under conditions of dissatisfying consequences, one seeks more acceptable alternatives to find balance.

- Under conditions of transition, one critically reflects and makes decisions.
- Under conditions of anomie, one searches for answers.
- Under conditions of guilt and great emotional strain, one develops internally focused pain management strategies (suppression, forgetfulness, leave home, alcohol and drug use).

These statements were then verified or modified by the data. This process led to the development of an outline of the model of Islamic conversion among African American males. Appendix C is an example of that outline as it applies to Participant A.

In summary, the axial coding involved asking questions about relationships between the conceptual labels and emerging categories. Specific similarities and differences among categories were identified to link in logical order. Finally, there was movement between inductive and deductive thinking to check the proposed hypotheses. The result of this analytical process was development of a model of Islamic Conversion among African American males. It
explains the process and identifies key decision points that ultimately led to the decision to accept Islam. Chapter IV explains the model and then describes how it plays out in the lives, experiences, and conversion of two African American male research participants.

Both research participants reviewed and commented on the full narrative of the model describing their experience. They commented that the narrative was accurate and reflected what they told the researcher. Participant A said the whole process of being interviewed, seeing the model, and reading the narrative helped him release these negative experiences of his life. He thanked the researcher for the opportunity. Participant B stated it was strange to see his life written out on the pages.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

MODEL OF ISLAMIC CONVERSION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

The model of Islamic Conversion among African American males, depicted by Model 1, emerged out of the data from this research study. It is being presented at the beginning of this chapter as background for understanding the experiences and decisions in the conversion process of the participants. Whereas some stages of the model may have similarities to other theories, it was not built on any other theories. It represents the researcher’s best attempt to organize the findings in a logical, rational, and sensible structure.

The model was developed using a grounded theory approach. This process required linking sequences of action/interaction to the main phenomenon. Consideration was given to changing conditions, action/interactional responses, consequences and how some of them became part of intervening conditions that influenced the next action/interactional sequence. This chapter provides a general description of the model and how it seemed to play out in the experience of the research participants.
Figure 1: Model of Islamic Conversion Among African-American Males

Decision to Accept Islam

Liberation and Inner Peace
Search for Spiritual Path

Critical Reflection
Transition Period

Consequences
Disassociation

Attempt to Gain Power
Reflect Status Quo

Failure Management

Pain of Powerlessness

Ethnic and Cultural Experiences

No Attempt to Gain Power
Accept Status Quo
A. Overview of Model of Islamic Conversion

The analysis of interview data resulted in the development of a model of Islamic conversion among African American males. This model involves the following stages:

1) experiences with racism
2) effects of racism
3) pain of powerlessness
4) pain management strategies
5) dissatisfaction with consequences
6) critical reflection in a transition period
7) search for spiritual liberation and inner peace, and
8) decision to convert to Islam

Stages 1 and 2, experiences and effects of racism, represent causal conditions that lead to the core phenomenon of the pain of powerlessness. Pain management strategies represent action and interactional strategies to deal with the phenomenon. Dissatisfaction with the consequences of strategies used and with the status quo constitute a major decision point in the conversion process. The next stage involves a transition period within a life development stage that includes critical reflection and a search for answers. The search for answers reflects a desire to liberate the human spirit and attain an inner peace which directly influences the decision to convert to Islam. The remaining sections of this chapter provide a fuller explanation of how
the model derived from interviews with the participants, played out in their experiences. A short narrative summary of the life of each participant will be presented which included a presentation of the model as it functioned for that participant.

B. Narrative Summary of the Life of Participant A

Participant A is a 46 year old African American male who grew up in the south. His journey to Islam is rather dramatic. He experienced the stages of the model with great intensity as evidenced by his story.

Experiences With Racism

Participant A experienced racism everyday as a child growing up in the south. Every visit he made to a local restaurant, movie theater, store, water fountain, and school was an encounter with segregation. Symbols of racism were in his environment, such as an old tree that was known as the lynching tree because it was used to lynch African American. His home town also had an area known as the slave market because African Americans were bought and sold as slaves. As a child he was warned not to go in certain areas because of stories of cross burnings by the KKK. The white-black conflict was real and a constant in his life. When
he'd go to a local restaurant he had to go to a back window to get served. While he was eating he had to endure vulgar and obscene gestures from whites.

Powerfully negative cultural values and messages about African Americans permeated this town. A good example of an overwhelming message that participant A was quite familiar with is the fact that African Americans were taken away from their families through lynchings. This was the ultimate symbol of powerlessness. The African Americans in his hometown were powerless to stop this act of premeditated murder even though they knew it was going to happen. This was part of the historical, cultural, and social conditions of the town that was communicated to participant A by his father, mother, brother, peers, and through various social experiences.

The reality of lynching promoted the perception of African American males being less than human. In a stage of childhood development, every time he passed by the lynching tree, he was reminded of his social status, although he may not have been conscious of it. As a youth, he assimilated the data from the environment and reached the conclusion that being African American meant there is only so far he could go. Material things were not available to him and others because they were African American.

The impact of the message of segregation was
psychological torture. Being African American meant having psychological limitations. The effects of segregation stopped him in his psyche. Life was a constant struggle to break through an invisible wall, a psychological barrier. He didn’t believe African Americans were entitled to the same freedom granted everyone else. These perceptions of his reality were confirmed by traumatic incidents during his youth that produced more pain and a feeling of powerlessness. The following incidents are specific examples of these experiences.

Specific Incident #1

At around 11 years of age, he took a trip to Louisiana with his father and brother. They were in an auto accident. A white motorist had hit their car. He experienced powerlessness as the white authority figure (policeman), took his father away from him and his brother. His father, who was his role model, was totally controlled by the white authority or power structure. Furthermore, he and his brother were sent away with a white family of total strangers. They were made to endure this trauma for about one week before they saw their father again or had any contact with their family. This childhood nightmare has been re-experienced and relived over and over again during the last 35 years. Even talking about it in the interview
made him teary-eyed as if he were reliving it at that moment.

This was a dramatic experience of powerlessness and fear in his life. One major lesson he learned was that the life of African Americans was constrained by the perceived or real power of whites. In this context, his action strategy was to question, plead, beg, and cry about the injustice of the white authority taking his father. However, the strategy was unsuccessful. He learned early in life that he and his family were powerless against whites. Right or wrong didn’t matter. Only being white. Regardless of age, position in community, being right or wrong, being good or bad, being an African American male meant being powerless. When he saw his father being controlled like that, what did that tell him about his power? He did not have any power. Even his questions didn’t carry any weight. The feeling of powerlessness was compounded by seeing other family members experience racism.

Specific Incident #2

The family was active in the civil rights movement. His older brother was the first to integrate the local high school. Although he was an Eagle Scout and a leader among black youth, in the context of this situation he was put down and ridiculed by whites. To force him out of the
school he was accused of cheating on a test and stripped of his Eagle Scout rank. Although the family wanted to keep it private, this became a public issue. It was written about in the local newspaper. African Americans had meetings about the situation. Yet, the results did not change. The lesson was that when an African American male tries to exercise some power to join the white "world," he will be despised, rejected, and stripped of his achievement. The hard reality of this lesson was experienced in another incident at work during his youth.

**Specific Incident #3**

At the age of 12 or 13 he had a major conflict with the white manager at the grocery store. He worked there as a bagger. He prided himself on being an excellent bagger. He had the capacity to bag three or four separate lines, simultaneously, during the rush period. One day, after one of these periods of excellent work, he requested his break which was scheduled at that time. However, he was powerless to get it.

The manager was a big man. The participant described this manager as a racist, with a slave master type of mentality. The manager verbally punished, humiliated, and embarrassed him in front of everybody in the store. He was saddened, shed tears and was put out of the store. A young
African American male was not supposed to speak up for what he was entitled.

These experiences in conjunction with the segregated environment was a form of deep conditioning. He felt much like the baby elephant who learns the limit of its existence, by being trained in the circus with a rope tied to its feet and a stake in the ground. Participant A was conditioned by racism through childhood, developmental stage experiences, that being black meant his life was limited and he was powerless.

Effects of Racism

Growing up in the social and cultural context of segregation had a negative impact on participant A. This effect manifested itself in identity crisis, low self esteem, and a negative ethnic identity.

Participant A's life was characterized by exclusion from other groups. This separation was constantly reinforced by symbols of racism such as water fountains labeled colored and white; black-white territory boundaries; African American police unable to go in white neighborhoods to do their job; separate seating in movie theaters; and African Americans being served at the back window of the restaurant. Living under this type of inhumane treatment, negative attitudes, and behaviors made him question his own
humanity. This contributed to self doubt and loss of a positive self identity. The seeds of an identity crisis had been planted in his mind.

Identity issues were a natural consequence of this environment that had such a devastating impact on him, in a negative direction, and constricted his physical and psychological movement. He developed negative feelings about himself and his ethnic group, although he was not consciously aware of it as a youth. The environment had a damaging effect on his self esteem and he began questioning his self and his abilities. He was damaged psychologically in terms of understanding his self and how to relate in situations. He was aware that he was not able to get or have what others (whites) had. He was not free to do things others (whites) were doing. The extent of damage this environment did to his psyche has not been fully recognized, even now.

Phenomenon

All of these experiences taught him some valuable lessons. The learning from these experiences was more significant than any lesson learned in school. They changed him. They inflicted pain on him and left him hurt with negative feelings. He learned: 1) it is not good to be African American, 2) it is awful to be powerless, 3) being
African American meant you were powerless in this society, 4) that he was different, 5) African Americans were not the same as whites, 6) African Americans had to live with constant barriers, 7) African Americans lived a limited existence, 8) lines were drawn between the races, and 9) there were places African Americans couldn’t go.

There were things African Americans couldn’t have, not just physical things. His experience taught him that blacks couldn’t have psychological and emotional things like respect, appreciation, recognition for contributions, freedom to be, and peace of mind. All human beings want these things. But the reality of being a black child growing up in the south, during the 1950’s, meant these things were not available.

These childhood experiences and lessons had a profound effect on him. The core phenomenon was a powerlessness that produced intense psychological and emotional pain. This pain ran so deep it required management or it could have been out of control and destructive. Pain management strategies become the action/interactional strategies for coping with the core phenomenon. The next section shows how participant A used various strategies to manage his pain.

**Pain Management Strategies**

Experiences with racism led participant A to explore
alternative pain management strategies. One strategy was to stick with his own people, his family, and other African Americans. Family values taught him how to deal with the negative reality of being African American. His mother and father were role models. They stressed action strategies such as hard work, independence, worship, responsibility, inner strength, wisdom, leadership, demonstration, and confrontation. As he got older he began to experiment with other strategies.

Another strategy for pain management that became socially acceptable during the 1960’s was lashing out at the oppressor through demonstrations against segregation. The civil rights movement legitimized these activities. As a freshman in college he participated in a protest that resulted in reinforcing his powerlessness against racism. This significant event set in motion a series of experiences and key decision points that changed his life.

**Demonstration Against Segregation**

A group of young African Americans implemented a strategy to exert power in response to the segregated environment. They wanted to force association with whites by integrating a bowling alley. He became involved as one of the person’s out front in the protest. In this way he was exercising family values and following in his father’s
footsteps as an activist. The protest shifted to a college campus.

This incident was a strategy for expressing anger. The demonstrators built a bonfire on campus. It was a symbol of their rage against racism and their frustration at being powerless to have equal access to an entertainment facility. While demonstrating they were confronted with their powerlessness.

As the bonfire raged, the police and national guard gathered and blocked one end of the street. They approached the demonstrators with drawn guns. The demonstrators became hemmed in and shut off from protection from the white authority’s enforcement unit. What followed became a consequence that served as an intervening condition and a key decision point.

A big stick was thrown at the policemen. They retaliated. The white authority lashed out intentionally to inflict pain, by firing shotguns into the crowd. The demonstrators were trapped, stuck and helpless against the flying fire from shotgun blasts designed to kill. Thirty students were shot. Some paid the ultimate price of death for their stance against racism.

Participant A was one of the person’s leading the protest, but he was still powerless to stay out of the line of fire. He became consciously aware of the full force of
powerlessness by being shot and seeing the fear as students ran for their lives. A testimony of their fear is that many students were shot in the back. He was struck by two bullets. One bullet passed through his arm, while the other one was lodged two inches from his heart. The reality of racism was driven further into his psyche as he faced his fears about death.

Multiple experiences of powerlessness occurred during this one incident. He was transferred from the college infirmary to the local hospital because of the seriousness of his wounds. While laying in the hospital bed he heard the moment of death for one of the protestors. He saw the doctors standing behind a curtain and described the silence after the person died. When the doctors came to him, he was sure it was his time to die. They looked at his wounds and decided they could do nothing for him. So he was sent back to the college infirmary.

After sitting for hours with a bullet near his heart, he was rescued by his family. They had driven 170 miles one way to find him. And they drove back 170 miles to get him medical care. He was operated on once he got back to his hometown. This experience became an intervening condition.

By the time he was a senior in college he was open to an alternative. He was invited to visit the temple to get exposure to an alternative. Eventually he responded to the
invitation one week before he graduated from college. The summer after graduation he prepared himself to go out in the world.

Dissatisfaction With Consequences

Consequences from the demonstration represent causal conditions for future decisions. The experience lingered for years because there were investigations, law suits, and court cases. There was also a feeling of guilt for the role he played in the demonstration. He was the person who threw the stick at the police.

After all these experiences, he became dissatisfied with his life, his reality, his existence. He described his life as a living hell. He had experienced a lot of pain, conflict, and emotional turmoil. He desired answers and fulfillment of needs for stability, belonging, and happiness. He was searching for a comfortable identity. His social and cultural experiences didn't allow him to find himself. He wasn't satisfied with society's definition of him. He didn't want to be what he was: inferior, black, guilty, responsible for people being shot and killed, poor, alone, and/or destitute.

He was also dissatisfied with the status quo religion. He believed the institution of Christianity had failed him. Protesting through the socially sanctioned civil rights
movement demonstrations had almost gotten him killed. He blamed Christianity for this experience. He was harmed by people who called themselves Christians. This experience coupled with having grown up in the house of a Baptist minister he understood the inner workings in a church. He had seen hypocrisy among Christians throughout his life. He had a lot of unanswered questions. But one thing was certain, he wanted nothing to do with Christianity or the civil rights movement.

He had encountered the issue of powerlessness and pain management for most of his life. After having tried other strategies to move toward integration he was still dissatisfied. Prior to this transition period into adulthood, he had been receiving Muhammad Speaks newspapers from someone from his hometown. He felt this person had found something to manage his life. They both had been exposed to the same values and influences during childhood in the same town. Yet this person seemed to be handling his life better.

After two years of invitations to visit the temple, from this hometown friend, he decided to go to a meeting one week before his graduation from college. He enjoyed his visit to the temple.

This experience was empowering because he experienced hope. The hope was that, at the temple, African Americans
were controlling their situation without the white man. However, his fear was the negative feelings that remained after having been shot. He remembered his powerlessness and relived the whole incident over and over again. He recalled the testimonies, court cases, and FBI interviews. He had to suppress the guilt and pain he felt from his role in the experience.

Transition Period With Critical Reflection

Graduation from college began a major transition period, in his life, into adulthood and adult responsibilities. He, like many graduates, had to face the world of employment and the costs of food, clothing, and shelter. It was a time for making major decisions about furthering his education, career, lifestyle and/or marriage.

After finishing college, Participant A made a decision to pursue further education. He applied for graduate school and was accepted at three historically black colleges. He decided to attend one of the schools in an urban area away from home. This decision to leave home was partly a pain management strategy because home was a reminder of the demonstration and the shooting. He was running away from the geographic area to ease his pain. He wanted to escape from the mental and emotional prison of life in the south and the memories of his experiences. Little did he know the
nightmare that awaited him and the turns his life would take. He may have been led to an unfavorable circumstance for reasons unexplained by rational arguments.

The trip to the "big city" didn't turn out as he planned. He learned that the hometown friend, who offered him a place to stay, had been shipped out on another military assignment. He found himself stranded, all alone. He was in a condition of anomie. He was in emotional pain, hurt, helpless, powerless, and resourceless. He was cut off from his family. He didn't have much money. He didn't have a place to stay. He didn't know anybody. He developed an unconscious desire to be saved from this hell, this depressing situation that was his life. He had been living with pain of his life and the guilt associated with past experiences that haunted him over the years. These drastic conditions complicated this transition period. This experience became an intervening condition.

He enrolled in school and stayed at the YMCA. He decided not to call home for help. He felt he could deal with the situation on his own. In a few days his situation worsened. He ran out of money and knew he had to get a job. Fortunately, after a few days, he found a job at a hotel. But he still didn't have any money until he received his first pay check. In the meantime, he slept in the street for over a week. He slept on the steps of the Salvation
army. He washed when he went to work and got something to eat from the kitchen workers. This desperate situation forced him to critically reflect on his life.

He had basic needs for security, food, clothing, shelter, and belonging. He didn’t know where or how he would get his next meal. He was adjusting to living in a nonsegregated environment. In addition, he was taking on adulthood responsibilities and roles. He was bringing his fiancee to town because they were planning on getting married. Therefore, he needed a stable job, income and a place to live. This provided a sense of purpose that kept him from giving up in this desperate situation. He felt he was near the breaking point. A little more pressure and he would have been ready for the mental hospital.

With all of this pressure and discomfort he knew he needed help but wouldn’t seek any help from anyone. He was running from the guilt and pain of his life experiences. In fact, his psyche was so damaged he didn’t believe he deserved any help from family or anyone. He didn’t accept help from a woman, he worked with, when she offered it to him. He didn’t want to get close to anyone because he didn’t want them to see his pain.

All types of feelings, thoughts, and questions filled his heart and mind. He was depressed, alone, and felt despair. He was near a breaking point. He felt guilt from
the shooting and determined he deserved to suffer. He asked questions like: What's going on? Why was he going through this experience? What is this life all about? Why was his life a living hell? Who are we as a group of people? Why were African Americans in such a bad economic condition?

He was searching. He wanted to know answers to these questions and others, such as: Who am I? Why am I here going through all of this? What can I do about my situation? He critically reflected on his condition, his life experiences and social reality; his relationship with Christianity; his desire to escape from being the next minister in his family; his self identity; his self concept; his ethnic identity, what it meant to be African American. He wanted to better himself.

This transition period in conjunction with his current condition created a synergistic effect where many factors culminated into a desire for a change. He had tried various strategies to manage the pain and powerlessness, such as:

- trying to leave the past and move on with his life
- being totally alone
- moving toward maturity/taking responsibility
- wanting to do it himself
- pride, stubbornness
- took a position that he didn't deserve help
- migration from the mental torture, persecution, and living hell of the shooting incident
- identity crisis - 3 to 4 months of trying to find himself in a new environment
- self oppression/playing victim/comfort in suffering alone
- believed he deserved to suffer
• culturally induced values
• alcohol & drug use during college
• desire for more/better/an identity
• focused on purpose, interests
• depressed and desponded
• critical reflection
• memory loss, momentary forgetting
• suppression, burying feelings
• didn’t want anybody to see his pain
• shielded himself from getting close to others, and
• protected himself in solitude.

Yet none of these strategies proved to be satisfactory. He still did not have peace of mind, as evidenced by the following quotes from the transcript:

"See I was searching. I was in a search mode as well. I was in a searching kind of mode where I said man I got to find the answers. Got to find the answers to why is this the way it is. You know. And is this the answer that’s going to help me better myself" (File Participant A, line 737-743). ".. Right now that pressure is telling me I got to get some help, some relief. So ultimately, with my conscious level being one way and my environment, man, putting the pressure on me. Oh Go, help me. Get me out of this situation (laughing)" (File Participant A, line 824-830).

"(Sigh) Well, I think the fact that I was running from that Orangeburg scene, in terms of what happened there. And what perhaps I caused. What transpired. I was also running from that. Hell man, you know, people got killed. Thirty something got shot. Man, I wanted to bury that wherever (increased volume and tone of voice, and laughing) that’s supposed to be buried, you know. So, I mean there were alot of things there that I was running from. So like I said, I was running but at the same time there was some purpose and I wanted to know why (increased volume and tone)? You know, why in the heck I came through all that. What in the hell was all that for? And then why was all that and why am I still going through some hell? You know why in the hell am I still going through some hell?" (File Participant A, lines 1438-1461).

He wanted a way out of this reality. This search for
answers and the plea to God show an awareness of the desire for inner peace and spiritual liberation.

Search for Spiritual Liberation and Inner Peace

After receiving his pay he rented a room in a boarding house. Finally, his basic needs were met. Now he turned his attention to his spiritual needs. He remembered his visit to the temple a few months earlier. He wanted to revisit the temple. He found an address in the telephone book for an Islamic Center and planned to visit one evening. He walked approximately three miles to the location. However, when he got there it was locked. He experienced more despair. Plus it didn’t look like the little store front place he had previously visited.

He was really distraught and dejected. The place he hoped to find some answers wasn’t even open. Hot and tired he walked three more miles back home. When he arrived about four blocks from his boarding room he saw a sign that said "Muhammad Says Buy Black." He went in the store and saw a woman dressed like a Muslim. Out of breath and perspiring he said to the woman, "I’m looking for the temple." She says "well brother, it’s right around the corner behind this building." He had walked 6 miles to find a place that was four blocks from where he stayed. Yet he was happy he found what he was looking for.
The next night he came back for his first meeting. Upon hearing the message of the Nation of Islam in 1971, he found answers to his questions and a healing for the pain in his heart. He decided to accept Islam as his new way of life.

Decision to Accept Islam: A Culmination of Everything

A convergence of various issues occurred and influenced his decision making included lifestage development, transition into adulthood, personal identity issues, ethnic identity issues, dissatisfaction with status quo, and pain. He was filled with conflicting emotions of: depression/hope, fear/guilt, despair/purpose, and was searching for answers. But before he could solve his personal issues he had some basic needs.

He had only one principle to hold on to; something unseen. Faith. He had no material possessions. Only faith and a mental toughness. Through this situation maybe he felt he was paying retribution for his sins, his previous actions. He had deficit thinking, negative expectations, foolish pride not to take any help, fear from guilt, depression and an attitude of hope. Eventually, as a last alternative, he made a plea, begging God for help out of his horrible circumstances. His call was answered. He was guided to Islam consciously. Islam represented a light and
a message of hope. It offered upliftment for black men, in
general, and upliftment for him from an awful condition.

C. Narrative Summary of the Life of Participant B

Historical context and geographic environment may
effect the intensity of one’s experience with racism. For
example, a person living in the south during the 1960’s may
have been confronted with more experiences of racism and of
greater intensity than a person living in the Northeast or
Midwest. Participant B is a 48 year old African American
male who grew up in a mid sized city in the north. During
his youth he observed, from a distance, the intense racism
in the south. He was also aware of race riots in major
urban areas across the country. Although he was not
directly involved in numerous and intense confrontations
with racism, he experienced it nonetheless.

Experiences With Racism

Although not directly involved, participant B’s family
engaged in intellectual dialogue about and analysis of
racist activities. Many dinner table conversations with his
parents, particularly his father, centered on contemporary
racist events. For example, they discussed the 1960
Sharpville Massacre in South Africa, the civil rights

80
movement in the south, the black power movement, the Harlem riots in 1964, the Watts riots in 1965, the Detroit riots of 1967, the 1968 riots in Washington, D.C., and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Conversations about racism were not limited to external events. His father had personal interactions with whites as an auto factory worker. Some whites looked down upon his father and other African American workers and showed their disfavor by throwing nuts and bolts at them. Also, racial integration of auto factories meant only certain jobs were offered to African Americans.

His father helped him develop a broader perspective about being African American. They discussed African American history and the great civilizations of Africa. His father read books like Leroy Bennett’s "Before the Mayflower." African American magazines and newspapers such as Jet, Ebony, and the Pittsburgh Courier were always visible at home. Eventually he began to read these publications on his own. This intellectually stimulating environment, the discussions and the reading material were the foundation for his black nationalism.

The family perspective on being black and living in white America was manifested in entertainment activities. He and his father celebrated when African Americans would beat whites in athletic events. For example, they were
overjoyed when Texas Western, an all black basketball team, beat Kentucky for the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) national championship title in 1966. They discussed Jackie Robinson as the first African American major league baseball player, as well as the emerging dominance of African Americans in major league sports between 1948 and 1960.

They listened to professional boxing matches on the radio during the 1950's. Victories by Sugar Ray Robinson and Archie Moore symbolized small victories over racism. He recalled being crushed when Esgarar Johannson beat Floyd Patterson. He felt elated when Patterson won the rematch. He followed closely the emergence of Muhammad Ali as an African American man overcoming the odds. These types of experiences and perspectives enhanced his black consciousness.

Participant B and his father sometimes discussed religion. His father had doubts about what he called white people's version of the Bible. He believed the scripture given to African Americans had been changed. His father analyzed the story of Cain and Abel, and the color of Jesus, and was skeptical about their authenticity in the King James version of the Bible. These types of conversations made him question Christianity. In addition to thoroughly addressing racism through intellectual dialogue and analysis of current
events, his father’s experiences, African history, and religion. Participant B still had some personal experience with racism that impacted his point of view.

Specific Incident #1

There was one incident in high school that raised his ethnic consciousness. As a member of the high school track team, he and the other blacks had grown the Afro hairdo’s during the summer. Right before the first track meet, the track coach told them to cut their Afro’s off because he didn’t want his "boys" embarrassing him. They were offended by the request and didn’t like being called his "boys."

To show their disapproval, the athletes decided to quit the track team until the coach offered a public apology. The coach did make a statement about the incident. He said he didn’t realize how important it was to the boys. But, for participant B and some of the others, this statement did not constitute a public apology, so they did not return to the track team. This protest was an action strategy to deal with racism in his environment.

These conversations and experiences had an effect on him. They resulted in him acquiring knowledge and a thought process that debunked all of the white man’s arguments, religiously and historically. Due to his father’s influence, he developed toward maturity with a viewpoint
that demystified whites. He viewed them as nothing special. He viewed African American as equal to or superior to whites. He developed a positive ethnic identity. As he grew into manhood, in the late 1960’s, he began to develop his own ideas and opinions about race relations and ethnic consciousness.

Effects of Racism

The effects of racism were not always negative for him. Participant B developed an ethnic consciousness that rejected the identity white America had put on African American people. He rejected the worldview of the inferiority and dehumanization of African Americans that resulted from slavery and white supremacy. He associated with people, through activities or through reading, who thought the same way. He gravitated toward people active in the black movement and was influenced by Black Panthers H. Rap Brown and Huey Newton.

Participant B developed a sense of race pride as a result of his experiences. He never felt inferior or a sense of inferiority being transmitted in his family. The underlying perspective was that blacks were as good as whites and he had nothing to be ashamed of. He felt whites had no advantage over him. Their houses weren’t better, their parents jobs weren’t better, their grades weren’t
better, and they weren’t better athletes.

He came into maturity as a young adult, in the mid to late 1960’s, during the Black Power Movement and/or Black Consciousness Movement. He hated assimilationism or social integration into European standards. He was tired of dealing with European institutions. He defined himself as a black nationalist. He didn’t want to be a "Negro." He wanted to be identified as black, wanted to be with blacks, and wanted to solve the problems of black people. This was an issue of defining his own identity.

Phenomenon

Participant B had not directly experienced the intense racism of the south, but nonetheless he was involved with the phenomenon of powerlessness. It wasn’t a physical or an emotional pain that he experienced. It was an intellectual pain. Intellectually he knew blacks were as good as anybody, but they had more problems than other ethnic groups. Intellectually, he had rejected the status quo and wanted to do something about the problems of African Americans. At an early age he implemented a pain management strategy of protesting, as evidenced by the incident with the track coach. He also used other pain management strategies, during his youth and young adulthood, while rejecting the status quo.
Pain Management Strategies

Action and interactional strategies were used by participant B to address the powerlessness he saw among African Americans. He wanted to do something about the effects of racism and the plight of African Americans across the country. The three dominant strategies he used were protesting, organizing, and learning through self-study and formal education.

Protests and Demonstrations

As a high school student, Participant B protested inequities in his community. He demonstrated at city hall against the denial of a fair housing ordinance. The administration turned on the sprinkler system to end the demonstration. He also wrote a letter to the editor of the city newspaper protesting the fair housing vote of a City Council member. This Councilman was his high school American History teacher. He protested the hypocrisy of his teacher’s vote because it was contradictory to what was taught in the American History class.

His involvement with protests continued during his college years. As a freshman in college he helped form a black student organization at the local university. As Vice President of the organization, he was active in demonstrations for more black studies programs, black
students, and black professors. As a local leader, he watched the student movement on the national level. After his freshman year he transferred to a small college in California and got closer to the action.

Formal Education

His formal college education was augmented by involvement in the black movement which was more intensely active in California. He took classes with people from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland some of whom were in the Black Panther Party. After having read about this organization for months, he was actually engaging in dialogue with Black Panthers. Within a few weeks, after moving to California, he was at an event surrounded by 30,000 people listening to Angela Davis. While in California he had African American professors who were heavily involved in the black consciousness movement. These professors further debunked the Eurocentric world view. His desire to do something in the African American community grew along with his ethnic pride.

Dissatisfaction with Consequences

Participant B continued to pursue formal education through graduate school. The "higher" learning helped him focus on what he wanted to do professionally. He began to
see education and psychology as racist systems needing to be changed. He was not satisfied with the status quo and needed to make a change politically, morally, and spiritually.

To begin this process of change, during graduate school, he engaged in self-directed study to expand his knowledge of ancient African/Egyptian history. In addition, he conducted a comparative study of different religions. He studied Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Eastern philosophy and the history of Christianity. This study resulted in a process of critical reflection on his own attitudes, beliefs and immoral behaviors. Although he was progressing intellectually, he was dissatisfied with himself as a moral being. This process of critical reflection became more pronounced during the transition period associated with the completion of graduate school.

Transition Period With Critical Reflection

A turning point in his life occurred while finishing his doctoral dissertation. He experienced anomie because he was going into the professional world alone for the first time. This state of anomie made him confront his own self. He desired solutions to the problems of the African American community. He wanted to solve problems but was involved in activities that were part of the problem. For example, he
was chasing women, smoking marijuana, and drinking his share of alcohol. His search for solutions converged with a critical self-reflection that resulted in a dissatisfaction with his own moral life. He saw hypocrisy in his own lifestyle. He began to see the contradiction in his own life as ridiculous.

Between 1968 and 1975 he had talked about revolution but wasn’t doing anything revolutionary, in a political sense or in a personal sense. He couldn’t break the chains of his own behavior. This precipitated his search for spiritual liberation and the decision to accept Islam.

Critical reflection and questioning himself was at the core of his search for liberation. He was looking for answers concerning two issues. First, was to find solutions to the problems of African Americans. Secondly, he was searching for a personal identity.

During this period of reflection and transition, he began to read the Muhammad Speaks newspaper as another source for answers. He read Wallace Muhammad’s weekly article and found it consistent with his own reading on different religions and on Islam. The Nation of Islam was changing. As a result of this inquiry, he couldn’t reject the new theology of the Nation of Islam. So he began to study it very closely and believe it. He began to reconcile some of his personal issues.
Search for Spiritual Liberation and Inner Peace

His decision to become a Muslim was based on two conclusions that were related to dominant issues of concern. First, he saw Islam as the straightest way to liberation for African American people as a whole group. The Nation of Islam presented a "group" program for education and economics that was benefitting the African American community. Secondly, he concluded that he needed religion in his life as a moral anchor. Becoming a Muslim was an identity issue. He needed to belong to something positively influencing African Americans but not part of the bourgeoisie Negro middle class or the socially accepted status quo. Becoming a Muslim meant moving or transforming from an identity as a black man to a Muslim, a believer in Islam. Ultimately, the decision to convert was a beginning in a process of restructuring of his identity. His search for spiritual liberation led him to the decision to become a Muslim. After the decision he had to go through a period of strengthening his moral code to effectively make the transformation.

An intensive, ongoing learning process was an essential aspect of his search and conversion. Between February and July 1975 he studied the direction of the Nation of Islam as an organization. He talked it over with his parents and friends. He went to at least one, sometimes two meetings
per week and attended 4th Sunday lectures. He read and listened to Imam W. D. Muhammad. While doing all of this studying, he questioned his self about whether this was something he could do. He knew it would require great discipline. Maybe a self discipline he didn’t possess at the time.

During this process his desire for inner/spiritual liberation became more apparent. He stopped intellectualizing his decision as a way to solve the problems of African American people and began encountering the need to save his own personal soul. He became tired of the hypocrisy he saw in himself. For years he had heard the rhetoric about the problems of African Americans, but saw the contradictions in his own behavior. He disrespected women by having girlfriends in different places. He got twisted up in lies, running between women. He regularly consumed his share of alcohol and always kept his bag of weed. He felt the need to plug into an organization or ideology that was doing something for black people. He had a need for belonging and doing something important. But first he needed to free himself from his own immorality.

"...Um, and I ran, I tried to run through all the reasons why I shouldn’t be a part of it. And those reasons basically boiled down to lifestyle. Was I strong enough to abandon sex outside of marriage, for example. Was I strong enough to quit drinking alcohol? Was I strong enough to quit smoking marijuana? When I framed it that way, then it became a question of
(slight pause) did I have enough discipline personally (slight pause) to do what needed to be done (slight pause) in terms of practicing an ideology that was good for the masses of African Americans. O.K. so I guess in terms of framing the question to myself, it almost became are you strong enough to do this? Can you handle this? Is what I'm asking myself. You believe it. Can you, you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk? And so that became the challenge for me. And then after mulling over this for basically a number of months and still coming right back to that conclusion that O.K. this looks like the best way for our people to go, for African Americans to go" (Interview 3 with Participant B, line 47-74).

Eventually he could only come up with personal reasons why he shouldn't become a Muslim. He critically reflected on his lifestyle, behavior, and values. He questioned whether he had enough strength to change his behavior. He believed in Islam and what the Nation of Islam was doing, but wondered if he could handle the disciplined lifestyle. He'd have to stop drinking, smoking, getting high, and sexual relationships with women out of wedlock. The bottom line question he asked himself was could he walk the walk? His behavior or undisciplined lifestyle was part of the problem. Islam offered a solution to the problems of the African American community and his own personal problems.

Decision to Accept Islam: A Culmination of Everything

Accepting Islam was a combination of all these ideas and experiences within his personality, that converged
within and emerged out of a context of him completing his doctoral degree. He was 25 years old, leaving the safe haven of school, and going out to face the world alone. As a full grown adult he felt the need to do something important, nationally and globally, within the African American community. All of this combined with his upbringing, the family values passed on through their dinner table discussions, the historical time that he reached maturity, and changes within the Nation of Islam.

In 1975, the Nation of Islam changed from a black separatist organization to mainstream Islam. After the change, participant B changed his view of the movement. It became a movement with an acceptable theology and a program to solve the problems of the African American community.

"Again I saw the organization having tremendous strengths in terms of discipline, in terms of self reliance, in terms of identity. I saw that as very positive. Um, I could not be a part of it because I thoroughly rejected the theology. Alright. Now once the theology changed and the theology became more consistent with what I had been studying and what I had been evolving in terms of a belief system. Then in a sense there was a match. There was a match between what I felt was true ah theologically and in terms of historical knowledge. You know, there was a match between that and what the nation of Islam was teaching." (Interview 3 with Participant B, line 25-41).

He concluded that Islam was the best way to go, the best philosophy for him to liberate himself from his own moral problems and liberate other African Americans. Some
of the reasons for this conclusion were: 1) the Nation of Islam, as an organization, was viewed positively for having strengths of discipline, self reliance, and a strong ethnic identity; 2) the theology changed and became more consistent with what he had been studying in terms of historical knowledge; and 3) it also matched his evolving belief system. He connected ideologically with Islam.

The black consciousness he developed in the 1960’s and early 1970’s guided and shaped his decision to convert to Islam. The convergence of things in his life made him feel he was going to change (become a Muslim) and solve his own problems. At some point he felt strong enough to deal with the discipline and decided to make that change. First he committed to the movement ideologically. The discipline and behavior change came gradually, thereafter.

D. Cross Comparison of Data Between Participants A and B

This section provides a description of similarities and differences between the data from participants A and B. The purpose is to determine the extent to which the model of conversion plays out in these two individuals.

Causal Conditions

Both research participants experienced racism and its effects as causal conditions leading to the phenomenon.
They both had incidents during their youth and young adulthood that impacted their self view and thinking about their place in the world. Participant A’s experiences were more intense because of the geographic area he lived. The 1960’s were very turbulent times regarding race relations, particularly in the south. African Americans of all ages were responding against racism.

Everyone in their families was involved in overcoming racism. Both participant’s fathers had a profound influence on their sons. They served as role models in protesting the treatment of African Americans. Participant A’s father was a Baptist minister and a civil rights activist in the south. His strategy for confronting racism was to be on the frontline standing for justice.

Participant B’s father was an auto factory worker who protested racism in his home, with his family, through an ongoing intellectual analysis of contemporary events and evidences of racism in white institutions. Both approaches were effective at raising their son’s consciousness of the problems of African Americans and encouraging them to take action.

The effects of racism on the participants was different. Participant B developed a sense of race pride. He learned from his experiences that he was as good as any white person. But as he matured he realized that African
Americans as a group had a problem with inferiority if they bought into the philosophy of white supremacy.

On the other hand, participant A was a victim living within a stronghold of white supremacy. He developed a negative self identity and ethnic group identity. He learned the limitations of the African American existence. His experiences taught him blacks had to live with constant physical and psychological barriers. Certain material things were not available to him and there were places he could not go.

The difference between these two effects on the participants can be partly attributed to the environment and the frequency and intensity of interaction with racism. As a result, participant A was more directly impacted in his individual psyche. His encounter with racism was always intense and everpresent. Whereas participant B was less impacted in his individual psyche, his consciousness grew from lessons learned by observing what was happening to other African Americans. The initial net effect of racism on both participants was a strong desire to do something about it. They implemented strategies to manage the powerlessness they experienced and/or perceived.

**Action/Interactional Strategies**

Both participants used various strategies for managing
the phenomenon. Participant A was somewhat accepting of the status quo as a youth. There was nothing he could do about his environment between the ages of 11 to 18. He tended to internalize his situation. However, as a freshman in college he demonstrated against segregation as a strategy for attempting to gain some power. Unfortunately the consequences of this action was negative and immediately led to great dissatisfaction. These consequences kept him suppressing feelings of guilt and inferiority. It was not until he graduated from college, and moved away from the south, that he was able to begin to reconcile some of his personal issues.

Participant B began protesting racism during high school. He never internalized the perspective of African Americans held by white supremists. The interaction with his father and mother was a constant filtering process within a strategy of not accepting the status quo. His positive sense of race pride helped him organize against racism. He also used the strategy of getting an education until he became dissatisfied with the Eurocentric approach. He completed his degrees but this rejection of the status quo made him want to change the educational system and do more for African Americans.

Both research participants managed the phenomenon to an extent until their dissatisfaction with the consequences
combined with the transition period of finishing school and developing as young adults. This period served as an intervening condition that thrust them into a major decision making mode.

Intervening Conditions

The transition period of both participants was marked by the following three elements: movement into adulthood, critical self reflection, and a state of anomie. The transition into adulthood occurred between the ages of 21 and 25. During the transition they critically reflected on their self identity, ethnic identity and their place in the world. As both men were finishing college they were confronted with the idea of facing the world alone. This was the condition of anomie.

Participant A was literally cut off from his family and friends in a strange city without money, food, or shelter. His negative self view would not allow him to seek help from his family. In contrast participant B anticipated the condition of anomie because he was stepping out into the professional world alone for the first time. Nonetheless they both asked questions about the who, what, how, and why of their personal and ethnic group condition.

Critical self reflection was evident in both participants questioning their identity’s and their reality.
They were seeking answers, but also a way to liberate themselves from the unpleasant conditions of their lives. Participant B sought liberation from his immoral behavior. Participant A sought a way out of his life that he described as hell.

Consequences

This search for inner peace/spiritual liberation culminated with all of their life experiences. An underlying theme is they both rejected the status quo. This led them to investigate other perspectives and accept Islam as a way of life. They saw Islam as the answer to their life’s questions and the solution to their problems.

Conclusion

Racism and segregation have such a profound effect on some African Americans that they adopt strategies to manage their powerlessness. When dissatisfied with the consequences of their attempts to gain power, coupled with critical reflection during a major life transition period, they began a process of seeking liberation. This desire for liberation and peace led these two African American males to investigate Islam.

This is not a linear model. The stages are dynamic and can occur over and over again. For example, both
participants experienced various encounters before they began protesting racism. When they were dissatisfied with the consequences of previous actions toward empowerment, an alternative was needed. For both participants, moving toward an empowered position was triggered by the transition period and critical reflection. The search for inner peace/spiritual liberation was a strategy of empowerment and accepting Islam became the action toward integration.

There seems to be enough evidence from these cases to justify the model of Islamic conversion among African American males. Although their life experiences were different there seem to be enough similarities to support the model. Differences seem to be explained by geographic region, frequency of incidents with racism, and intensity of these causal conditions. The major decision points around dissatisfaction, transition period with critical reflection, and the search for spiritual liberation and inner peace, leading to the decision to accept Islam, seem to hold true for both participants.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

In the preceding chapters, this research project has dealt with the issue of conversion to Islam among African American males as a decision in a process of individual transformation. The research focused on the social and cultural conditions leading to the decision to convert to Islam. The research took the life experiences of the research participants and developed a model in exploring the meaning of Islamic conversion and how conditions, strategies, and consequences influenced the decision to become a Muslim.

The themes identified, developed, and presented in the model, in the previous chapter, represent the researcher’s efforts to organize the information provided by the participants to enhance understanding and knowledge about Islamic conversion. These themes were not limited or exhaustive, but they were a way to organize the data and explain the views and experiences of these participants.

What is portrayed in this study is only a small segment of the overall picture of contemporary Islamic conversion. Other ethnic groups with different social and cultural experiences are converting to Islam in America and Europe.
It is important to recognize the sample in this study was limited to African American males.

The research findings support some of the literature on religious conversion. First, findings support Lofland and Stark's model of conversion as a gradual process. Secondly, findings are consistent with Straus' (1974, 1976) perspective of conversion originating through dissatisfaction or a specific problem within a constraining environment that forces the person to seek alternative ways to cope with their situation. In this research study the constraining environment was racism and the dissatisfaction concerned an acceptable way to manage the powerlessness resulting from experiences with racism. Thirdly, the findings support Silverstein's (1988) belief that conversion is connected to sociocultural forces, critical reflection, and life span developmental needs.

Furthermore, Silverstein (1988, p. 281) believes that conversion addresses the problems of "preconversion unhappiness" and "poor relationships" through self transformation. If this can happen with an individual, then couldn't it occur with a group of people? Couldn't the social reality experienced by African Americans and the negative perception of African American males throughout American history provide evidence of preconversion unhappiness and poor relationships with the power structure
and peers? This study identified the social and cultural conditions of preconversion among two persons in this specific group.

The research findings also support the literature in adult education on perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990), but only partially. The first five stages of Mezirow's model (disorienting dilemma; self examination; critical assessment of sociocultural assumptions; recognition of one's discontent; and exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions) are supported by this research study. However, no data were gathered to support the remaining stages of his model (planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing the plan; trying new roles; building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and reintegration into one's life).

One reason for this may be that this study only examined the conversion process to the point of decision. Making the decision to convert does not complete the transformation process. In some respects it only begins the process. Further research on how new converts to Islam learn to develop new roles and relationships after the decision making process may provide data to address the remaining stages of perspective transformation as they relate to religious conversion.
The most significant finding of this research study is the model of Islamic conversion unique to the experience of two African American males. The model emerged from the data as evidence of the social and cultural context of racism and their inability to cope with the environment in a satisfactory manner. Eventually their dissatisfaction, life transition, and search for answers to their conditions combined to force a decision to change. This change had to be unique and not apart of the status quo establishment. Islam became the answer to their quest.

Broader Implications of the Model of Conversion

Experiences with Racism

Race has been and continues to be a dominant issue in American society. The historical and cultural context surrounding racism is traced back through slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and civil rights. Unfortunately, it continues to demand significant attention. Race remains near the top of concerns for Americans as evidenced by reactions to the O.J. Simpson trial and verdict.

African Americans have been confronted with racism at the core of their social reality and worked to overcome it. They have not fought this battle alone. During the civil rights movement, energy and influence to overcome racism was
initiated through legislation and enforced through the courts. The list of laws touch every aspect of human life. The laws and the civil rights movement legitimized the rights of African Americans to fight back against oppression. From the emancipation proclamation to laws on desegregation, education, voting rights, and equal employment opportunity address the impact of racism on the lives of minorities and/or women.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made on this issue, a problem with this approach is that morality cannot be legislated. A good example of this reality are statements made by Darryl Gates, former Los Angeles Police Chief, in a recent television interview with Diane Sawyer. Mr. Gates stated that "people have a constitutional right to have racist thoughts as long as they don't act it out in a significant way to go against the law." A change in racist attitudes can only occur in the hearts and minds of people, not because the law will punish them, if they get caught.

It seems that progress has been made in the war against racism, but not without severe consequences, especially for African Americans.

**Effects of Racism**

When racism is a way of life, it creates negative consequences for all involved. The oppressors and victims
become stagnant in perspectives and patterns of thinking. This study did not address the many negative effects of racism on whites. It focused on the effects of racism on African Americans, particularly African American males.

At some point during their lives, most, if not all, African Americans have to resolve at least one or a combination of issues as a result of their social and cultural experiences. In part, early socialization experiences have been influenced by the germ of racism permeating the environment. If not directly, then indirectly through experiences of family and friends. Some of the issues to be resolved may include:

- psychological and emotional turmoil
- a negative self identity and group identity
- inferiority complex
- feeling oppressed
- perception of inhumanity (external and internal)
- less educational and/or economical opportunities
- lower standard of living

Racism and its effects are often experienced through social contact with persons who work within a public institution and/or private business. These experiences may begin at a very young age. Lasting effects of negative experiences with racism during childhood socialization may result in deep seated pain and an awareness of one’s powerlessness in the social and cultural system. This represents the core phenomenon facing African Americans, in general, and African American males in particular.
Pain of Powerlessness

Feelings of powerlessness are perceptions that shape human reality. Once a person perceives himself or herself to be powerless they may be confronted with perceptual and emotional barriers that stifle their action. Misperceptions and fear can be overwhelming and lead to passive action or aggressive action. Once one encounters a feeling of powerlessness he or she must develop strategies to manage it, work through it, or overcome it.

Pain Management Strategies

When a human being faces the discomfort and pain of being powerless, it is only natural to desire a state of balance. Reaching balance means developing strategies to gain enough power to handle the phenomenon or pain of powerlessness. There is not one strategy that works for every person. These different strategies may be focused internally, within the person, or externally, outside of the person. They may also be socially acceptable and within the "status quo" system or not socially acceptable and outside of the status quo system. Examples of internal strategies include, but are not limited to:

- self oppression
- self identity crisis
- depression
- protecting oneself in solitude
- alcohol & drug abuse
• playing victim
• hiding pain inside
• suppressing feelings
• isolation
• being totally alone
• accepting culturally induced values
• trying to leave the past & move on with life
• running away
• migrating from the mental, emotional torture
• believing one deserves to suffer
• pride and stubbornness
• developing an inferiority complex
• critical reflection on oneself and one’s situation
• taking responsibility for oneself
• moving toward maturity

Examples of external strategies are:

• intellectual dialogue
• black consciousness
• joining an organization
• trying to find an acceptable identity outside of oneself
• getting an education
• starting a legitimate business
• starting an illegal business
• pursuing a sports career
• pursuing a professional career in entertainment
• obtain a "position"
• demonstrations (marches, sit ins, writing, speaking out)
• social and political activism
• rejection of status quo religion (Christianity, Judaism)

Some of these strategies may produce consequences that are socially acceptable or some that are not socially acceptable. Regardless of the consequences, these strategies represents efforts to find balance and peace of mind.

These strategies and their consequences represent a critical stage in the model. There is no set time period
for an individual to come to one of these strategies and be engaged in associated activities. Pain management strategies can be a continuous process through application of a single strategy or multiple strategies until the individual’s soul reaches a state of peace and satisfaction. One could reach a point of satisfaction with one or more of these strategies and make them a lifelong pursuit.

For example, an individual could accept the status quo, make no attempt to gain power, and withdraw from the struggle for inner peace. Others have made careers out of demonstrations, social and political activism in an attempt to gain power.

Jesse Jackson is a good example. He has been involved in demonstrations from the 1963 March on Washington to the 1995 Million Man March. He has also led boycotts of businesses to protest racism. Therefore, he has some level of satisfaction with these strategies and feels no need for change.

In contrast, when an individual is dissatisfied with their attempts to gain power or not to gain power, then there is need for further action. One may spend their whole life trying different strategies, until they find one that results in peace and satisfaction. The lack of satisfaction is one of the most critical turning points in the theory.
Dissatisfaction with Consequences

Unanticipated consequences from attempts to reach balance may result in a state of dissatisfaction. This result may cause an individual to pursue other socially acceptable strategies or a strategy outside of social norms. It is at this point one may confront, for the first time, the phenomenon of powerlessness and its pain.

Awareness of dissatisfaction with the consequences of one’s actions and the inability to deal with the pain increase the desire for an acceptable solution. One may begin to critically reflect on their experiences and look for alternatives. When critical reflection is associated with traumatic life experiences or a transition period, then the person is ready for a change.

Transition Period with Critical Reflection

Necessity is the mother of invention. After various strategies have been tried and resulted in dissatisfaction, then the individual needs to find another way to reach equilibrium and peace of mind. Sometimes it takes a traumatic event or a major transition period in the form of lifestage development to force a change. After everything else has failed, and the individual begins to reflect during this period of transition, a decision is made to seek answers and achieve spiritual liberation. For African
Americans who have already rejected the status quo religion (Christianity), seeking spiritual liberation leads to a curiosity about, and subsequently, an investigation of Islam.

Why Islam?

This is a very difficult question to answer. This study has described the events that took place as these persons converted. It described the model they went through in choosing Islam as their way to fight back against an oppressive social and cultural environment. But it is not altogether clear why they accepted Islam.

Although the data do provide some possible explanations for their decision, there may be alternative possibilities as well. The model does not fully address this issue, partly because the researcher did not get deeply enough into the participants to get that kind of data. This represents an incompleteness in the model and an important gap that still needs to be addressed. Nevertheless, reflection on this issue in the light of this study does provide points for discussion.

Throughout American history, white supremacy, sometimes in the name of Christianity, has been used to oppress, beat, burn, lynch, and shoot some African Americans. So it is understandable that some persons, seeking liberation from
oppression, would not find peace and satisfaction within the religious system of their oppressor. Islam is the only major religion not connected, associated, controlled, or led by whites. Those who have chosen to reject the status quo, in all aspects are left with Islam as the viable option to find peace, satisfaction, and liberation of the soul.

Additional rationale for acceptance of Islam cannot be separated from the stages of the model. Experiences with and the effects of racism, feeling powerless, engaging strategies to manage the pain, and still feeling a sense of dissatisfaction seem to culminate through a process of critical reflection during major life transition.

The culmination of many elements leads one to desire inner peace and liberation of their human spirit. Some of the issues driving the desire for inner peace may relate to any stage in the process, but seem to emerge in a time of transition, critical reflection and searching. The issues can be grouped into categories, such as Ethnicity/Historical, Education, and Spiritual Knowledge.

Ethnicity/Historical Focus

Islam is a big part of African heritage. Many great African civilizations were Islamic civilizations. Even today Islam is prevalent in many African nations such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Ghana, Egypt, etc. Islam has
contributed to the image of Africans and all blacks as dignified people.

In Islam, the black man is not inferior. From the Islamic perspective, unlike the history of American culture, race is not a criteria for judgement of people. Islam distinguishes people by faith, belief, and the degree of righteous deeds performed for Allah’s pleasure. Islam affirms the humanity of every human being, including African Americans. During the significant part of its history, this society rejected the humanity of African American people. Islam addresses this issue in a significant way.

The Nation of Islam was the first organized group to use Islamic terminology and principles to instill ethnic pride and a positive ethnic identity among African Americans. This identity helped many members reform from crime and contribute positively to the African American community. The Nation of Islam was run and operated without the aid of whites. It portrayed a strong image of blacks who were not afraid to stand up and empower themselves.

The organization provided a structure and a program to solve the social and economic problems of African American people. This program was independent of whites. It was not controlled by whites. In fact, whites were not allowed to join the organization between 1930 and 1975. Although this distinction between races is not acceptable in Islam, the
experiences with and effects of racism and the pain of powerlessness may make an organization run by African Americans more appealing to those victims of racism who reject the status quo.

This organization represented a power against the racist system. As a counterhegemonic force it opened people up to black consciousness, ethnic pride, and a new attitude or spirit of the African Americans ability to do for themselves. As evidence, the organization established businesses and educational institutions outside of the control of the white system. These positive results from the work of the Nation of Islam could not have been accomplished without an educational process.

Educational Focus

Rubenstein (1990) defines hegemony as "the way one social class exercises political, cultural, or economic influence over other classes." The concept of hegemony is directly related to education. In this society, limited education translates into less economic or political power. Historically, African Americans have had limited educational opportunities, hence less power.

Conversion to Islam represents a counterhegemonic force for education and re-education of African Americans. During the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's, Islamic converts were
educated in reading, writing, English, and mathematics. The Nation of Islam had an educational entity called The University of Islam for basic adult education and for educating Muslim youth. The organization stressed basic education of converts in prison.

In addition to basic education, Islam requires a restructuring of values. The dominant value in Islam is the Oneness of God. The restructuring of values includes re-education about who The One God is, what the human beings proper relationship should be with The One God, and the role of the human being in this life.

Islam gives a clear description of the Lord, The One God, as the only one worthy of worship. This One Lord is described as the Guardian, Evolver, Cherisher, and Sustainer of everything in creation including all spheres of knowledge and activity. The One God who has created everything and therefore is the One with complete, absolute authority over everything. This message has an appeal to those African Americans who may be dissatisfied with the status quo.

African Americans have always had someone with complete authority over their existence. African Americans freedom was taken away, as they were brought to this country under duress. African Americans learned, the "hard" way, what it means to be a slave. White supremacy and racism dominated the social and cultural experience of African Americans.
Unfortunately, that authority was unjust. The authority of The One God is just. Since slavery has been a major aspect of the African American experience, Islam's message of equality has a natural appeal to some of these former slaves.

Islam promotes slavery from a different perspective. Society told blacks to idolize whites and be slaves to whites. Islam says the One God is the only one to idolize and serve as a slave. This concept is revolutionary. A slave can not serve more than one master. Therefore, this concept implies the human being who is a slave to the One God cannot be a slave to whites or anything else in creation.

To be a servant, slave to The One God means giving up one's freedom, in order to be obedient to The One God. This slavery means one is free from enslavement to any other beings. This one thought gives a freedom beyond any legislation, governmental definition, or organizational program. Islam gives African Americans freedom to be what God made him or her to be, that is, a human being.

Racism in America denied African Americans this sense of humanity. Islam gives this humanity back to African Americans without being sanctioned, controlled or influenced by whites and social institutions. Islam has been a force for the spiritual liberation of African Americans in spite
of media efforts to portray a negative image of Islam and Muslim.

Conclusions

After participating in the interview process with these participants and listening to their experiences with racism and Islamic conversion, it became apparent these individuals made a major life change. Their individual personalities and specific experiences seemed to influence the way they converted.

Based on discussions, the participants had major choices to make concerning the factors that influenced their decision to convert to Islam. These choices were related to the strategies used to manage the pain of powerlessness and reshape their identity. Other strategies for managing their response to racism were ineffective for these participants. For example, participant A became disenchanted with civil rights protests and Christianity after being shot at a demonstration. Participant B became dissatisfied with other philosophies, organizations, the education system, and his moral state.

Failure to reach a state of "peace" using other strategies was a major factor influencing their decision to convert. Dissatisfaction with consequences of previous strategies, the process of critical reflection, experiencing
transition into adulthood, and searching for answers and liberation were all major decision points in their journey to Islamic conversion. Islam became the strategy of choice for these individuals after having tried other approaches.

It can be concluded that Islam, as an alternative, became the strategy of choice for resolving personal identity issues. It also became a satisfactory strategy for liberating themselves from the experience of being African American males.

It is necessary for persons to implement empowerment strategies that provide them enough power to make changes, help themselves and eventually help others. Merely intellectualizing problems of others is not enough. The Nation of Islam, as an organization, sparked a higher awareness and provided an environment for change. Islam as a philosophy, a set of values and behaviors, and a way of life provided the strategy for moving them to integration.

Recommendations

The participants in this research study were African American males between the ages of 46 and 48. Both were college graduates. One participant completed a doctorate degree and the other a bachelor’s degree. Future research efforts could attempt to determine if the issues identified for these participants would apply to other converts to

118
Islam. For example, the experiences of African American female converts to Islam could be examined. In addition, future research could focus on conversion of other ethnic groups, such as Hispanics and European Americans with different social and cultural backgrounds.

The model of Islamic conversion could be tested further by conducting research on historical time periods. Data from recent African American male converts, since 1990, could be compared with data from persons who converted in the 1970's to determine the similarities and differences in social, cultural, and historical contexts of conversion to Islam.

This study only addressed the conversion process up to the point of the decision to convert. Future research could focus on the transformative process that occurs after this decision. Some of the issues to be addressed through this research could be: how the person(s) actually change their values and behaviors; how they take on new roles and relationships; what learning process was used to transform; and how their sense of self changed since the decision to convert. This could be useful in understanding the individual transformation change process and developing educational programs to help other African American males resolve personal identity issues and make meaningful change.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Probes
1. How did you come to be a Muslim or participate in the Islamic way of life?

2. Can you reconstruct any early social and cultural experiences in your life that may have contributed to your participation in Islam? . . . i.e., experiences in your neighborhood? . . . family? . . . school? . . . with friends? . . . and at work?

3. What significant incidents or events specific relationships with family, friends, and school mates; and stories about your childhood experience between ages 5 and 115 may have contributed to your becoming a Muslim?

4. Given what you have said about your life before you became a Muslim . . . how do you understand your decision to convert to Islam?

5. What does being African American or how does that relate to your conversion?

6. What did it mean to be African American in your family?

7. What was the environment telling you about who you were and what your place in society was?

8. What were you telling yourself about who you were and what your place in society was?

9. What did it mean to be a man in your family? What were the values?

10. What did it mean to be African American at a certain point when you were a young man?

11. What does converting to Islam really mean for you in light of these experiences and being African American growing up in the south?

12. At the point you made the decision to find the temple, what was going on with you?

13. Why did you choose Islam as opposed to something else?

14. What is it about Islam? What were your needs and what about Islam met those needs?
15. Why Islam? What does it mean in light of your experiences?

16. What does the temple represent for you?

17. What was your self view, your self concept, in this desperate situation?

18. How do you explain your Islamic conversion in light of the fact that you are African American? What was that connection? How does that relate?

19. What was happening within your mind, your feelings, your thoughts, your values at the point when you made the decision to accept Islam?

20. What are the immediate circumstances at the point of decision?
APPENDIX B

Example of Transcription and Case Study Report for Participant A
King got killed in 68. Yeah and ’68
something else happened. February 8,
1968, and its called the Orangeburg
Massacre. I was a student freshman at
South Carolina State College. Uh man,
and uh trying to reflect on this Brian.
I think this was probably something that
I guess again kind of shaped me (uh).

B: Take your time man.

A: Yeah at that point I was just in
school, well the summer before that was
when _____ and I you know we were in the
same high school. So that was the
summer that we kind of connected right.
You know (laughter), you know connected
right. So and (uhm) that was the same
summer that we met up in New York as
well. Alright but (uh) Orangeburg
Massacre was when some 30 or more
college students were shot on campus and
three of those students were killed. I
was one of the 30.

B: You were one of the 30 that got shot.

A: Yeah one of the 30. I got shot twice
and once in the arm and once two inches
above the ticker.

B: Whistle.

A: Yeah (unclear) and I don’t know I
guess that was another traumatic
experience that kind of I guess kind of
put me. I don’t know it’s kind of hard
to explain it but I guess certain things
happen to you and you know it’s like
kind of changes you, it makes you
(laughter) kind of (woo) you know so
again I think all of that had something
to do with it. And when that happened
(uhm) several things happened that night
that really also changed me, changed
you, changed me. And (uhm) what
happened was that (uhm) (sigh)
originaly I had no trust in going to
the local hospital you know but what
happened was I bleeding right and they
were buckshot. I was ______ they
were in my chest and I made it back to
the infirmary but they saw that I needed
to go someplace else. So I was taken to
the local Orangeburg hospital.
Incidentally, the incident arised around us trying to integrate a bowling alley you know.

B: That’s what kicked off...

A: That’s what really started it. I mean a couple of students went down to the bowling alley and they got rejected and then all of a sudden the word got back to the campus and was over a period of a maybe a week or two that all of this started happening. Then of course there’s climax with that shooting. But that’s what happened. The fact that we went back to the bowling alley that night that when really it kicked off. And all along I didn’t know that I was really following in my father’s footsteps but I was always (laughter) you know like him going out there to see what’s going on and being out there trying to get out front right. An upcoming freshman but at the bowling alley and at the conference there was a confrontation and (uhm and clears throat) and really it was pretty bad scene and a lot of folks got hurt but it was a matter of a crowd hurting each other as opposed to someone throwing or hitting us with a stick. But that’s what initiated the cops were there at the front of the bowling alley and the crowd was hear but the crowd behind didn’t see that could be up front so when the cops started swinging and the people up front trying to get back (clap of hand) boom I mean you know they saw an opening, people who were in the middle they were the ones that trampled and hurt. But anyway we moved from there and took the protest back to the campus and of course what happened after that was a lot of shutdown you know wanted the officials to do something. There was no real classes going on. There were several incidents where white folks had begin to come on campus and shoot and, of course, the only thing that we were doing was we had Molotav cocktails and (unclear) other things (uhm) and also there were those among us who you know obviously had prepared to do what they had to do to defend
themselves. And (uhm) what happened was that night I don’t know whether it was the end of the week or whatever period of time that was but when it happened from my recollection was that we had built the barn fire in the middle of the street and we were on campus they had sealed off the block you know we weren’t really, there weren’t really no people that we could harm because everything was self contained. The campus was closed up, the National Guard and the local policemen were already blocked off the streets so the traffic wasn’t really going. So the only thing we did was really build the barn fire in the middle just to get off our frustration in the middle of the street. The barn fire caused, well I should guess it maybe didn’t cause maybe someone intended for this to happen. But what happened was they came forward and (uhm) apparently what they said a policeman was struck. Out of the trauma someone was struck with a stick or something and.....

B: That’s what they said .....  

A: Yeah that’s what they said. It could of been. And then afterwards they said also there were gunfire coming from us to them. I didn’t hear any you know. I’m not saying that it didn’t I didn’t hear any. And then (uhm) I could see it, see it right now the fire, I mean see the shotgun blasts and everything. I was up front. I was up front and I could it, I can see the flames right now (unclear). And I saw it and I saw them coming but it was too late and I couldn’t get out, couldn’t get out of the range of fire. What seemed like an eternity, they say was only 30 or 20 seconds but man all I can remember was this (sound of gunfire) you know hails of bullets man. You know and what happened because I was up front and when I got hit I got spun around and I just felt myself getting knocked out. But then when I opened my eyes and all I could see man was students being mowed down just like this running, running just like this here (sound of running) and what beared the truth beared the
other that most of the students wounds 641
were in the back (laughing). Most of 642
the students wounds were in the back. I 643
might have been the only one shot in the 644
front but again after the aftermath 645
there were three students. Smith, 646
Hammond and Middleton. Smith, Hamilton 647
and Middleton. Smitty, Hamilton and 648
Middleton and Middleton was a high 649
school student who joined in the 650
protest. But like I said when I went to 651
the hospital that night (uh) I had 652
another rude awakening, I guess the 653
shotgun pellet didn’t enter my cavity 654
but it was still in my flesh wound, you 655
know it was still here in my muscle and 656
(uhm) I was in a room and I don’t know 657
who it was. I don’t know if it was 658
Smitty or I don’t know whether it was 659
Middleton but I heard them say that we 660
were looking at them, you know leave me 661
alone don’t touch me. He was kicking 662
and all of a sudden (shoo) it was quiet 663
and they kind of pulled the curtain 664
back. Whoever it was I knew that the 665
image of the (unclear) and then that’s 666
when they came over to me and I said man 667
(unclear) and guess what. They packed 668
me up shipped me right back to campus, 669
we can’t do nothing for him. (uhm hmm) 670
sent we there to get treated and they 671
told me no we going send you back to 672
campus.

So they knew all the time my father and 673
those was coming up and the word was 674
spreading they were trying to reach me 675
and find out if I was one of the ones 676
that eventually they figured something 677
was wrong because I didn’t call you 678
know. Finally they came and got me and 679
transported me back home in their car. 680
And that was about .... 681

B: (unclear) 682

A: Yeah in his car, in his car. About a 683
100 and 70 miles back in his car. I was 684
going back with one of my classmates. 685

B: And you still hadn’t had any 686
687
treatment? 688

A: No not at that point. I was just 689
laying on, in fact, the only no mother 690
was on the front, my father was on the
front and there was a sister in the
back, I can’t remember her name because
she was one of my father’s church
members who also went to the school and
one thing I remember is that she kept
telling us to lay on my lap, lay on my
lap you know. I couldn’t. The only way
I could get comfortable was, this is
strange, I said man if I lay down there
I’m not going to make it. The only way
I could get comfortable was to lay on
the floor board.

B: In the back of the car?

A: Yeah, that’s why I said no I cannot
lay stretched out on the backseat with
my head on your lap. I can’t do it. I
have to lay on the floor board. I got
to feel the ground. I got to feel
something you know (chuckle) and that
kind of kept me awake you know, kept me
awake. That kept me awake, kept me
awake because I didn’t want to go to
sleep man (uh uh) you know and that
(uhm) I was (unclear) because I did not
want to close my eyes you know. And so
eventually you know they get me to a
hospital and I got the operation. But
again that was a fleshy wound and
because of that muscle and fleshy I was
able to get up and go with them. So
again I think you know my leading to
Islam to the temple at that time was a
result of a lot of traumatic but yet
things that happened that, and I’m not
no special person because everybody when
you’re down south coming through that
you know hey man folks that happened to
folks. You know it happens you know.
Families lost love ones who have been
lynched. I mean (unclear) in fact we
had, Hugo took care of this tree but
there was a lynching tree right in the
middle of Ashley Avenue not far from my
father’s church. It was immortalized by
concrete and we dubbed it. It may have
been history law or it may have been
folklore that this tree was used to
hang, hang us. Hurricane Hugo came
through and ripped it out (laughter).
So you know what I mean but as a kid you
grew up there and every time you passed
it oh yeah that’s that lynching tree you know. But yeah so I know I came through all of that and I think because of that environment you know of all of that, when the brother when I went back on campus after I got through and I didn’t get back until maybe, this was in February right? I think that the atmosphere at that point and time was such where those whoever they were that were injured I think the professors and those kind of looked in terms of some empathy. I was allowed to take my exams even though I hadn’t really gone back to school and I admit I came through. I came through. I may have had some about a week or two of refresher course or something like that just to kind of catch me, catch me up. I came through it. But it wasn’t until the next year yeah. Now remember Dr. King got killed when?

B: That was the same year April 4, 1968.
A: Yeah that’s right so that hit me.
B: So that happened all at ...
A: That happened the same year too. John F. Kennedy when did he go, I’m not sure.
B: That was in November.
A: November
B: Was that before or after
A: Sixty seven. I think it was before.
B: Yeah that was in November.
A: Yeah, yeah, but again those are the time frames that I kind of grew up in you know and I think those are the things. Because in 1969 when I got back in school, I ran into a brother and his name was J C B. Now he’s from Charleston right? J C B. Boxer man. A little guy. Littlest guy you can imagine. I mean in fact little like (unclear). Little like Talib or maybe somebody but a boxer. In fact
away from that even. Again I said, man, you know, I kind of left that scene. I can hang but I really don’t want that right now. I got to find out, what else, something else is happening right now. I think again going back to that environment or that situation I put my self in, school, work, getting married, trying to survive, you know that kind of thing, pulled me away from it. But I can recall that that was there.

B: As an alternative. You talk about relationships and all that, that was there ...

A: Pause. I think to Brian, I was searching. And that might have been one of the overriding factors in allot of why the temple. Cause I was actually searching. I was actually searching. And regardless to the influences if your mind set is one direction, then ultimately, that might be the overriding thing that helps you keep that direction. And so, I was searching. I was both running and I was also searching. I was running from and not really knowing what I was running to. Being that, I know I was running from Christianity. Because of what I thought Christianity had done to me. IS CHRISTIANITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND ORANGEBURG INCIDENT CONVERGING TO THIS OPINION. AS WELL AS OBSERVING MOTHER AND FATHER? You know, it damned near got me killed. I mean all that stuff, right. I kind of put the blame, man, you know I was Christian and what not.

B: Oh you mean that was part of the Orangeburg thing?

A: Yeah. That was part of the psyche thing.

B: I mean Christianity was part of that?

A: Yeah. Yeah. So I think the mode I was in was searching, but what compounded it, what kind of forced me in that direction were the other things that I was trying to pull together. I
was trying to pull alot together. I’m trying to pull food, clothing, shelter. I’m trying to pull life together. You know, I’m trying to pull education together. I tried to pull all of that together. To me those were the positive things in my life. The positive poles that were pulling together. But at the same time those other negative influences were there.

B: So actually you did have some purpose?

A: Yeah. I think I did. I did. In spite of, in spite of the situation my purpose never died. Yeah I got depressed and may have got disposed but the purpose was there. And I think the role of being responsible that my parents put on us was a part of us, part of me. So when I got to the point where Joyce and I had committed to each other I couldn’t allow my responsibility to fall. Not from that standpoint. You know, that’s the thing that also helped to kind of propel me.

B: Aside from this, you said you were running from Christianity, I mean what else?

A: (Sigh) Well I think the fact that I was running from that Orangeburg scene in terms of what happened there. And what perhaps I caused. What transpired. I was also running from that. Hell man, you know, people got killed thirty something go shot. Man I wanted to leave that in the past. I wanted to bury that wherever (increased volume and tone of voice, and laughing) that’s supposed to be buried, you know. So, I mean there were alot of things there that I was running from. So like I said, I was running but at the same time there was some purpose and I wanted to know WHY (increased volume and tone)? You know why in the heck I came through all that. What in the hell was all that for? And then why was all that and why am I still going through some hell? IS THIS A DESCRIPTION OF HIS LIFE AS HELL? WAS HE LIVING IN HELL? You know why in
the hell I am still going through some
hell? I remember, I told you Billy or
somebody said to me when I walked in the
temple. You know, I was sweatin' man.
You know, I was running, I was walking
fast. Man said to me, "boy look like
you running from the hell fire."
(laughing). I said yeah. I said yeah
that's right.

B: What do you think about that comment?

A: Man, actually hindsight tells me, at
first I didn't really gather what he was
saying because I wasn't familiar with
the lingo. But afterwards I think that
he was right. In fact I tell what. I
had begun to deduct that. In fact
that's what was happening to me.

FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT HE BELIEVED HIS
LIFE WAS A LIVING HELL. I had begin to
deduct that all of that which I was
going through was Allah sending a
message to me. Telling me come on boy
get yourself together. Because I bought
you to the brink of the fire and I'm
giving you blessing to get it right one
more time. So hindsight after I got in
and I heard what the hell-fire and all
that was going on, that's how I began to
deduct it. And then see I began to say
O.K. so now I'm running from. I see
what I'm running from. So now where am
I going? Yeah. So yeah, absolutely.
That was interesting the fact that that
was the first words I heard. I think it
was Billy who said it. Bro. Weadad, I
think he was the one who said it. Maybe
it was somebody else. Somebody who stand
up. Because he was there searching me.
Yeah that was the reasoning that was the
rational, the fact that I thought, you
know (pause). On the brink of the fire,
buddy. You couldn't tell me I couldn't
see the fire. But said the brink of the
fire, shh, I saw those shotguns
wailing (increased volume and tone).
Yeah that's the fire (said softly). All
that other stuff... very close.
(Knocked on table twice). But for the
blessings of Allah. Sshoo. (Pause)
yeah. (pause). Yeah (increased volume
and sigh) so, those ah, those ah, those
ah, those ah, those are some of the
Interview 3 with Participant B

B: Basically after listening to the tapes what I want to do is come back to is the moment when you decided that you would join the Nation of Islam and become a muslim. And I know you had said some things about working in with a racist system that needed to be changed, and you wanted to find solutions to the problems of African Americans and that kind of thing but. In the first question you were saying something about you didn’t want to be hypocritical. Well I guess the first question is what was happening within your mind, your feelings, your thoughts ah your values at the point when you, when you made that decision?

H: Well the first thing that happened was really the coming to the conclusion that this was the best way to go. That this was the best philosophy.

B: But what does that mean? I mean what does that mean to you? What about it made you come to that conclusion?

H: Again I saw the organization having tremendous strengths in terms of discipline, in terms of self reliance, in terms of identity. I saw that as very positive. Um, I could not be a part of it because I thoroughly rejected the theology. Alright. Now once the theology changed and the theology became more consistent with what I had been studying and what I had been evolving in terms of a belief system. Then in a sense there was a match. There was a match between what I felt was true ah theologically and in terms of historical knowledge. You know, there was a match between that and what the nation of Islam was teaching. Now once I saw that that match was there, then the question for me was... I don’t remember exactly if the question for me was why should I not be a part of it? Or should I be a part of it? There was some variation on those basic questions. Um, and I ran, I tried to run through all the reasons why I shouldn’t be a part of it. And thase
APPENDIX C
Examples of Codes Indexed to Narrative
CAUSAL CONDITIONS

- Experiences with Racism
  
  - Segregation

  "I mean I can recall the store, the restaurants that I had to go around to the window to get served, okay. You know I mean there was one particular, it was like a White Castle kind of a restaurant. You know those little White Castles those little hamburger places, but man they sell some of the best raisin toast, you know. And all we wanted was raisin toast, right. But we couldn’t go in, we had to get it from the window from inside. We knew that even as a kid you knew that hey you can’t go inside that’s for white folks. And then again I’ll tell you, I was one who would know the whole city. I would walk, walk. Like I even try to do it now just walk the whole city now just to try to learn it. And you would know when you’ve walked you would know what fountains to go to. What fountains not to go. I mean it’s right up there in bold black, white only. Colored, we didn’t say black. It would say colored only, you know. White only and these were the bathrooms. And so even the movie theaters, you know." (Coded version of Alfred (participant A), line 277-303).

  - Symbols of inhumanity, inferiority
  - Gestures and obscenities

  " . . . I went in and bought some doughnuts and have whites come to the windows and spit on the window and make obscene signs. Those kinds of things. So things like that kind of hit you but again you know as a kid you know you don’t think about them" (coded version of Alfred, line 344-350).

- Traumatic incidents during childhood and young adulthood

  "I mean I’m going to tell you some of them were painful and I guess I’d trying to get to them, okay?"

  Interviewer: "Don’t let me interrupt you."
Participant A: "You know I’ll be _______ I’ll be reflecting back. One encounter we were going to. As a child we used to go every summer to Louisiana to my father’s home. And what happened there was an accident. Now of course we relied on my father in terms of explaining to me what was happening cause as a child in the car with my other brother, you know, we don’t, we’re just young, young kids. But it was obvious that what he was saying to the policeman, as we came to the scene in, it was either Georgia or Alabama, somehow I get the feeling it was Alabama. One of those states but we hadn’t got to Louisiana yet. We were side-swiped by a white driver who was driving another car. But, that’s the first moment I realized how delicate, well as a kid you really breakup right because what happened, he took our father away from us. Took my father away from me and my brother."

Interviewer: "Right there?"

Participant A: "Right there. I mean we were only like 11, 12, 13 man. You know, took him away. Sent us with a white family that I still cannot really visualize where they came from, alright. Not knowing what was going on with him, whether my mother knew what was going on, where we were. So you know, man, the only thing we had was me and my brother. So we were like balling, mean like crying (laugh). So that was one encounter that I never forgot as I was growing up and that stayed with me like, you know. Like where was my father? Why are you’ll treating us like this, you know, you know. I mean it’s like please where is my father. Like you’ve taken him away from me. Where is he? And that situation exists for about a week." (Coded version of Alfred, line 358-407).

- Effects of Growing Up in a Segregated Environment

PHENOMENON

- Pain Management and Powerlessness
CONTEXT

- Social and Cultural Climate (Segregation)
- Family Values
- Anomie

INTERVENING CONDITIONS

- Effects of Segregated Environment
  - Lessons Learned
    - not good to be black
    - being black equals constant barriers, powerlessness, and a limited existence
    - stick with own people
  - Distrust of White Institutions

- Identity Issues
  - Negative Self Concept
  - Damage to Psyche
  - Feelings of Unworthiness
  - Psychological torture and boundaries

- Dissatisfaction
  - With Status Quo Religion
  - With Himself & His Life
  - With consequences of action to deal with the Pain

- Transition into Adulthood
  - Critical Reflection
  - Responsibilities
  - Anomie
  - Marriage

- ACTION/INTERACTIONAL STRATEGIES
  - Handling the Pain and Guilt
  - Turn Inward - internalize powerlessness, pain; negative self concept; negative group
concept: self abuse, experimentation with drugs; ethnic pride; Black consciousness; leave town; memory loss; isolation; suppression; depression

- Turn Outward - demonstrate, protest
- led to dissatisfying consequences
- being shot

"... And then (uhm) I could see it. See it right now. The fire. I mean see the shotgun blasts and everything. I was up front and I could it. I can see the flames right now (unclear). An I saw it and I saw them coming but it was too late and I couldn’t get out, couldn’t get out of the range of fire. What seemed like an eternity, they say was only 30 or 20 seconds, but man all I can remember was this (sound of gunfire) you know hails of bullets, man. You know and what happened because I was up front and when I got hit I got spun around and I just felt myself getting knocked out. But then when I opened my eyes and all I could see man was students being mowed down just like this. Running, running, just like this here (sound of bullets) and what beared the truth. Beared the other that most of the students wounds were in the back (laughing). Most of the students wounds were in the back. I might have been the only one shot in the front ..." (Coded version of Alfred, line 628-654)

- no medical treatment
- guilt, fear
- powerlessness
- emotional pain
- black consciousness
- go to temple
- search for answers
- plea to God

• CONSEQUENCES (consequences of some actions did not lead to peace)

- culmination of experiences - a living hell
- immediate circumstances (anomie)
- need for belonging
- Accepting Islam - answers, identity, forgiveness, inner peace
B. ZAYID ABDUL-KARIM
8210 Anderson Dr.
Fairfax, VA. 22031
703 560-2911

CAREER SUMMARY: A total of fifteen years of work experience. Ten years in program management and five years in training and development with particular expertise in:

- organization development
- human resource development
- interpersonal communication
- leadership styles
- workforce effectiveness
- facilitation skills
- strategic planning
- team building
- diversity
- negotiation
- minority outreach
- client presentations

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

BOOZ-ALLEN AND HAMILTON 1996 TO PRESENT
Training Specialist
Serve as internal trainer and consultant in the areas of Consulting Skills and New Hire Orientation. Coordinate all off-site internal training programs for Worldwide Technology Business.

Accomplishments:
- Conduct training workshops with professional staff in consulting skills, such as Structured Writing, Client Presentations, and Face-to-Face Data Gathering Techniques.
- Conduct firm’s official orientation program for all new employees.
- Assist with the design and implementation of a Mentoring Program for African Americans within the firm through the African American Forum.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS, INC. 1995
Senior Associate
Responsible for the design and delivery of training, consulting, proposal writing, project curriculum development, marketing, and support services for contractual work.

Accomplishments:
- Assist with the design and delivery of dozens of 2–4 day training workshops in the areas of strategic planning and teambuilding, leading change and transition, workforce effectiveness, communication, diversity, and EE/AA Affirmative Action for mid level and
senior managers and technical employees within government agencies.
- Trained mid level managers in how to lead their employees effectively with individuals possessing different diversity factors.
- Coached individual employees on developing strategies for more effective problem solving during periods of reorganization and downsizing.
- Consulted with and coached mid to senior level managers on implementation of strategic plans and presentation to Board of Directors.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  1992-95
Graduate Assistant
Provided assistance to professors in the College of Education and College of Engineering including teaching, library research, graduate student services and clerical duties.

Accomplishments:
- Wrote and distributed bi-annual Department newsletter.
- Designed and facilitated class sessions, periodically.
- Served on Graduate Center Committee for Strategic Planning.
- Served on Graduate Center Director Search Committee.
- Assisted with planning and coordinating of Roundtable Conference on Green Engineering.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS  1990-1991
Program Analyst
Planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated Chapter 2 statewide "Effective Schools" mini-grant projects with public and non-public schools.

Accomplishments:
- Provided technical assistance to projects on fiscal matters to ensure compliance with federal regulations.
- Assisted with development of Chapter 2 State plan and amendments.
- Provided technical assistance to DCPS as a proposal reviewer for outside grant applications.
- Coordinated Chapter 2 workshops on Proposal Development and Effective School Leadership.
ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION OF GREATER WASHINGTON 1988-1990
D.C. Outreach Coordinator
Conducted major outreach efforts in D.C. and Prince George’s County, especially minorities, to provide public education on Alzheimer’s disease and develop support services for under served families.

Accomplishments:
- Planned, designed, implemented, and gave dozens of presentations at educational activities such as annual conferences, community educational meetings, workplace seminars, and special population conferences.
- Established and maintained productive relationships with local church groups, civic associations, universities, non-profit organizations, government and private agencies.
- Recruited and worked with board members and other volunteers as staff liaison to Education Committee and Minority Outreach Committee.

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY 1987
CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Human Resource Development Consultant

Accomplishments:
- Designed and implemented a JTPA training program emphasizing job readiness, motivation, goal setting, self assessment, skill identification, occupational exploration, interview skills, and non-verbal communication.
- Conducted 3-day and 5-day workshops for youth employment programs to help youth develop job seeking employability skills.


ADDITIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

NATIONAL LOUIS-UNIVERSITY 1993-Present
Adjunct Faculty
Teach undergraduate classes to working adults in the Management program.
Accomplishments:
  - Designed curriculum and taught over 20 undergraduate courses in the areas of Organizational Behavior, Communication in Organizations, Communication Skills for Managers, Management and Supervision, Managerial Ethics, and Managing Diversity in the Workplace.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY 1995
Adjunct Faculty 1990-1991
Designed and taught three undergraduate courses on "Administration and Supervision of Human Development Programs" in the School of Education and five continuing education classes on "Communication Skills" in the School of Continuing Education.

EDUCATION

Ed.D., Adult and Continuing Education 1996
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,
Falls Church, VA.

M.P.A., Masters of Public Administration 1982
The American University, Washington, D.C.

B.A., Man-Environment Relations (Urban Planning) 1977
The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA.