

## **“You can’t really look normal and dress modestly:” the Problem of Dress & American Muslim Women College Students**

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### **Abstract:**

The image of the veiled Muslim woman continues to be used by Orientalists as well as feminists to establish the foreignness and the barbarism of Islam and Muslims. Mystery, foreignness, traditionalism, remoteness from modernity, disempowerment, victimization, and lack of agency are wrapped up in this image. American Muslim women, including college students, find that this powerful image, fueled by popular culture, remains a backdrop to their identity work on campuses. In this paper, I examine the data from my interview-based study of American Muslim women’s identity work on two college campuses in the Washington, DC area, focusing on American Muslim women’s encounters with this image, how they resist and challenge it. I examine the role of modest clothing as well as the *hijab* in Muslim women’s identity work. Under “scrutiny from the colonial, Orientalist, religious, multi-culturalist, academic, and feminist gaze” (Khan 2002, xxi), my participants challenge the attempts of the gaze to categorize and stereotype them. They are “constantly pressured to identify [“their”] single truth” and as they “express [their] desire for flexibility and the right to be contradictory and confused, which more fully reflects the hybrid nature of [their lives, they] receive subtle and sometimes not so subtle messages that [they] do not quite fit” (ibid). They “do not quite fit” in dominant majority circles, nor do they fit in the one-dimensional mold of the Muslim woman generated by the Orientalist perspective. Often, they do not measure up to Islamist expectations either.

### **Introduction**

Everyone wants to know what Muslim women are wearing, why they are wearing it, and why they are not wearing something else. It is assumed that they will veil, yet they are questioned for both the presence and absence of the veil. Muslim women’s distinctive clothing is a form of difference to the North American dominant majority that stands out in public spaces, including college campuses, despite the academic ethic of diversity and tolerance. To many of their peers, the veil and other forms of distinctive clothing has associations of fear (terrorism), inferiority and subordination (disempowered femininity), and excessive religiosity.

A case in point for the veil as symbolizing disempowered femininity is the American focus on Afghan women’s burqa. The tyranny of the fashion police in Kabul was attacked by the new fashion police, who are less focused on indicators of women’s well-being than on their clothing. As Franks (2003) shows, in support of the Afghan women against “barbaric” Afghan men, it is not Afghan women that are truly present but the Feminist Majority: Afghan women, though invoked, are not present.

Far more interested in portraying Afghan women as mute creatures covered from head to toe, the Feminist Majority aggressively promotes itself and its campaign by selling small squares of mesh cloth, similar to the mesh through which Afghan women can look outside when wearing the traditional Afghan burqa. The post card on which the swatch of mesh is sold says, “Wear a symbol of remembrance for Afghan women,” as if they are already extinct.” (Franks, 2003)

Even Laura Bush, by no means a member of the Feminist Majority, uses Afghan women as a cause. The empowerment and emancipation of women is assumed to be a western cause, and one to which the civilized western world must convert the “barbaric” and patriarchal Muslim world.

Before 2001 as well as after, the image of the Muslim woman—generally identified by clothing—is used as a pawn between the “barbaric” Muslim world and the “civilized” West. Clothing is key in this image, as the veil and modest clothing are used to project essentialized attributes of the Muslim woman – mystery, strangeness, foreignness, traditionalism, remoteness from modernity, disempowerment, victimization, and lack of agency. This continues to be the case in the US, in terms of imagery of American Muslim communities.

Not surprisingly, American Muslim women college students find that the image of the Muslim woman in the burqa, the veil, and/or the headscarf continues as a sensational backdrop to their navigation of campus spaces. Muslims in North America, from many geographical regions, are “assumed to be a single, monolithic religious immigrant community with few class and race differences” (Haddad and Smith, 1993). Muslim women are generalized as all wearing the veil and being subservient to men (Bilge and Aswad, 1996).

In my study of American Muslim women college students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, I have come to recognize the importance of the “in-between” spaces that allow for the “[elaboration of] strategies of selfhood – singular or communal,” the “interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” (Bhabha 1994: 1-2). These young women all identified as Muslim. All of them had different ways of doing so. The Muslim women I interviewed are under “scrutiny from the colonial, Orientalist, religious,<sup>ii</sup> multiculturalist, academic, and feminist gaze” (Khan 2002, xxi).

Cultural / religious narratives are frequently founded on misleading notions of racial and ethnic purity that deny constantly produced and performed hybridity. They channel us toward binary positions of victims / victimizers and oppressors / oppressed, positions that have explanatory power and are easily recognized as symbols of the “correct” truth (ibid, xxi).

Like Khan, my participants are

constantly pressured to identify [“their”] single truth” and as they “express [their] desire for flexibility and the right to be contradictory and confused, which more fully reflects the hybrid nature of [their lives, they] receive subtle and sometimes not so subtle messages that [they] do not quite fit” (ibid).

Within what Bhabha calls the “cultural third space,” (Bhabha 1994) “cultural orientations and identities are continually being made” (S. Hall, 1996, 629, cited in K. Hall 2002), yet Muslim women are still imagined as one-dimensional images in a monolithic community.

I draw on Khan’s work because her work and mine have a great deal in common; I use the medium of clothing to examine, like her,

this seemingly unbridgeable duality of Orientalism and Islam that encourages an allegiance to either one or the Other and thus discourages the in-between gray zones from which progressive politics often emerges. I want to complicate the term Muslim and write in the history that constructs and reinforced the duality of

Orientalism and Islam. And I want to challenge liberal feminist calls to free Third World women, in particular Muslim women, from their communities (ibid, xxiii).

From 2002 to 2003, I conducted a study<sup>iii</sup> of American Muslim undergraduate females' experiences of campus climate and their identity work at Georgetown and George Washington Universities. My dissertation study was concerned with the nature of American Muslim students' construction of their identities, their cultural production, and the way in which campus climate facilitated and/or inhibited this identity work. In this paper, I discuss the nature of American Muslim women college students' identity work as it relates to the issue of clothing. My main concern will be with the pressures on American Muslim women's identity work, as well as their resistance to being categorized and stereotyped.<sup>iv</sup>

Conventional notions of ethnic identity have identified static characteristics of groups of people (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975, in Khan, 1). Social theorists have emphasized that ethnic boundaries are permeable and shifting (Bhabha (1994c), Anzaluda (1987) and Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) and Stuart Hall (1996)). Khan draws on Bhabha's notion of hybridized subjectivity in the third space and Anzaluda's notion of a "mestiza" consciousness. My participants refuse to be placed in static molds, and challenge others to recognize their hybridity and complexity, by refusing to provide data about themselves, sticking with their religious and cultural peer groups to avoid negative encounters, and avoiding in-between spaces. Sometimes, they withdraw from the "battle," disguising their identity or avoiding the appearance of difference. At times they accept the stereotypes regarding Muslim women, only to assert that they are different, and at other times they challenge the stereotype altogether.

Many of my participants find that they do not fit in at college since they make choices related to clothing that are different from the dominant majority. This difference of clothing is such that middle class status and even whiteness do not suffice to compensate for it. Some refuse to provide data to their peers whereby they may become categorized as hyper-feminized Muslim women, while others challenge the gaze by confusing it. Many are aware that hijab is a source of discomfort to peers but challenge their peers to embrace their complete hybridity. They dodge stereotypes of the purely religious veiled Muslim women, and find themselves in the range of stereotypes of the non-observant unveiled Muslim woman. They invite their peers to see them in their entirety as American, Muslim, ethnic (where applicable), and, if applicable, religious as well as resisting religious strictures.

Muslim women recognize that there are certain spaces that many Muslim women do not fit in due to certain features of modest clothing or hijab, while those women who do frequent such spaces, are aware that hijab will restrict their choices. Even certain careers are not welcoming spaces for women with hijab, and some kinds of religious/intellectual exploration may be difficult for women with hijab. At the same time, some Muslim women feel that hijab may offer greater mobility by preventing undesirable attentions from men. However, Muslim men are subject to fewer clothing-related restrictions deriving from contemporary religious codification; this makes "fitting in" easier on college campuses, since they may simply wear Western clothing without being perceived as irreligious. Hijab itself appears to bestow/impose representative (of Islam and Muslims) status on a woman that may be a privilege or a burden. Muslim women feel that this static image of a Muslim woman impacts how seriously their opinions are taken and how they are stereotyped. As for those women who do not wear hijab, they are interrogated about their religious status, but many of them enjoy disrupting the assumptions of their peers. In religious terms, Muslim women are often sandwiched between conservative demands to observe particular rules on clothing and modernist or progressive opposition to such regulations.

## **“You can’t really look normal and dress modestly”**

Obviously, religiously perhaps, I don’t think I was [fully prepared when I first became Muslim]—I mean, I was fine with praying five times a day and fasting. The biggest thing was clothing. I think that might have been it. Because you can’t really look normal and dress modestly. I mean you can to some extent. You can pull it off to some degree. But you’ll never—[trails off]. ... And so I think that was one of the things that—there are definite barriers between being religious and being normal in society. And you can make up to a certain degree with personality or knowledge of popular culture—or being interested in having a fun time that’s not necessarily *haram*<sup>v</sup> or something, but ...

Heather’s comments during an interview give me a clue to the importance of women’s clothing at a hip, expensive, private, metropolitan university. A white convert, Heather does not wear a headscarf. She perceives a conflict between dressing modestly/being religious and looking normal/American society. Majority society may provide you some space to dress modestly/be religious (“I mean you can to some extent,” “You can pull it off to some degree,” “You can make up to a certain degree ...”), but this is space for which you *work*.

Heather does not wear low-rise short skirts, or tight pants, cropped tank-tops, or high heels. She is wearing a loose cotton shirt, with a t-shirt inside it, and a long denim skirt to her ankles. She certainly doesn’t seem to be one of the most “popular” girls on campus, or the most fashionable—and at this campus, these are important categories. But in some ways, also, she is careful about her thesis. She knows “you can pull it off to some degree,” because she does. With her American Eagle T-shirt and Gap skirt, she does not stand out like I do, with my K-Mart pants and Target top. She is put-together: her ensemble may not be from the cat-walk, but it is not completely out of place here, where the children of diplomats mingle with the children of millionaires and neurologists. But there’s something “you’ll never” manage to do: she will not blend into that space where people are normal because they belong in the highest/higher status category, and dress is a marker of comfort in that high status.

As a white woman who grew up in a prosperous Christian family, Heather does not have to cope with the pressures of racial/ethnic/cultural/class difference. But she will remain at the margins rather than the core of this campus culture, in terms of how the dominant groups identify it. Yet she and others insist on redefining the culture, redefining the core and the margins. Even as she does so, however, she is aware of the ironies of her resistance: she can compensate for her religiosity by being “cool” and dressing contemporary, with personality; but then, she has to compensate.

There are times when Heather is called upon to explain her choice of clothing, despite her efforts to blend in.

In an effort to find parking, which is difficult to find, Heather responds to an advertisement, and walks some distance to negotiate with a resident regarding a parking-spot., dressed in a long Gap-style skirt and a long-sleeved cotton shirt. The resident interrogated her, trying to get information about her religious and/or cultural background.

She was—it was like 90 degrees, in the middle of DC, in the middle of summer, and I walked all the way to her place to check out the parking spot. And she’s like talking, and she was really sort of, *prying*, which sort of bothered me. And she was like, ‘So—you’re at [the university]?’ I was like, ‘Yes.’ And she’s like,

‘Do you take any foreign languages there?’ And I was like, ‘Spanish!’ And she’s like, ‘That’s it?’ I was like, ‘Yep.’ And she’s like, ‘What’s your major?’ I’m like, ‘Anthropology.’ She goes, ‘Do you study any certain region of the world?’ I was like, ‘Not really.’ She’s like, ‘Eastern Europe?’ I was like, ‘No, I have no reason whatsoever to study Eastern Europe.’ And then she’s like, ‘Well, you walked here; it’s such a hot day.’ I’m like ‘Yes.’ She’s like, ‘The way you’re dressed, you look Amish!’ And she didn’t say it like a statement; she said it like—it was very much like, ‘Are you Amish?’

Several things about the parking-spot owner’s behavior are offensive. First, Heather does not generally wear her faith on her sleeve, because she wishes to avoid negative encounters. She plans her clothing strategically so as to be as unobtrusive as possible, yet the woman tactlessly probes her attempts at disguise. Second, she implies ridicule of Heather’s clothing, but only by dropping hints, in a manner that prevents Heather from returning fire or even avoiding her curiosity. Third, American norms of polite society (the campus is in a wealthy neighborhood) do not permit for direct questioning into strangers’ religious beliefs, and Heather is annoyed that her choice of clothing seems to allow the woman to breach social norms. The woman feels she has the right to pry into her background and beliefs. Fourth, the woman assumes that Heather belongs to a small, otherized religious group, or that she is foreign, or has foreign background, or speaks a foreign otherized language, and demands information, leaving little room for Heather to maneuver out of the corner. While Heather almost triumphantly proves her credentials (she studies an American foreign language, Spanish; she does not study the culture of a region outside the U.S.), this does not satisfy the woman. This makes her intrusion into Heather’s private selfhood more offensive.

Heather is aware that there is an alternative strategy that many Muslim women would exercise: *da'wah*.<sup>vi</sup> She distances herself from this choice, opting to preserve her privacy from a prying, rather insensitive stranger. This may be due to her clear identification as an indigenous (rather than an immigrant) and white American, demanding to be treated in accordance with dominant norms of etiquette. The “*da'wah*” alternative, it seems to me, accepts a certain level of otherization, and accepts the necessity to normalize one’s religion to the dominant majority member. Unlike many of the Muslim youth she knows, Heather consciously chooses not to reveal her religious choices or share her private beliefs indiscriminately. She makes the choice, instead, to express her distaste with the woman’s prying behavior by rejecting her parking spot and not seeing her again.

I don’t know, some people would be like, ‘Actually I’m Muslim, and this is why I dress this way.’ And I was more like, ‘You’re really annoying, and I’m not going to provide you with any further information.’ I mean, that may not be the best way to go about things but I was just like, no! This woman is clearly not the most tolerant or sensitive of people, and I was like, if I’m going to be parking in this parking space somewhere, I don’t feel like having her spying out the window at me every single time I come, and she’s like, ‘Woo-hoo! These *Moslem* people!’ And I was like, she’d probably be really freaked out by that, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she caught up tomorrow and, like—‘The spot’s not open anymore’—you know? So I was like, I’m just going to leave it alone.

Heather’s rejection of the parking-spot (and further interaction with the woman) is not simply indicative of her personal irritation with the woman’s prying. It is also indicative of her awareness that as soon as the woman discovers she is Muslim (not Amish or Eastern European) her curiosity may be transformed into active prejudice. Though Heather does not wear hijab herself, she often

drives with friends who wear hijab, and she foresees the woman becoming nervous about renting her parking-spot to Muslims.

Before the woman can realize that Heather is Muslim and possibly lie that the spot is no longer available, Heather removes herself from the social encounter. This appears to be self-protecting behavior, where she anticipates discriminatory behavior and prevents it from happening by no longer interacting with the individual.<sup>vii</sup>

Heather resists attempts to otherize her based on her choice of clothing. I also observed this strategy in her response to alcohol on campus. In various ways<sup>viii</sup>, she seeks to establish a legitimate American norm in the majority sphere that excludes alcohol. This may be especially because she is white, and resents the “new” exclusion, marginalization, or intimidation she experiences.

Roshan is unwilling to give up the social advantages and safety she has as a non-hijabi<sup>ix</sup>. To her, wearing hijab is like walking in a highway: it is tantamount to risky behavior.

Roshan: If events come up, if people ask me, if I see Islam being directly bashed, - I will stand up for it. But at the same time, you have to take your measures. It's the same thing: you don't go walk in a highway. ...

S: What kinds of things would you avoid?

R: I think – I really – okay here's the thing: I want to do hijab. I just don't have the strength in me, because I feel like – ... I'm worried about the non-Muslims, the way they'd treat me, or the way I'm accepted to the community. And I know people say, 'Oh, well, hijab isn't about pleasing people.' I'm not doing it for that—to please them—but I'm worried about the way I'll be accepted, the way my professors are going to react to me.

Roshan differentiates between the desire to appease people by not appearing Muslim and avoiding negative or hostile behavior by not advertising her faith. Especially since 9/11/01, many Muslim women feel that they are torn between the desire to be true to religious commitment and the desire to avoid

Intisar, who came from Africa as a child, identifies as an observant Muslim. She wears hijab, and to fit in, started wearing baggy jeans, shirts, sweatpants and sweatshirts. On one level, this was an attempt at making others comfortable with her, and at erasing the hyper-visibility of her hijab.

S: What stuff do you do to put non-Muslims at ease? ... The way you dress?

I: Of course. Well, not this season because I'm wearing skirts but other occasions, baggy jeans. ... Baggy jeans, shirts, sweats. That's a comfort [thing] but it started out because it was a way to fit in. Yeah. And now it's sort of a comfort level.

And even then it's so fitting in. It's not really fitting in, - it's almost myself out there in a new perspective: 'I'm not your regular Muslim girl. I'm really not. I'm not the conservative quiet – whatever. I'm so different that I will wear different things so you really couldn't figure me out until you come to me, and embrace that difference.'

On another level, Intisar's clothing is a challenge to others to know her on her own terms: it was a refusal to fall into the category others had created for her (veiled, therefore conservative, quiet, and withdrawn). Yet at the same time it was an acceptance that the “regular Muslim girl” is veiled, conservative and quiet; the overall stereotype remained, and was too powerful to be

dislodged, but as an individual she could fight her way out of the stereotype. Intisar's "grunge" outfit complete with baggy jeans and shirts or sweats makes her one with the culture, but her hijab challenges the onlooker's attempt to "read" her. As Latifa refuses to participate in class discussions (and therefore provides no data to her classmates to categorize her), Intisar challenges the gaze by confusing it with accoutrements of a modern, western youth culture combined with a hijab.

Intisar is prepared to meet the challenge of connecting with "other" people even if there is "discomfort" involved. She identifies the source of discomfort as her clothing and what it indicates, her identity as a Muslim woman. She believes that "other people" might become uncomfortable with her, but that she was willing to endure the resulting discomfort. She positions herself as "so comfortable with the way [she is]" that she is willing to endure others' discomfort.

Intisar: I would like to meet other people, you know what I mean, -because I'm a people person. Because of the fact that I'm so comfortable with the way I am, what I am, and the people I have around me. ... Live a little beyond the limit. And even if it's going to cause me a little bit of discomfort, I'm okay with that. ... Even if they're not comfortable with the way I look, like being covered, being a Muslim woman on campus, even if they're not comfortable with that, I'll be fine. I don't really care. ... For them to accept me, as the total me, the whole me, but just to have friends, others.

Naheed, an Iranian-American non-hijabi, responded to my questions via e-mail:

S: Do you feel like a non-hijabi girl would have any advantages over a hijabi, socially, on campus?

Naheed: I think it all really depends on what someone perceives an advantage to be. For example, hijabi girls probably don't frequent random parties very much (that would probably be quite a downer at a keg party), but they probably wouldn't consider being at keg parties (or clubs, for that matter) much of an advantage.

Integration here comes across as relatively unnecessary for hijabis, since it involves participation in unfitting (for hijabis) activities. Haseena, who is in a long-term relationship, discusses the hypothetical consequences of hijab. She finds that attending clubs and such activities would become unfitting or jarring, were she to wear hijab, and she prefers to continue these activities.

Haseena: I actually did try wearing hijab when I was sophomore in high school and I took it off after three days. ... And just because like, I didn't want to go to the extreme of being that different than--. ...

S: What do you think might be the consequences of wearing hijab full time?

H: Well, I guess I wouldn't have a boyfriend anymore. Because that would be weird [laugh] I think hijab is not a fabric, it's a lifestyle. ... People treat you different. ... I mean like, also people can target you as Muslim, there's some people out to target you post 9/11, they would know who you are. But I think – you get more respect: from males, I think, you would get more respect. ... Some ignorant people would be like, 'Oh, you're oppressed: you have to wear hijab.' ... No, I wouldn't [wear hijab], because socially it changes a lot. Where you are and where you are not. ... I guess this is a bad thing but it's more fun not to be hijabi. Because you wouldn't see a hijabi at a club, you know [laugh] that's what I'm saying it would change your so—you wouldn't lose friends, I think, but I

think a lot of my friends would be kind of weirded out. They would be like, ‘Oh, I didn’t know she wanted to do that.’

Hijab can specify “where you are and where you are not,” and not only does hijab make borderline activities (having a boyfriend, attending nightclubs, etc.) “weird,” it also causes a woman to stand out as different, even if this is sometimes only to earn “more respect.” Haseena seems somewhat doubtful as to whether it would actually cause her to lose friends, but they would probably, she believes, be alienated by her decision to wear hijab. To them, she would become a different person by virtue of the headscarf (‘Oh, I didn’t know she wanted to do that’).

Latifa talks about the gender differential in terms of ease of integration:

... Because I wear hijab, for example any random passerby would know automatically – if they knew about Islam – that I’m a Muslim. You know? Whereas you don’t see people here wearing *thobes* and *abayas* and *igals*<sup>x</sup> or other stuff. ... For example, with the boys I don’t think that – I don’t think that aspect is integral in their friendship. ... They’re taken for the person they are and it may come about once when they’re partying and maybe say this random Joe Muslim doesn’t drink and he says [masculine voice] ‘Oh, I don’t drink because of my religious faith.’ ‘Really? What’s that?’ ‘Oh, I’m Muslim.’ That’s when they find out they’re Muslim.

Because Muslim men do not usually wear distinctive clothing, religion does not make an appearance to highlight their difference, and, Latifa feels, they can more easily disguise their religious identity. Heather (who is considered “conservative” by most other Muslim students) agrees, in an e-mail, that a religious Muslim male can “fit in” more easily than a religious Muslim woman:

But, within the Muslim community, I feel it is faaaaar easier for a religious guy to fit in than a religious girl. Well, let me qualify that actually -- if the guy has a giant beard, wears a kufi<sup>xi</sup>, and some sort of Islamic/cultural clothing (*thobe*, *shalwar*<sup>xii</sup>, etc), then he is not going to fit in either and people probably will be freaked out by him. However, on a college campus, a guy with a short beard blends in far more than a sister wearing hijab, or even long sleeves/pants all the time. Even down to go to a job interview, a guy can easily play the religious card when he has to, but blend in fine when it’s not necessary or beneficial.

As Latifa and Heather point out, for Muslim women, hijab is a clear identifier, but Muslim men in the US do not have a similar—unambiguously religious—identifier. Wearing a beard is a *sunnah*<sup>xiii</sup> but a short beard does not necessarily cause a man to stand out as Muslim, unless it were a “giant beard,” since it is not an American cultural practice of young men in metropolitan centers, especially if combined with a kufi, an Arab-style shirt, or Pakistani-style pants. Such a man would, in fact, be more conspicuous than a Muslim woman with hijab or even one who always wore long sleeves and covered her legs.<sup>xiv</sup> The latter betrays that Heather feels self-conscious in her new code of clothing, always covering her arms and legs, even if she does not wear hijab.

Teresa struggles with the double-standard of integration for men and women. Islamic parlance as it popularly occurs in North America includes almost no explicitly non-Western articles of clothing for men, while women have the hijab. This means that if they wear Western clothing, men do have the choice of disguising their Islamic identity more easily than women. Also,

Teresa—a white woman born and raised on the East Coast—feels that full integration in American society demands participation in the culture of clubs and (by Islamic standards) immodest clothing. So women like Teresa feel like they must choose complete integration in society or a conservative Muslim lifestyle, which will make for a better reputation and easier marriage within the Muslim community. Like Heather, also a white convert, Teresa is strongly aware of what she has given up by way of “fully fitting in.” For her, “fitting in” is win-lose game: she will fit in the Muslim community, or in the non-Muslim one. Men can do both.

Men can integrate easily. They can dress like Western men and still be considered good Muslims. Dress has a huge bearing, perhaps the most significant even, on how one is perceived, so men can live both lives with more ease. Additionally they can talk to women and go to parties, etc. without being considered ruined. Women on the other hand are in quite a difficult situation. In order to fully fit into Western society in terms of being dressed appropriately to go to clubs and hang out with “cool” people they have to dress in immodest clothing which in turn has a negative impact on their reputation and ability to get married. On the other hand if they dress more conservatively they will have an easier time getting married while still being able to integrate somewhat so long as they do not talk to guys for too long and do not go to clubs etc. But if they go so far as to wear hijab than this is another matter entirely.

Hijab, to Teresa, excludes the possibility of integration. However, “integration” is not necessarily considered a laudable goal. Intisar loves basketball, and during high school wore shorts to play the sport. She feels that the influence of her non-Muslim friends led to this “backsliding.”

The whole thing I got into basketball, was because of the influence my – ... That [basketball] was the worst one. I actually had shorts on. I really wasn't covered then. I was 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> grade – fourteen, fifteen. Yes I do [feel really guilty about that] but I don't regret it. I don't regret – but I feel guilty. Because if I have the same friends – I don't feel strong enough that I'd pull myself back ...

Here the friends (non-Muslim friends) that Intisar is talking about are a source of religious weakness due to whom she engages in activities about which she now feels guilty.

### **What doesn't “go” with hijab: Hijab and mobility**

Apart from fixing you in people's minds, Hijab limits mobility. It limits your ability not only to transgress, but also to experiment and to occupy gray areas, to be a public freethinker, and to adopt certain careers. As Roshan explains her reluctance:

I think I'll be so afraid because it will be such a check. It will be such a – authoritative figure on me. And I think I'm afraid of like – letting that take over me.

Teresa realizes that once she starts wearing hijab, she cannot occupy “gray” spaces. As Haseena says in this paper, a hijabi does not fit in clubs and certain parties. This does not mean that Teresa strongly believes that one should not go there, but with hijab, she is no longer able to hold an independent opinion. She must abide by the conservative view on going to clubs and parties involving alcohol, because her hijab puts her in a role of representing conservative Islam. Her personal life takes on the characteristics of conservative Islamic codes because of who associates with her and who does not.

Once I wore hijab it meant that I couldn't be spoken to like before. Certainly this is in large part to my behavior which to answer another of your questions is indeed tremendously affected by the hijab. There are no "in-between" places for me. I would truly feel ridiculous going to a party even if I were not drinking while wearing hijab because I know why people go to parties of the sort that take place in college which are to get drunk and meet people of the opposite sex. A young woman who does not wear hijab can get away with this blurring of lines but I cannot. To me it would be a disgrace to hijab and to Islam to go to these sorts of gatherings. That is not to say that I think someone should not go to them, indeed, I did before, but when I chose to wear hijab I chose to relinquish some things in favor for that which I consider more precious. In my opinion if I want to go to parties etc. that is fine but once I wear hijab I am no longer "independent." My actions have a direct correlation with how people view Islam. ... It does bother me that young men don't talk to me in the same way but then again, that is why I put it on! So to be annoyed with that would be ridiculous. The ones who were not interested in me other than sexually do not talk to me and those who were always my friends still are and still talk to me just as much, so in reality, I am very glad with how the hijab affects how people interact with me because it is like a filter which prevents that which is harmful and useless from getting to me, and I am so happy for that, alhamdulillah.

Clearly Teresa struggles between approval of the fact that she cannot occupy certain spaces, and frustration over this restriction. Teresa even finds that her wearing hijab causes young men to approach her less. Going to parties is "ridiculous" just as keg parties and nightclubs are, for hijabis, according to Naheed and Haseena. Hijab and these activities/spaces do not "go" together, just as certain kinds of clothing match certain activities and spaces. Before she became Muslim, Teresa used to sing. When she started wearing hijab, she feels that a hijabi singer would be anachronistic (as a hijabi at a keg party would be, or hijabis at clubs, according to Naheed and Haseena).

Well, now especially, I can't be a *muhajjiba*<sup>xv</sup> singer [laugh]. It's crazy. I mean, I could, but it's crazy. ... But now I am trained how to recite Qur'an; [laugh] that's another use for it. I like that a lot more.

Singing and hijab do not "go" either. Charlise is uncomfortable over the prospect of giving up going to the beach, and differentiates herself from other Muslim women (of immigrant origin) as someone who has grown up with certain activities:<sup>xvi</sup>

And it makes me look back and think, how much am I giving up? I'm a water baby. I love water, I love the beach. ... Last time I went with a bunch of women, it was for a sorority, and we had a ball. But it was a public beach and there *were* men there. I wore my modest little suit but it made me uneasy to think, this wouldn't be allowed. ... That kind of thing, having grown up with it, it's hard to do without.

Rana, Pakistani-American and hijabi, is interested in the foreign service as a career. She finds that the career environment itself is branded as closed to certain types of individuals, and others, even Muslims, have marked certain careers as unsuitable for her. She must be protected from certain careers because her clothing disadvantages her.

I used to work for this Iranian doctor and I used to tell him I wanted to go into the foreign service – when I was a senior in high school – he was always trying to talk me out of it. He’s like, ‘You shouldn’t; it’s not good for a woman, especially not good for a covered woman. It’s not a good environment; you have to make a lot of sacrifices. You have to deal with strange people.’

Tehzeeb, a non-hijabi, argues that wearing hijab prevents women from personal development. She feels that a Muslim woman is not free to publicly rethink her intellectual approach, or change her religious ideology once she dons hijab. She recognizes, like Teresa and Zareen earlier, that wearing hijab seems to require “flawless” representative behavior, and it is thought that there is little space for individual quirks, errors, and personal development in terms of religiosity or “intellectual exploration.”

Tehzeeb: I think it's good to go through changes. ... But it's hard. It's hard to go through changes when you wear hijab for example. I think it's hard to go through changes like that – just because if you can't, what can you do? Okay, if Hala [a religious and intellectually inclined female student], for example starts thinking something or starts rethinking, she can't like stop wearing hijab or something like that. She really can't. ...

S: You can.

T: Yes, you can, if you want to be a weirdo forever, - ... It’s a bad move because what does it say about Islam? What does it say about hijab, period? You know what I mean—it's all this responsibility. ... It's so tough. It's much easier for me to go through all these different changes and do all these different things. It's much harder for people, for example, who wear hijab to go through different changes. ... I'm very pro-hijab. I have no problem. ... I used to not understand this whole ‘growing’ business [laugh]. I thought it was this American bullshit. But I really think there's so much to it. I think it exists, and maybe a lot of people don't do it, I don't think it happens to a lot of people but I think it does happen to some people. And I think when you're young – whatever the ideology is, even if it's as perfect as Islam, I don't think you can commit yourself so strongly, when you're so young, to something that's an intellectual sort of thing to like---. Can you really handle it all intellectually? When you commit yourself to something so young, how do you – what happens when you go through – maybe you'll come back to it at the end, but you have to allow yourself the freedom to be able to come back to it at the end instead of just – ...

For example, if Hala– I don't know, if she suddenly got convinced about existentialist philosophy or atheism – or not atheism, she'd never do that – something, something, whatever, and she really, really liked it so much – what can she do? She can't do anything! Whereas what I think is better is if someone could go do that, learn, see what it's like, maybe leave Islam if they have to if they're *so* convinced by it or something, go see what's happening there and realize that, oh my God, it's crap, there's nothing here, Islam is so much better – and then come back to it. ...

I don't mean leave it like that, I'd never – or not even like, leaving Islam, but even within Islamic philosophy, what if someone was really into Sufism or something ... what can you do? Not even – the hijab isn't relevant there, but for example Wisal [a hijabi MSA leader] really got into Sufism or something, she can't become a Sufi for a while because, *hello!* Her friends, everything, the

people, pressures, people know her, and – you know what I mean, you can't allow yourself. That's why I like being independent, I like letting people know what my thoughts are, just because there is a responsibility. And also I feel I personally have an important responsibility that's why I don't like – I like being low-key and on the fringes and stuff, because I wouldn't want to influence anyone. ... So anyone, -- at the end of the day I know I would never ever choose anything other than Islam, I know that. But my interpretation might change, might become weird, but – I don't know. ...

But that's okay. For a lot of people that's fine. Because a lot of these people don't do a lot of intellectual – I mean maybe they don't like to admit it but it's true; at the end of the day they don't do a lot of intellectual explorations. Yes, they wear hijab, they're Muslim, but how many of them really are interested in Islamic philosophy or – yes, whatever they're majoring in biology and Arabic – which is fine, Islam is for people at all different levels. For some people it's fine, I'm not criticizing it at all. It's good for them. But then are people who are very – like Hala, who's extremely intellectually curious, - for this kind of people it's a little problematic that's what I mean.

Tehzeeb is speaking of particular “types” of religious women, who are involved in groups and believe in and/or conform to the group's religious ideology. For them (as for members of any social group) hijab is part of the religious uniform and simply means the boundaries that they cannot, or do not cross. They must be prepared to be representative examples, while as a non-hijabi, Tehzeeb is not representative of “the” right Islamic way, and is free to make mistakes along the way.

Heather realizes that modest clothing is meant to close certain doors in terms of sexuality:

Heather: Apart from that, I think the other was, obviously the dating thing in Islam. That was very easy for me to accept. I had no problems at all with that. I was Catholic, and you're like, dating if you're Catholic—but you're really not supposed to do anything. ... What is the point of dressing scandalously if you're not trying to pick up guys all the time, or not trying to prevent further things from happening? I realized that was completely contradictory as well—really, what is your intention of dressing that way? And the whole concept of lust as well, I mean, you're not supposed to be staring at people, wanting them or whatever, so why would you dress in such a way that's setting up people to do that? And so I think once I put the pieces of the puzzle together it made a lot more sense. But for a while--.

Hijab also appears to have the potential for legitimizing mobility, though this means that the absence of it de-legitimizes mobility. Yasmin, who attends clubs and often critically questions religious injunctions, has had an unpleasant encounter with a cab-driver from a Muslim country; he makes her uncomfortable by engaging in explicit conversation with her:

Yasmin: He's like, you know, these American women are too skinny and blah blah, and sex is very important; and if you have sex with a woman who's too skinny, when the penis goes in – I was like *ohmygod*. [laugh] ... He's like, it's not tight enough! I was just like, ‘Oh my God! You are so sick! You are like my grandfather's age or something! I was like, that is disgusting. Don't you have any sense of what you can talk to people about?’ Oh, you know what he prefaced that

with? 'Well, you're educated, so I can talk to you freely!' I'm like, 'Is that what educated means to you?!' ... And then today I was going to the gym, I was jogging. And I hear these people talking and I look and there's five construction workers just staring at me. I'm like, 'Can you stop?!' ... I always think that, I should just wear hijab, and then they'll leave me alone.

S: But you don't believe that?

Y: Well, I don't know. I understand, in hijab – I think hijab – it makes sense definitely – in a way. But then it's also about drawing the line; what does hijab mean? What does it mean you can't do? Does it mean they can't do things, or is it just a symbol? ... Sometimes you feel like, I want to look nice; I want people to be like, 'Oh, she looks really pretty.' I don't want – I want it to a certain extent. I don't want it to pass a certain line.

Yasmin is repelled by the notion that because she is “educated” (which may connote a modern and liberated college student uninhibited by “superstition” and religion or culture), the cab-driver can engage in blatantly inappropriate conversation. Yasmin is wrestling with a number of questions here. She finds that men such as the cab-driver, the construction workers and the sleazy men in a club force undesirable attention on women. The discomfort of such situations brings out guilt and she wonders if she should wear religious clothing so as to ward off any undesirable attention. She traces the guilt to her religious upbringing (though she comes from a relatively liberal family). There are certain aspects of Islamist discourse that place much of the responsibility for chastity on women's behavior and clothing.<sup>xvii</sup> Though she thinks temporarily that hijab may prevent men from making undesirable advances, she wonders about the multifarious meanings of hijab, and those that she is less comfortable with. The problem is, hijab is accompanied by more meanings than the wearer desires. It is not only written by the wearer, but read by the observer.

Here, Yasmin realizes that not only can hijab offer mobility, but it can also restrict mobility. Whatever the effect of hijab on men, nightclub-appropriate clothing may invite that gaze. Yasmin argues, women bear a certain responsibility for their behavior, clothing and occupation of certain spaces, such as nightclubs. Yet, she feels, hijab and loose clothing too cannot guarantee that she will be protected from undesirable male attention.

... [Also,] I get mad when girls go to a club and be like, 'Oh, why is that guy trying to dance with me? Why is he getting so close to me?' I'm like, 'You're in a club! You're dressed a certain way. Of course - you're dancing, what do you expect?' But then, on the other hand I'm like, if I'm just taking a cab somewhere, does that mean anything? ... If you obviously don't want to dance with them then they should leave. If they don't leave then that's ridiculous. But I mean, you're there, you're dancing! You know, obviously, if they want to dance with you they'll try. I feel like girls are just trying to be like, 'Ohh, [looking offended] why is he trying to dance with me?' I'm like, 'You're putting yourself in that situation.' -- But I don't know—then I'm like, maybe I'm putting myself in this situation by living on my own, dressing – wearing a t-shirt, or – wearing makeup. Maybe I am – maybe this is the same thing! Maybe it's like, you know, I'm putting myself in a situation where people can say things like this to me. ... I was having issues with this for a bit. I was really getting sick of it. and I just finally I couldn't stand it, I couldn't even stand people looking at me, I just wanted them to stop looking at me. But then – why do I feel bad? Why are they making

comments? Is it because of me? Is it my fault? Because I should be covering from head to toe—in some way I'm provoking it.

S: Do you think you are?

Y: I don't think I am, but you are raised—it's a whole Islamic thing, that you need to cover yourself because men are tempted and you're going to tempt them, so you need to do something about it. So you do have that somewhere in the back of your head that, oh, if I wore hijab, I wouldn't have to deal with this, nobody would do this. But then sometimes—it doesn't make sense because I'd be coming from the gym wearing big baggy sweatpants and a t shirt, and still! The gardeners and whoever that's out there--.

### **Hijab as representative**

Theorists have stated that ethnic identity is both self-ascribed and ascribed by others. It is no surprise that both Muslims and non-Muslims frequently employ hijab as a symbol of Islam and Muslims. In some commonsense, concrete way it is a relatively unambiguous symbol that identifies Muslims.

Hijab is taken seriously by many Muslim women, the adoption of hijab treated as a high point by many. Roshan, a Bangladeshi-American young woman who is an MSA officer, does not wear hijab, and agonizes over her unwillingness to wear it. She feels that she is not “qualified” to wear it. She feels that hijab symbolizes a “point.” But she feels that she would be engaging in false advertisement if she wore hijab. She would be a representative of something but she is not prepared to represent it. Do Muslims fall prey to the “fixed image” of the pious, hijabi Muslim woman as well? Roshan's hijabi friends encourage her to wear it anyway, since, they contend, hijab is a facilitator of the religious life that will bring her to the point where she will be “qualified.”

I think the problem is that I feel like I'm not ready to be a hijabi. You know what I mean? I feel like I do a lot of things I still do I shouldn't be doing. But I've told hijabis that and they're like, 'Roshan, don't let that suppress you from taking on the hijab. A lot of times you'll see that hijab really helps you in that.' Because I feel like I'm not worthy enough to wear the hijab yet, you know what I mean? Yes; yes, I feel like I'm not qualified.

Charlise, an African-American convert, before she started wearing the hijab, spoke of her ambivalence about wearing hijab. At first, she said, it would be an identifier; then she spoke of her expectations about a hijabi:

S: Why do you feel so strongly that you should wear hijab?

Charlise: Because I – you know – at first it was a cultural thing, to identify myself as Muslim. ... [It's] a marker.

S: In a good way.

C: Yeah! I don't think it's bad. But at the same time, people make automatic assumptions. ... I can only speak for the assumptions I made, and I'm a very moderate person. Um—but I knew that—I guess I assumed that if a woman was wearing hijab she was faithful, like, she prayed five times a day, I assumed that she *had* read the Quran, that she was knowledgeable about some of the institutions of Islam—that was always my assumption when you see someone on the street wearing hijab. ... Just knowing that when I wear it, not that I would

have to, I would want to correctly represent—know about Islam as much as possible.

To Muna, an Arab-American young woman who attended an Arabic-Islamic school, the changes in several school friends illustrate how hijab becomes a key point where a religious life is begun, an aid to living that religious life, and/or a symbol of the various other changes that the hijab-wearer will undertake in her life.

Muna: And even in high school I remember there were so many girls they'd have-

SM: Guys on the side?

M: Yes. ... Actually what's interesting is that by senior year several of them became more religious and stopped going out with the guys. I don't know why, and I'm glad this happened to them. They stopped going out with guys and took up wearing the scarf.

Once undertaken, hijab imposes a great deal of representative responsibility. Zareen is a Pakistani-American young freshman who identifies strongly as Pakistani and Muslim. She does not wear hijab, and in practice is closer to the liberal end of the spectrum in matters of dress. (Unlike many of the Muslim women I interviewed, she wears shorts when she goes running, and wears knee-length skirts.) In an email, she describes her feelings about hijab:

Zareen: Personally, I believe that it [hijab] is mandatory and that it is a very good idea, and I make sure to voice this to the person I am speaking to. However, I also believe that one has to be in the right place spiritually before they take on the challenge of the hijab, because it is a challenge. Once you put it on your head, you can not take it off<sup>xviii</sup>. And with it on your head is also a constant reminder of how you should be living your life, what you should and should not be doing. If you aren't ready for that, and if you aren't strong in other aspects of your faith like praying, etc. you should not take on that challenge. Along with being a challenge, I also think it is a wonderful gift. From a mile away, someone can tell that you are a Muslim. You are a representative of your faith.

Zareen regards the hijab very positively. She considers it religiously mandated as well as a “very good idea.” She feels that it also has the advantage of making a woman recognizable to others as a Muslim, and of putting her in the position of representing her faith. To Zareen, this is clearly a privilege, which places a woman above the ordinary run of Muslim women who more easily assimilate into the “normal American” crowd and do not stand out as Muslims. But perhaps for this same reason, she feels that a woman must be spiritually prepared for the commitment of hijab. Since it puts a woman in the position of representing Islam and Muslims, it is a challenge.

Teresa is a White woman who converted to Islam during her sophomore year. She explained the changes that hijab had brought in her life in an email:

Teresa: Definitely my behavior has changed because like, for instance, I quit smoking. Now I would not stand in front of the library smoking as before if I felt like having one cigarette, and I would not possibly have a drink or go to a club as an exception. The hijab means that others notice what I do as a reflection of Islam and of my own level of religious strength so I don't want to devalue that for one exception. As far as positive changes, as I have only spoken about what I won't/can't/shouldn't do, now I do feel more respected, it is easier to pray on time, I have started eating *halal*<sup>xix</sup>, and I feel better around people I look up to,

like Prof. Arwah [a Muslim woman professor], and Dr. Shahryar [a Muslim professor and Sufi]. Even if I were the same person as before, which I am not, as I act more in accordance with Islam, wearing the scarf is a statement about my level of commitment, a sacrifice of one life for another (emphasis added).

Wearing the hijab signifies that Teresa has chosen a different way of life. It is significant that Teresa says that the hijab is a “statement” about her commitment, even if she were the same person as she was before this commitment. It is a public statement, meant for public consumption, and while it may reflect private life, this is not the main issue. Muslim women like Teresa, through hijab, serve as public representatives or ambassadors of Islam, and their behavior must be flawlessly Islamic in public especially when they are wearing hijab. Teresa gives up smoking because the social price she pays for smoking is a price paid by Islam, and she represents Islam, a heavy burden especially post-9/11/01. She is aware that due to the hijab, she is under a microscope; she is aware that people notice everything she does and classify her actions under Islam rather than as the actions of an individual.

Zareen described in an email how the commonest question related to Islam and Muslims that arose in class was about women and hijab. The questions and objections raised about hijab lead her to feel that she needs to “address whatever questions are brought up.” During my observations, on one occasion, when she raised her hand to address another question about Muslim women, her professor addressed her as “CNN’s representative on the issue” with affectionate sarcasm.

The questions that usually arise are about hijab. For example, "Do all women have to cover? Why don't you cover? What are the restrictions on women? Do women have different rights than men? Why are women often oppressed?" I like to address whatever questions are brought up, and there usually are quite a few. I think a good way for professors to address these issues is just to provide an open forum for these questions to be answered and to be informed enough to answer the questions ...

To Latifa, an Arab-American hijabi freshman, her hijab, as an identifier, becomes such a crushing presence that she wishes it were invisible. She is very uncomfortable during a discussion class on Muslim women at university in her first semester:

Latifa: It was a dramatic semester ... I remember I felt inside, ‘I want to say something but I don't want to sound stupid.’ ... I was so concerned with my image. I really was. ... I didn't want there to be any expectations. ... Again, because I was a Muslim female, with a head-cover, then people – naturally would assume I have a certain perspective – I do have a certain advantage and I'd present that more often but I didn't want people to look at me in the classroom as a Muslim female learning about women in Islam. ... Even in my paper I said, I guess I was very obvious in that sense but all I wanted was to be a regular student learning about the subject like any other student. And I was just very image-conscious throughout. Perhaps it was my sensitivity to that that prevented me from participating more, from taking an active role in classroom discussions.

Rana feels that all Muslims are perceived as a single monolith, free of geographical, cultural, and ideological difference. Rana is clearly aware of the negative associations that accompany foreign, non-Western Muslims. American Muslims therefore become equated with the image of the foreign and barbaric Muslim Other. The struggle of extricating Muslims in general from the

category of “barbaric” is too much for her to manage, so she wishes American Muslims to be free of the negative baggage of foreign, non-Western Muslims. This Orientalist image is related to the “ideal” image that she mentions: “some people” (some Muslims, especially Islamists) see Muslims as one monolith, whose unity should be reflected in their uniformity. To these Muslims, differences among Muslims threaten the unity of the ummah.<sup>xx</sup> This image and the Orientalist image of a single type of Muslim feed into each other. Rana’s sense of how Muslims are essentialized is intimately connected with her sense of how her peers and professors relate to her as a hijabi in her international affairs and political science classes.

S: In classes ... are you ever not able to share knowledge from your religious, cultural background?

R: Yes. ... I mean a lot of my classes are international affairs or political science. ... I feel like whatever I say they look at me as – I think, just because of the hijab, everything – they think whatever you say is representative of us [Muslims]. That’s what I feel like sometimes, I don’t know if that’s true. But it’s annoying.

S: Isn’t it a good thing because you’re a representative?

R: No! Because not everything I say is going to be exactly – my opinions might not necessarily be Islam. But yes—[this happens] especially in my political science classes.

S: What do you wish they knew while you were offering your opinion and they are thinking, ‘That’s the *ummah*’s opinion.’ What do you wish they knew?

R: I sometimes wish they would listen to me not as a Muslim but as a person. [pause] But I don’t think you can ever divorce the two. I mean that’s like me listening to someone who talks and trying to figure out whether they are Jewish or Christian. With Islam it’s much easier to do, because – a lot of the view that Islam’s a monolith – Judaism too to some extent – but ‘Christianity is a diverse religion’, so many different views, and being Christian isn’t your first identity to a lot of people.

Like Latifa, Rana feels that she is sometimes inhibited in terms of class discussion because she believes that her fellow students see her as the embodiment of Muslim and her opinions as the prototypical Muslim opinion. She wants to be seen as just one individual, rather than a spokesperson for all Muslims. The burden of representation is a heavy one to carry, and though she feels the need to speak out for Muslims (as she says on another occasion) she does not want her opinion to be perceived as the Muslim opinion. She understands that there is a fine line between listening to a Muslim opinion and the majority Muslim view—or a common Muslim view—on an issue, but she correctly points out that Christianity in the US is not subject to the same problem of perception. Since Christians are the majority in the country, and are adequately represented in all spheres of life, a diversity of opinion is represented. It is the diverse, ever-present norm, to which minority religions must provide a single, contrasting representative truth. Being Christian is not a “first identity” either—since it is the normative original that need not be stated. The appearance of diversity represents a disunity and disharmony—though this is not the case with Christianity.

I asked Rana if September 11, 2001 had affected her perspective:

Rana: It completely shattered your sense of security. Living here, you expect- ... Yes, you expect be secure. And being Muslim, it’s just not there anymore, that security. I’m confused—I think it changed all our futures, what we want to do. People are saying we’re all blacklisted and whatnot. I always wanted to get into government, state department —now I’ve completely changed what I wanted to

be, because everyone said, 'No, you're not going to be able to get anywhere. Being Muslim.' ... Yes, I mean I feel like I'm going to have to work ten times harder to do what I want to do. And I'm going to have to shine ten times more to be able to be successful. And you just have to—your identity has to be even more secure now in order—I feel, if you're a wishy-washy type of Muslim you'll just be walked over. I feel like—either you say you are [Muslim] and go for it. ... I feel like I have to be even more loud about my identity.

S: In what ways?

R: I speak out a lot more in class, especially ... being an International Studies major. ... Class is always interesting because I'm always one of the only Muslims in the class. So you're often—when they're talking, heads turn towards you. You're expected to speak. If you don't then you're completely selling out [nervous laugh].

S: Is that a comfortable place to be?

R: No [laugh] it's not. It puts a lot of pressure on you but at the same time it gives you confidence to—. ... Right, and I feel like if I wasn't secure—I mean I'm not completely secure—but if I wasn't then I shouldn't even be in that position. I shouldn't even be wearing this [hijab] because that puts you in that position. ... There were times after 9/11 when I wished I wasn't wearing it just because I didn't want—I didn't want to have to explain myself, or justify anything. ... Because you're wearing it, you have a responsibility to articulate it—not just what Islam is but about Muslims here, you should be knowledgeable about what's going on, you should be articulate enough to talk about it. It's really tough. It's high standards. Yes, but in the environment I'm in, that's what I tell myself so I can keep up. ...

Rana finds that as soon as issues of Muslim countries and Islam crop up in class, “heads turn towards you” and she feels that if she does not provide “a Muslim voice” that they might see her as “wishy-washy,” and a sell-out. Because she is wearing hijab, she is in a representative position. And she feels that her representation of Islam and Muslims—as well as their current situation vis-à-vis civil rights in the US—must be flawless (“It's high standards”). This puts her under stress, to the point that she wishes she did not wear hijab so that she did not have to defend Islam and Muslims, in the post-9/11/01 crackdown.

We also see here that the post-9/11 “backlash” against Muslims results in an increased defensiveness and assertiveness in terms of identity. At times inevitably Muslim youth like Rana wish that they were not in this position of representation. They feel besieged and embattled, as if they do not have the choice to stop defending their community because to do so would result in Muslims being “walked over.”

### **The static image**

Amira, a non-hijabi Pakistani-American sophomore struggles with the hyper-visibility of Muslim women, and with the stereotype of Muslim women as veiled. She struggles with the gap between her own practice and the stereotype. She is anxious when she encounters Muslim women who break Islamic guidelines regarding dress and alcohol, because they make the task of representation more complicated. She sees them as betraying the community's consensus for behavior. They represent Muslim women, as all Muslim women must represent all Muslim women, and they are poor representatives. She represents herself as “moderate” in her own

gender-interaction behavior (she does not hug boys unless they are close friends, and does not indulge in open flirting behavior, such as sitting in a boy's lap):

Amira: Like, I don't—I will not—I hesitate to hug and kiss everyone, for example. ... But then, when you turn around and you see other Muslim girls are doing this, you feel like they're betraying—they're not—for whatever reason, it doesn't matter, but you feel a little betrayed. Like, this is the rule, and you're not following the rule. And it's almost like, what is this going to make other people think? What is this going to make other people think about you as an individual? Will they respect you? What will this make people think about Isla—like, Muslims in America? ... [F]or an American, if you don't know that many Muslims, if they see them on TV, they always wear hijab. For a while, people couldn't tell if I was Muslim or not because I didn't wear hijab. I mean, that was in their mind, that all Muslim girls wear hijab. ... We're not exactly all uniform ... I mean, what satisfaction does it bring to other people when it's like, 'Oh, she's a Muslim, but she drinks and she smokes and she dances—like she goes out with men.' Like, she's not a practicing Muslim, she's a hypocrite.

Most of Amira's emotional turmoil in these comments is related to the common perception of Muslims and of Muslim women. She struggles with actual diversity among Muslim women and the perception of uniformity. A Muslim woman represents all Muslim women, and a woman who smokes, drinks and goes out with men will help establish another stereotype about Muslim women. That stereotype, as the "opposite" of the veiled one, will make Muslim women in general look ridiculous.

Zahida is often amused at her American friends' response to descriptions of—and assumptions about—life in Middle East. I shared some secondhand experience with her: my husband worked for a while in Qatar, and found a number of Americans who lived the expatriate experience isolated from Middle Eastern circles.

Zahida: There's that expat experience where they're totally separate from life... and they make that experience as if they're from the Middle East. And you're not from the Middle East: you're in America in the Middle East. But especially when people ask you, that's what you usually tell them about - American life in the Middle East. Because you can explain life in the Middle East to them, but like 'Do you wear an abaya there?' [I say,] 'Well, sometimes if I go to places that are very conservative.' If I go to the mall I just wear jeans and stuff. Usually Americans want to hear about American life there because they're so intrigued by that. They always think it has to be either completely American or completely Arab.

S: So the in between thing bothers them.

Z: I don't even go there. When they ask me what my camp is like, I don't say, 'Well, there are some girls there that are conservative.' I just say, 'Well, there are kids there that run around and drink and smoke and stuff; it's just like the US.' So they're like, 'Okay.' And then people are like, 'Well, what's life like outside the camp?' And I'll say, 'Well, a lot of them are really conservative.' There's a small group there that's in the middle but you don't even know them because nobody socializes in Saudi Arabia that much. When you go outside, you're very conservative, everyone's in their abayas. But on camp, some people are really in the middle.

Zahida finds that her American friends categorize life in the Middle East as “either completely American or completely Arab.” Their static notions of Muslim identity make a nuanced perspective difficult. In the same way, they are more amenable to thinking of conservative girls or “wild” youth that “run around,” than of “people [who] are really in the middle.”

The burden of representation that seems to accompany wearing hijab appears to a) be a consequence of a static image of Muslims commonly held by westerners b) and to demand a static form of behavior.

Fixed notions of identity informed by Orientalism and Islam<sup>xxi</sup> are often associated with multiculturalism. These connections strengthen conservative notions of identity politics, thereby not only giving greater authority and legitimacy to patriarchal visions of community but also strengthening stereotypes about the community as well. At the same time, the diversity of the community, and in particular the diversity of feminist positions within that community, is denied as irrelevant. Deliberations that move away from notions of fixity open up the third space, allowing a rescripting with social and political implications. (Khan 2002: xiv)

It is noteworthy that the media image of Muslim women is the first identifiable image that Latifa rejects. The image of the oppressed and heavily veiled Muslim women is ubiquitous in popular culture, and perpetuates stereotypical notions regarding Muslim women.

S: Now apart from Prof. Lockhart’s [renowned expert on Islam and Muslims] class, obviously in general the environment’s very different at Georgetown, what else about your image would preoccupy you. How would you not want to come across?

Latifa: You know, your typical traditional Muslim female, the type you see on TV, very conservative in that sense – in the sense of ideas, lifestyle – ... And sometimes it does come with baggage – the headscarf, but I think, once people talk to me, and in our first conversation they realize I’m a little different, they do discuss their curiosity—which could be disguised as reservations at first.

The power of the visual image is such that it is present in the minds of students and professors even in classrooms and college spaces. Latifa is under stress because she desires emancipation from the wearying gaze that seeks to categorize her. She desires freedom from the assumptions about her that accompany the context and her appearance: she is acutely self-conscious that her professor and class-mates may think of her as “the” conservative, oppressed, excessively religious Muslim woman who is attending a class on Islam to learn more about Islam.

This particular element—“learning about Islam”—is one that she resists most in the image that is projected of her. She wants to be like a “regular” student, “learning about the subject like any other student” and not a Muslim woman student who is learning more about women in Islam. The latter would make her an easy target for other questions (is she learning to escape her oppressive circumstances? Is she learning to combat the relatively progressive perspective advocated by the professor?) She feels that her appearance generates assumptions about her, and open the door to her private life, letting in strangers where a “regular student” would not be so exposed. Just “subject matter” renders the situation a safe one, where she is not exposed to the public gaze, (mis)informed as it is by stereotype. This pressure causes her to withdraw from active participation in class discussions. She resists the gaze she feels upon her, and refuses to provide

any data (by talking during discussions) that might assist onlookers in categorizing her. This is similar to Heather's refusal to engage with the prying curiosity of the parking-spot owner.

S: Do you feel like girls who don't wear hijab have a better deal almost?

Rana: Yes. I feel like what they say is taken more seriously. Especially in a lot of my classes about the Arab Israeli conflict—and I'm very passionate about this, about the whole issue—so when I speak I feel like my words don't mean much because I'm 'biased' automatically. ... I don't feel like I have to defend what my idea of justice is. Just because I'm Muslim. And if I can't do that, then I need to like, go into medicine or something. Because when you're defending opinions you're ultimately constantly defending your identity. It's a constant battle between them and yourself [laugh].

S: After 9/11, I was a bit relieved I didn't wear hijab.

R: Yeah, and you know people say "Because we're wearing it, people listen to us because of who we are, not because of what we look like" [laugh]. That's not true. It's not true. I mean they're going to—what we are—wait, what am I trying to say?—we are—they're going to think—by looking at us they're going to think they know who we are. And so—

S: And assume they know who you are.

R: Exactly. So they're not really listening to what you're saying but who you are as you're saying it. That's what annoys me.

S: So they're almost predicting what you're going to say.

R: Before you say it.

S: And discounting it maybe.

R: Yup. ... Even though that really, really bothers me, I still feel like I have to speak out, at any big lecture or event I feel like it's my duty to do [laugh] and I'll often be the only hijabi at university [events]. After 9/11 they had this big town hall meeting the whole university. And I felt like it was my duty to go, I asked the first question. It was a packed hall. I don't do that: I've never been a vocal person.

S: You've been pushed into that.

R: Yes, now in every single thing I feel like I have to speak up [laugh]. No one else is going to do it for us and we're just going to be stomped on. And yes, it's constant pressure, but if I don't do it then I'm not going to respect myself.

Rana is almost envious of Muslim women who do not wear hijab since she feels that their voices are taken more seriously. They can either disguise their Muslim identity, or their religious identity does not necessarily come through as primary. Hijab gives the appearance of a primarily, or exclusively, religious identity. This means that a hijabi's opinions are often taken with a grain of salt, since their bias is assumed. A hijabi woman must be biased in favor of the Palestinian people, therefore her arguments are not taken seriously, and the cause itself receives little real public support through her. The opinion of a seemingly "secular" person is considered more reliable.

When it comes to discussions about the Middle East situation, Rana is in a tough spot. She attends a university where Israeli and Jewish professors teach courses on Middle East politics, Islam and Muslims. She and various other students have complained that the professors' bias is clear to them. However, as a hijabi, Rana's bias is assumed in matters related to the Middle East, and she feels like she is assumed to be a blind follower of a community belief (Khan 2002). Her hijab—a religious practice—works against her opinions and her defense of her community. Paradoxically, her clothing negatively impacts her struggle, where if she were dressed in a less

visibly Muslim fashion her views would be those of an individual, and would be received with less bias.

Rana's ambitions of breaking the color, gender, and religion barrier and making it in the foreign service are frustrated post-9/11, when intelligence, law enforcement and immigration agencies are all indiscriminately targeting Muslims. She feels that in this climate she has no chance of fulfilling her professional goals. Added to that is her frustration with the way her opinions are both predicted and negatively evaluated. She feels that it would be better for her to choose a career where her religious identity and political perspective are less important. In a career such as medicine, she believes, her professional training alone would be more important, and she would not be forced into a "constant battle" with "them."

Americans often assume that all Muslim women wear the hijab, and if they do not wear it, they are often assumed to be non-observant Muslims. The absence of veil almost disqualifies them as Muslim. Heather, a white senior who says that she is not free to observe the hijab because she is still financially and socially dependent upon her (non-Muslim) parents, faces this dilemma.

At first blush, Zahida is a very different person from Intisar. She is Pakistani-American, and though she does not identify as a very religious person, is clear about her identification as a Muslim, though her religious practice has varied over the years. She finds that friends are "shocked" that she is Muslim. She feels pleasure that she has disrupted the predictability of Muslim women's attributes.

But I remember in my high school, someone was shocked. 'You're not Muslim! You're Muslim?!' I was like, 'Yeah, of course I'm Muslim, what's weird about that?' So – 'Do you have to wear that thing on your head?' [It's the] first question! [laugh] ... it's just funny. I felt kind of glad that at least one person realized that you can be Muslim and not be a, b, and c.

The notion of a static 'Muslim' (and by extension Middle Eastern) identity and practice is reflected also in the way Zahida's friends formulate their questions about life in the Middle East. She tailors her responses to their questions in consideration to their apparent inability to conceive of a hybrid Muslim practice in a Muslim context.

Zahida: I didn't wear an *abaya*<sup>xxii</sup> on the camp ... They [American women] would wear them by itself because the *mutawwas*<sup>xxiii</sup> would get on their backs if they wear tight jeans and stuff. They'd do small stuff like go to the mall in the morning because there's not that many people there. Most people don't go at night. We go at night all the time; I just put an *abaya* on.

S: It doesn't bother you?

Z: No. It did at first, but then I didn't care because I was like, 'Well, I don't look American, so *mutawwas* are going to look at me and say, 'Well, what are you doing without it on? You don't have an excuse.' And I don't! If I'm there, and I'm Muslim, I should. I personally don't think women should be wearing *abayas* in the first place over there, and covering themselves head to toe but I mean I –. When I wear my *abaya* my mum and I put it on and have a scarf around our necks but we're not like covered or anything. ... [In Makkah and Madinah] they don't have their faces covered for *umrah*<sup>xxiv</sup> and stuff. I just thought that was so interesting ... you can't have your face covered but every other part of Saudi Arabia – I mean give me a break. It's just BS, you know. When we went around in Makkah and Madina I didn't cover myself. I had an *abaya* on ... We definitely

have our hair covered when we were there because people who go there--you're not just going to walk around with your scarf falling off your head or anything. But we didn't cover our faces at all. I didn't cover my face in Saudi Arabia when I went out of camp, because there's places that are really conservative ... Where I'd not feel comfortable walking around. I feel more comfortable walking in an *abaya* in the mall too, because first of all, people look at you and they think like, 'Who does she think she is?' And I'm American but I don't care ...

S: I knew an anthropology professor who told me she'd put on the scarf in Jordan and the other American women refused to put it on; they reacted to it in a feminist way. So you didn't respond to it like that?

Z: Oh I did at first. I would fight and my dad would say in Rome do as Romans do, I could care less if you were wearing jeans but you should know logically what are you going to do, protest to the king, go to jail? Just do it so you can get on with your life. I mean, do small stuff like that so you can get through it.

Clearly, to Zahida, who is a liberal Muslim (and Shiah), following the dress code of Saudi Arabia is not about giving in to patriarchal powers. It is not even about religious practice: when she says: "If I'm there, and I'm Muslim, I should," it is not because she thinks she is religiously obligated to cover herself in Saudi Arabia, as she hurries to make clear in the next statement ("I personally don't think women should be wearing *abayas* in the first place over there, and covering themselves head to toe but ...") and later when she ponders over what she perceives as the ludicrousness of the veiling policies. Zahida feels that the local Saudi laws are not in accordance with the revealed religion: the requirement to uncover the face during *umrah* and *hajj*,<sup>xxv</sup> she feels, legitimates her belief that women should not be required to cover the face in Saudi Arabia. But she walks a delicate balance between a respectful compromise and personal independence. If she walks in the mall without an *abaya* she is seen as setting herself above the general population. She does not feel that her dress code practice reflects her opinion about the dress code, or even that it should. It is about a legalistic following of Saudi law and assimilation within cultural practice, and no more. She is aware that women can get away with not wearing the *abaya*, but this is something that American women might choose to do. This flaunting of the law is a racial and imperial act; to Zahida, it is not about women standing up against patriarchy, but about American women thumbing their noses at a non-white, non-Western country and culture that is not in the First World. Zahida is an American, but racially, as non-white, she is not identifiable as an American. This means that racially, she has no power to flaunt Saudi law. At the same time, it means that she is racially on the inside, and to remove her *abaya* would be an act of distancing herself from non-white Saudi citizens. She simply avoids visiting very conservative spaces where she would feel uncomfortable without a face-veil, so she does not wear the face-veil in Saudi Arabia at all. This is part of her system of "small stuff" that allows her to "get through it."

### **"You're Muslim? Where's your veil?"**

Heather deals with the fact that as a non-hijabi Muslim woman, she is often assumed to be a non-observant Muslim. As shown earlier, a religious Muslim man is not required to present evidence of religiosity as Muslim women do.

It's always an interesting question. My professors will be like, 'Oh, you're Muslim!' And for them, it's like, 'What does that mean?' And so it's hard to tell someone – they'll assume that I'm not practicing. A lot of times they'll assume that, 'Oh, you don't wear hijab; you're probably not practicing' - something like that. Or they've met so many Muslims that are so totally 'I'm Muslim but like' -.

Or they've met so many Muslims that really aren't practicing, they just assume that nobody's practicing.

Zahida encounters the same stereotype when the subject comes up with her friends. Zahida does not wear hijab, used to drink occasionally, attends clubs, does not pray regularly, and clearly identifies as a Muslim.

S: What do you think they're thinking when they think same typical Muslim women?

Z: I think like basically there are two types – most people think Muslims are – if they don't know Muslims, they think Muslim women wear the hijab, conservative, don't talk to guys, don't like going out, probably really conservative in their views, just go to school and get married. And then I think in the Middle East and more in DC its like there's two types, that type--Muslim type, drinking, typically in Saudi how they portray, you know how they portray – really rich, don't care about prayer or religion – so there's two extremes that most people are aware of.

The need to define “the minority” exactly leads to dilemmas of representation. Who shall be used as the representative of Islam? The hijab-wearing “religious” woman? The Muslim who drinks and goes to clubs? While a member of the dominant majority may drink or not, dress as s/he wishes, and is not rejected as an appropriate “sample” of his/her population, diversity in “the Muslim woman” confuses their American peers. Yasmin explains how, when she refuses to drink and is asked why, she says that she is Muslim, whereupon some non-Muslim peers interrogate her about her practice and why it differs from the Muslims who drink (Mir, 2003). The wearing of hijab also functions as a signifier of identity, and a Muslim woman who does not wear hijab often submits to interrogation about her choices; but then, a Muslim woman who does wear hijab is interrogated about her choice as well.

Diya struggles with the awkward question (which Heather's professor asked her):

I guess sometimes people ask you, ‘Are you religious?’ and that's always an awkward question because ... if they're thinking in the orthodox sense then – I guess when they think of Muslim religious person, then they're like, ‘Well, why don't you cover your head? I guess they have those ideas about – I guess fanaticism, or that you'd be really critical of what they were doing, you know, things like that. They have this sense, like you're very judgmental and you have moral superiority, attached to being religious. ... that's what it seems like the general idea is with people.

Khan puts it better than I could:

First of all, there is an elision and eclipse of the representations of different Muslims. In North America racialization of Muslim is connected to fundamentalist Islam, and there is little indication of a distinction between Islamic and Islamist in popular imagination. The word Islam frequently suggests a fundamentalist, faith-driven politics and evokes images of the “barbaric Muslim Other,” while failing to consider the strength of other fundamentalisms such as Christian, Hindu, Jewish, communist, cult dogma, and so forth (21).

Diya understands that answering the question “are you religious?” that seeks to categorize her, is a complicated task, and calls for some familiarity with the complexity and diversity in the Muslim community as well as in Islamic theology. However, this profound awareness is rarely to be found. In its place, Muslim women find a set of stereotypes: a religious Muslim woman wears a veil, and is overly moralistic, fanatical, anti-West, and xenophobic. Diya too can be described as a religious woman, a spiritual woman who is good to others, a woman who identifies strongly as a Muslim, who feels strongly about gender equity, and who prays most of the ritual prayers<sup>xxvi</sup> everyday and fasts in Ramadan.<sup>xxvii</sup> However, she will not necessarily be “qualified” as a “religious” woman to her interlocutors, since they have static notions of Islam and gender. This illustrates the “seemingly unbridgeable duality of Orientalism and Islam that encourages an allegiance to either one or the Other and thus discourages the in-between gray zones from which progressive politics often emerges” (Khan 2002: xxiii).

Zareen is also often interrogated about why she does not wear hijab. She makes the fluid situation within the community clear to them as well as her position on the hijab issue. It is possible that the necessity to provide a position on hijab forces Muslim women to position themselves clearly either in favor of against it, whether or not they wish to.

Zareen: A lot of people have asked me why I don't wear hijab. I usually explain to them that nowadays, there is a lot of debate within the Islamic community as to whether hijab is mandatory upon women. Personally, I believe that it is mandatory and that it is very good idea, and I make sure to voice this to the person I am speaking to.

A Pakistani-American sophomore transfer student, Myra, who does not wear hijab says that she wishes to be well-informed about Islam so that she can respond to queries and comments about it.

Myra: I feel like hijab is a big thing. Like because people – I've heard so many different things – my mom says burqa is not in the Quran. But so many people associate being properly covered with just burqa. Like you can't just wear loose clothes and cover your head and you're fine. They're still like, ‘Oh, that’s not good enough.’ I feel like, other cultures and other people – white people or black people, they always associate being properly covered with wearing a burqa because people constantly say, ‘Oh, why don’t you wear it?’ ... [Like] you're not covering yourself properly. I'm like, ‘I can't say I dress appropriately. You know, my pants are more tight [sic] than they should be. But I don't wear skirts or shorts or things like that. I wear short sleeved shirts, but that’s it. I have my limitations.’

Myra battles the stereotype that if she does not cover herself top to toe she is not covering herself as a Muslim should. Conservative Islamist notions of women’s dress and fixed Orientalist notions of a Muslim woman’s practice feed into each other. Myra explains that she practices modesty within a Pakistani-Muslim code – harder to define than a head-covering. She feels called upon to defend her dress code since she does not cover her head or face.

Amira faces the same questions from her peers as well as her grandmother, and she uses the Quranic text to support her interpretation of Islamic injunctions on dress.

People ask me—when people find out I'm Muslim—they'll ask me, ‘Oh, why don't you cover your head?’ My grandmother used to be after me: ‘You know, in the Quran, when a girl is a teenager, you have to cover your head.’ I took out the Quran and showed her the passage. It's kind of like, ‘guard your modesty,’ that’s

the phrase. I mean, what does it mean? 'For you, Grandma, that means cover your head: okay, many girls do that. For me, it means dress nicely but don't dress showing too much' and [pause] also in your interaction with other people—... I mean, I'm friendly I'm open, but I'm not going to go sit in a guy's lap [laugh] unless, I mean, there are certain lines, I feel like I know that.

Neelam is a liberal Bangladeshi-American undergraduate. She does not pray the ritual prayers regularly or often, has never considered wearing hijab, and questions certain juristic rulings regarding women. She, too, is obliged to respond to her dorm-mates' demands as to why she does not wear the veil.

Neelam: I mean certain people, like I have a boy next door from Indiana, and he doesn't know any Muslims where he's from. So what he sees is what he sees on TV, one person walking down the street. So it's like, 'Well, how come you don't cover yourself?' So he has a lot of questions like that because he has this view of a stereotypical, very religious, has-to-obey-the-husband type Muslim girl – he has a lot of questions for me in terms of that because he hasn't been used to it.

"It" seems to be the reality of American Muslim women in particular and Muslims in general, as opposed to the frozen, stereotypical image that is constantly present in American popular culture. In Neelam's dorm-mates' perspective, covering herself (head, face, etc.), religiosity and subservience to men all go together.

Amira feels that, as a non-hijabi, she represents the heterogeneity of Muslim women. She accepts that most people believe that Muslim women wear veils, are "intolerant" and "uncomfortable" (are not integrated), and tries to represent that she is different from this majority, that she is the insider ("you can approach someone like me about it.")

I think because I've been in this environment where I'm always the minority but I'm just used to it! And I just don't feel the pressure. I actually kind of savor the idea that they offer me a drink and I say, 'No thanks.' I don't act insulted, or 'how dare you?' but it's like they realize later that she doesn't drink. So from now on it's always been like at parties, the person will come and bring me juice or – ... And it shows to these people who probably have this perception that all Muslim girls cover their heads, all Muslim girls don't talk to people that are not Muslim, all Muslim girls are very intolerant or uncomfortable, it sends a message to these people that you can approach someone like me about it.

Zahida is amused that the first question she is often asked is, whether she must wear a headscarf.

S: Do you mind if people always – how people ask you all the time, 'What do Muslims think?' Do you mind if people think of you as Muslim?

Z: I love that, when people – sometimes when I say, - people say, 'Oh, you're Muslim?!' I don't believe, - only because of how you're dressed, sometimes they say that. But sometimes if I say something in class, or if I talk to my room mate – some political thing, being liberal or something, ... and she's like, 'It's interesting that you have that view, it's cool.' I like the fact that people can look at you and say, 'Not all Muslims are this, because of her; she doesn't do that,' - you know?

Like Intisar—the hijabi Muslim woman—Zahida too enjoys disrupting people’s assumptions about Muslims and Muslim women. She finds that the mere fact that she is dressed in jeans and a T-shirt challenges people’s assumptions when they discover she is Muslim. She is heartened that she can go beyond that by showing that she can be politically liberal and aware; even though it is somewhat patronizing of her room-mate to be so moved by a Muslim woman having “cool” political views, she is happy that at least she has complexified someone’s notions of what a Muslim woman can be.

### **The terrorist, or the terrorist’s sister**

Unfortunately, the hijab that gives a woman the “privilege” of representation also makes her the first and most obvious victim for hate. And to some, being an oppressed woman might be a relatively benign stereotype in comparison to others that Muslim women encounter.

On September 11, 2001, Zaineb was in New York City. Zaineb is an ecumenical-minded Iranian-American woman who wears hijab.

We were walking across the bridge, and someone was like, you know,--“You Arabs did this!” ... And then the other was when I was in Brooklyn, a lady, she was about fifty years old, and she was African-American, she came to me, she's like really worried, and she was shaking me, and she's like, ‘Don’t wear this! Take it off! This is a war! They're going to kill you!’ I was like – I didn’t know how to react. She's like, ‘No, don’t wear this, don’t wear this, they're going to kill you.’ And she just went. I was like, wow.

This appears to have been a moment where a woman of color saw the impending attack that would engulf the Muslim community, and tried to protect a fellow woman of color from its impact.

Look, a Negro ... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened ... I could no longer laugh, because I already know where there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity ... Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema ... It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. ... I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. – Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p.112.

Zaineb did not react negatively to the former attack.

Zaineb: Well, the first one, it was expected. I was like, okay, the towers just fell. ... Yes, and we saw people – like photographers there and as we passed, they’d take pictures. It was a long walk. It was about an hour and a half walk across the bridge. ... I knew that this is a bridge people usually see the towers from and they look now there's this huge cloud of smoke, and they see a hijabi walking across the bridge. And I was just thinking and I was kind of watching how people would react to that.

She recognizes that as a hijabi, she appears as a representative of her faith community – in its entirety. She appears with her hijab with the absence of the twin towers behind her, as if she herself were responsible for this absence. As if separate from herself, she observes photographers snap photos of her on the bridge and people reacting to her presence. But she does place the

situation in its context and critique American geo-political self-absorption and poor awareness of the rest of the world.

Zahida: And then – that one comment, that was sort of what I was expecting. Thing is, I can't really blame them, because when you look at the way we're exposed to the world, it's so different from so many other people. So like, when I put it in the frame of, this is all we know about the world, the most we know about international affairs is like – Canada [laugh]. And a little bit about Mexico; Cuba sometimes. But if you put your self in that frame work and then all of a sudden you see a terrorist act, it's kind of like, 'What did we ever do to you? ... You hate our MacDonal'd's and stuff, what did you attack us for? We didn't do anything.' You have this mentality. So I totally understand the anger they have. That's what I was expecting. ... My mom even like—'If you ever fear for your life, this isn't you know, this [hijab] isn't something you need to die for—if your life is in danger you're not going to be like no kill me, - this is not salvation or anything. This is a statement we make for our identity. So if it has to do with your survival then you shouldn't wear it. It's actually wrong for you to wear it. If it's going to be your death certificate – if you know you're going to be killed for it,' - I don't know. There are different views on this.

Several religious leaders delivered rulings soon after 9/11/01 saying that if women were at risk, they could remove their headscarves. None of the hijabi women in my study took these rulings seriously for themselves. Zaineb's mother does not wish her daughter to be in danger of a physical attack and urges her to consider removing it under similar circumstances. A strong and confident young woman, Zaineb does not report considering this.

Charlise, a convert, reports the changes post-9/11 for women who wear hijab:

Charlise: It can get so extreme, after September 11, so many sisters took off their hijab.

S: Did you feel safe?

C: I felt safe but at that time, I lived 3 blocks from the state department. if you get someone stupid, there's going to be a lot of people on top of them. I had so many Muslim guy friends I could just ask 'Yo, can you walk me over to my room?' and he did, that was no problem. But it can be ..., people assume what they don't know. ... So yes there is a danger in choosing to wear it. As unlikely as it is—I'm [tall] I'm a big girl, nobody messes with me! At the same time that makes me more an indirect target, someone is more likely to throw something at me as opposed to confront me. So there is that assumption that a woman who wears hijab has dealt with at least one instance of outright bigotry; I don't know any who haven't. Most of all with their own families. ...

It seems that 9/11 made Muslim women more physically unsafe, and increased their reliance for physical safety on Muslim men.

Roshan is aware that due to a combination of her name which is not explicitly Muslim, the fact that she is non-hijabi, and her physical appearance, she is shielded from hate crimes:

As far as after effects. Negative effects to Muslims—I didn't have to really go through all that because I think people—it's because I tend to look Indian so people may think I'm Hindu, or something, and I don't wear hijab, I don't look

Arab—because I think it was mostly against Arabs and Muslims in general. And you can't define me. You can't look at me and say oh she's a Muslim. Unless I was wearing hijab or something.

Roshan is a sophomore and a (non-hijabi) MSA officer. She is nervous when her (White, non-Muslim) peers and colleagues in a volunteer program see her with a group of hijabis. She is also nervous when, walking out with a group of hijabi friends, some drunk men yell at them on the street, inviting them to have sex with them. Her parents are “moderate” Muslims, and she claims that she has become much closer to Islam at college, in contact with the MSA. Her parents are aware of her activism as well as the fact that she is considering wearing hijab. They are somewhat nervous for her safety due to the Islamophobic climate in the US.

Roshan: Also for example hijab, they're not against it; and they want me to do good. No matter really what it is, they want me to do; but at the same time, as far as religion they want me to be careful. They don't want my name on some blacklist either, be it like a career or –

S: So they don't want you to be too religious?

R: Yeah yeah.

S: Or visibly religious?

R: Visibly religious and also I think they don't want me to take such a high political stand, for Palestine—strongly anti-Semitic—I mean, anti-Semitic or anything, not necessarily as a Muslim but – I mean, you could be an okay Muslim and be like very political.

Roshan is not anti-Semitic by any stretch of the imagination, but she reflects on the common rhetoric on campuses that to be pro-Palestinian is to be anti-Semitic. The MSA and the Jewish students group have a troubled relationship at her campus, and they clash in public events and the campus newspaper over Middle East issues. When asked if she ever felt like she had to be cautious about making her Muslim identity public, or if she worked to make it palatable to non-Muslims, Roshan confessed that these political issues had a clear impact on her religious practice, especially such visible practice as hijab.

Roshan: So yes I do modify it. ... exactly, it's all about how I propose the idea to non-Muslims. I have to do that because they jump to conclusions these days.”

S: What conclusions?

R: Oh, everything from: she's supporting the enemy; or she's a fundamentalist or she's anti-Semitic, everything. That's the other thing, there are so many Jews in this school, you don't know who's open minded and who's not. That's why I have to be aware. Honestly I'll tell you I feel like I can't wear hijab not because of the Muslims but because of the non-Muslims.

Roshan feels that the prejudice against Muslims makes it considerably difficult for her to choose to wear hijab. She shrinks from being stereotyped as hijabis often are:

At the same time I feel like it would've been so much easier to do hijab if I didn't have to worry about all these non-Muslims jumping to conclusions. ... I know some of the non-Muslims, they look at hijabis and they're just like, 'Oh, she's one of those; she's an outcast.' And if I'm considered that, I can't—it'll be really hard for me to give up da'wah to them.

Da'wah is considered by many Muslims to be a religious duty. It is important to note that this is not proselytization, or even conversion, but conveying the message of Islam to others, to respond as they will. Roshan feels that if she wore hijab, it would prevent her from conducting da'wah. A strange dilemma: hijab—a religious duty—is an obstacle to effective da'wah, another religious duty. But the reality is far more complicated. Generally, when my participants speak of da'wah, it appears to be closer to raising awareness and combating stereotypes, than religious missionary work. They use the religious terminology most familiar to them, but in practice their work and the reason for this work seem to match that of student groups that raise cultural awareness regarding minority groups. Roshan translates the gaze upon hijabis reading them as “outcasts.” Once they are rendered outcasts and aliens, no dialogue, no “da'wah definitely, can take place.

In terms of survival, this work of da'wah seems extremely important. As for hijab, there are questions within the Muslim community about whether it is obligatory or not. Clearly, it also potentially brings a number of problems to the wearer in American society. For personal and collective survival, it seems that Roshan's choice is a cautious and well-considered one. However, she resents the necessity of her choice between two religious imperatives, a choice that she feels compelled to make due to the prevalent prejudice against Muslims.

At the same time, some Muslims can say, ‘No, you're giving up da'wah to them in the first place because you're not wearing a hijab.’ I like inviting my non-Muslim friends to MSA things because I want them to see we're not freaks, we're not fundamentalists, we're not – you know – we're not – I guess dangerous people, we're not terrorists. ... I see that as a huge thing I have to deal with because they think my dad's, my uncle's, or family's terrorist.

Roshan is aware of the (Muslim) claim that wearing hijab is a form of “silent da'wah.” It is a banner of Islam, an invitation to learn about and possibly embrace Islam. Roshan does not want to wear hijab, because she feels more confident about approaching her friends and inviting them to events if she does not wear hijab. She is motivated by the desire to invite her non-Muslim friends to MSA events to show them that they are not “freaks,” “fundamentalists,” “terrorists” or “dangerous people.”

The manner in which Roshan describes common gender-differentiated perceptions of Muslim men and women is poignant. As a woman, she is on the front-line battling stereotypes that her male relatives are violent and dangerous, and therefore protecting the lives of her male relatives. Though a Muslim woman is considered oppressed—the negative image of the violent Muslim male—she is an agent of protecting her men and her community, since she, as a woman, can work to combat stereotypes in a way that the “violent” male may have less potential to do. The danger perceived from “potential terrorists” is a physical one, and the corresponding fear from the dominant majority is immediately rendered a physical danger. The rise in Islamophobic attacks on Muslims (and Sikhs, who were mistaken as Muslims) post-9/11 expresses the nature of this fear.

Fatima, of Asian Indian-American background, believes that she has an advantage in the job market in terms of being a Muslim woman, rather than a man, and a non-hijabi, especially post-9/11:

S: Do you feel your religion and ethnicity will impact your career opportunities at all?

Fatima: I definitely think yes, it will, especially after September 11, I think of this more often. But I think being a Muslim woman also helps. I don't think

they're really looking out for Muslim women. And I think that the fact that I don't wear hijab will help.

The Bush administration's security measures after September 11, 2001 focused on the religious Muslim male, Middle Eastern or South Asian. Women like Fatima are grateful for their comparative advantage, as women. Muslim women, however, have become targets of discrimination when their hijab identifies them as Muslim and religiously observant.

### **Disempowered femininity**

Not only does hijab identify a general Islamic identity but it also fixes the particularities of a negative (victimized and disempowered) Muslim female identity.

Undertaken for a positive purpose, it takes on a negative one, when its meaning is lost in translation. Heather finds that, as a White convert, she is more likely to directly experience this stereotype. White members of the dominant majority are more likely to confide in her regarding their prejudices, while many Muslims of immigrant background are more likely to experience prejudice in other, less direct, ways.

S: Do you feel like there are pressures on campus for someone like you to fit in?

H: In terms of Muslim? Yes. It's so annoying when you go to class ... and I just went in a button-down long-sleeved shirt and a skirt, a khaki skirt. Like, "Are you hot?"—the most irritating question in the world. "Aren't you hot?" Ugh, you know what, do you see – I have a t-shirt on under this; if I cared, I would just take the shirt off, you know! Plus, what sort of benefit are you deriving out of asking me if I'm hot? Yes, I'm absolutely burning up. It's really unfortunate that my religion is so oppressive, and like, I'm suffering here [laugh] you know.

My participants reacted to the widespread belief that Muslim women are especially oppressed by their religion repeatedly in my interviews. Here, Heather mocks the infuriating question ("Are you hot?") that poses like an expression of concern but seeks to subvert her entire sense of self as an empowered and religious woman, turning her into a victim of her (foreign) religion, a blind follower, a dupe of a male religion, and an individual beyond the pale of normalcy. She responds to it as a form of pressure to cave in to American dominant majority norms of dress, that especially in the summer, call for baring skin especially through swimwear and casual wear. Heather demands that tact be exercised when people perceive others dressed in a certain way. "I don't think it's necessarily a question that has a lot of thought put into it, but that may be part of the problem too because if someone's dressed in a certain way you might be curious as to why they're dressing that way."

However, she also asserts that her choices are generally "legitimate" ones within her culture:

On the other hand, wearing long sleeves isn't all that much hotter than like – you know, it's about the material, I was like, 'It's light colors and it's a light material.' And there was a Muslim girl sitting next to me. I mean, she had on capris and a short-sleeved shirt, but she was like, 'No, look, this is so light,' whatever. It was sort of nice that she defended me so to speak ... I don't know, there's certain sacrifices you have to make based on your belief. Obviously I don't think she knows I'm Muslim, but like – it's an irritating question and so definitely this summer I'm a lot more inclined to wear, like, light-looking things or things that might fit in a little more. Like, skirts that don't look like they're hot, or pants that just look like khakis, because you can sort of get away with wearing

khakis in the summer and nobody's going to ask you 'Are you hot?' for the most part. Because at least you're like – you know, it's a legitimate thing to wear. The problem is when people wear long skirts or long pants they normally wear, like, a tank top on top.

Heather is moved by the strategic “defense” of her by the Muslim class-mate—even if she was dressed in capris and short sleeves (exposing legs and arms, which Heather does not). She contends that she is no victim to her religion, and she is not suffering excess of heat by covering her body. The zeal of her argument shows the depth of the wound: she struggles hard against being perceived as either not normal or a victim. Yet she feels the gaze upon her, and strategically adjusts her wardrobe, wearing light colors, skirts and khakis that look cool (the emphasis is not on them being cool for her, but on appearing cool to those who would reduce her to a Muslim damsel in distress). But within the choices, she is not happy with her efforts: all this is only partially successful (‘for the most part’), and skirts are really ‘appropriate’ summer-wear only with tank-tops.

The fashion industry emerges in Heather's world as a tyrant, demanding that women expose more skin. She feels the tyrannical influence through majority women, who demand why she does not conform to the unwritten rules (written too, in fashion magazines, and what-to-wear books) that skirts must be short, and must go with tank-tops, not with long-sleeved shirts.

Heather: Yes. I think non-Muslims are going to look at Muslims' very—perspective. Like, 'Why do women dress like that? Why don't they date?' People think it's crazy! ... And another time there was an article in the paper about a Muslim woman and why she wears hijab and why she feels it's liberating. ... But I read the article, and my friends said, 'Did you see the article ... there's this Muslim woman who's talking about wearing hijab and how she feels it's liberating!' And my friend's like, 'Yeah, my mom's like, 'Well, they have to justify it some way.' Okay, and this was three months—two months before I converted. In my mind I was already Muslim. ... I was so disgusted; I was like, 'Just let me out of the car. I just want to leave.' But at the same time, I could sit there and argue on behalf of Muslims, because they didn't even know I knew anything about it and that I was thinking of converting. And I was just like, you know, 'Don't talk about what you don't know about.' So non-Muslims obviously have a ton of misconceptions ... unfortunately I knew my friend's perspective before, and now I have to deal with being Muslim and knowing that's how they feel about it. But on the other hand it gives me a little bit more insight into like, maybe they can see someone who's like, a strong Muslim woman, or – self respecting, or – whatever. Just pretty similar to who they are. And I'm sure they think I'm a freak. [laugh] I'm not going to deny that. But at least they can think Muslims don't have to be totally, entirely someone different from what they are.

Heather appreciates the insight she has into non-Muslim stereotypes about Muslim women and the veil, but it is also painful that she is now aware that her friend believes she (Heather) is “a freak” for choosing to be Muslim. Yet, Heather is glad that she renders Muslims a little less alien (or as Roshan would put it, outcast). This pattern of willingly working, bit by bit, at times painfully, to educate the dominant majority regarding Muslims, is a common one among my participants. Heather is happy to introduce a note of doubt in her friends' stereotypes about Muslim women. She feels that her status as a White woman, she is in a position to be an effective ambassador to non-Muslims, since she is more “similar to who they are.” However, paradoxically, though she is “more similar,” this also makes her a “freak”—a White member of

the Christian dominant majority who chooses to identify as a Muslim—while Muslims of immigrant background, born to Muslim families, are not “freaks.”

White and non-white Muslim women both feel called upon to disprove this stereotype of a disempowered Muslim female identity through their example. Naheed, an Iranian-American non-hijabi woman, comments on how she probably does not hear stereotyping of Muslim women as “oppressed” in her presence simply because she does not wear hijab. Hijab increases the degree to which a Muslim woman is “oppressed” in the sight of the dominant majority. It is a symbol of female disempowerment.

Naheed: [Laugh] [Ideas about Muslim women are] pretty typical. You have fewer rights; nobody’s ever come up to me and like, “You’re oppressed.” I don’t know [why], maybe because I don’t wear hijab – maybe that’s more oppressed than just being Muslim, I don’t know.

A Pakistani-American young freshman (non-hijabi), Diya feels that hijab renders Muslim women “different” and has a psychological impact on them. Diya thinks Americans associate hijab with disempowerment, foreignness and fear.

Diya: I think it has a psychological effect on girls. They feel more different and more distant from everyone else, and I think they feel like a lot more people are watching them--especially because it’s almost like a stigma. It has these connotations for American people. They feel like everyone is judging them. ... American people look at Muslim women and think, ‘Oh, they’re oppressed. They’re oppressed, - they’re – maybe they don’t speak English’ [laugh] or maybe terrorist related things.

S: Do you ever feel like you need to represent an opposite of that as a Muslim woman?

D: Yes. I mean, definitely as a Muslim woman, I do. Yes. As far as hijab, I really love my friends who wear hijab – Latifa, you know like she has just a different vibrance [sic] to her, wearing hijab. I think people do have a different image of a Muslim woman when they see Latifa. I think because she’s more outgoing and usually – first of all people think you’re oppressed and if you’re very quiet then I think that sort of [confirms it]. Or they think you’re traditional, Eastern, backward. All that stuff. [She represents that] I can wear hijab but it doesn’t mean I’m any of the things you think I am.

S: Do you think she has an advantage over if she didn’t – socially?

D: I think she might. I don’t - . I think people who don’t wear hijab do have a social advantage. I mean, yes, definitely. I think she does – she sort of compensates for that. Yes, I think she definitely – people don’t treat her any differently because she wears hijab; I think people forget that she wears hijab. Ideally, I think that’s what should happen. People shouldn’t treat you differently – they should be able to not – for that not to be an obstacle.

It appears that many non-hijabis are, like Diya, acutely aware (or believe) that hijabis are often stereotyped as oppressed, foreign, traditional, quiet, and withdrawn. Paradoxically, they can also be stereotyped as associated with terrorist groups (note that they are “terrorist-related” rather than terrorists, since Muslim males are more likely to be regarded as terrorists).

Diya examines the case of Latifa, who is often cited as the exception to the hijabis. Tehzeeb and Tabassum say that Latifa is friendly, “smiley” and approachable, unlike some of the other hijabis,

who are described as comparatively socially withdrawn and sticking together (with other hijabis). Diya contends that people “have a different image of a Muslim woman when they see Latifa.” Much of this is because she is outgoing. It appears that the impression of being oppressed increases in degree for the following types of women:

A Muslim woman (oppressed)

|

**A hijabi Muslim woman (very oppressed)**

|

**A quiet, shy hijabi Muslim woman (most oppressed)**

Therefore a Muslim woman is often by default assumed to be oppressed, but if she wears hijab, this becomes a visual and therefore concrete “reality.” If she happens to be hijabi and quiet, this only serves as confirmation of what is assumed. A white Jewish or Christian female college student can be socially withdrawn and is therefore simply a shy woman; a Muslim woman who is shy is a representative of a global community. It may be that young hijabi women like Latifa are obliged to work on their personae to prove that they do not possess these default characteristics. Diya argues that Latifa actually consciously compensates for being a hijabi by being outgoing.

Latifa has a mental pattern of how she becomes closer to people, and it generally involves an “interrogation process.” She responds below:

S: What kind of characteristics have people assumed about you, and how does it come out that they think that way?

L: The typical stereotypes that females are subservient, degraded gender, uneducated, deprived. Those are the negative assumptions of course that are sometimes implied during the “interrogation process.”

Amira, a non-hijabi, has a “vigilante streak” that urges her to defend hijabis when they are attacked, because she feels that they cannot necessarily defend themselves:

Amira: I remember there was a talent show at my sisters’ high school and there was a girl who wore hijab and she was doing a magician’s act. And there was this boy behind me, he was really like—some white boy, he was like, ‘Oh, she’s going to pull a rabbit out of her head-cover.’ And I turned around and glared at him, and I was like, ‘Excuse me, do you know why she wears that head-cover?’ ... I was like, ‘There’s a reason she wears that and I hope you respect that.’ And he was like, ‘I’m sorry!’ And I sat down, but I was angry. I was like, you shout out something like that, and a girl who wears hijab is performing an act, that’s so disrespectful. It would be like pointing out that someone was fat. So I do kind of like have a streak that can stand up and—yes, it can be a vigilante streak. ... I think part of my logic is, it’s like standing up for someone who can’t—maybe it’s a little paternalistic, but you have to protect especially those who are vulnerable. Because if you don’t protect the ones who are vulnerable, you yourself are in the line of fire.

Amira’s analysis here examines hijabis through the gaze of the dominant majority. Pointing out a hijabi’s head-cover is “like pointing out that someone was fat.” A fat person is a common object of social ridicule in American society. Amira believes that hijabis can be similar targets of ridicule. She protects them because she thinks they are the clear targets of ridicule and hate directed at Muslims—such as herself—and if hijabis are not protected, other Muslims could be

next. She also defends them because in her view they are unable to protect themselves. Interestingly, Amira too buys into the common stereotype of the veiled woman as weak, oppressed, and incapable of defending herself.

### Third space

We had just finished an interview and were walking out when we bumped into a male student friend of Latifa's. He asked her why she hadn't been in touch, and then teasingly pulled at her hijab, moving up rather close to her in a mock-confrontational manner. I sensed that Latifa and I were both uncomfortable but were determined to not feel or look uncomfortable. We responded to his banter with forced good humor, but he continued with his rather physical humor as she pulled her hijab away from him. He snatched her water bottle; she said, 'Please give it back;' when he wouldn't, she grabbed it, laughed and said, 'Why am I even asking you?' Then he took hold of one end of her hijab and said, 'Why don't you wear it like this?' and stretched the fabric out like a veil in front of her face. She said, 'Well, I didn't know you wanted me to; if you do, I will!' I said, 'Maybe because she doesn't want to.' He said, 'You should do this, I like this better, I like you like this, I'd rather not see your face.'

Though Muslim women college students fight stereotypes, even this task is complicated. The frozen, binary opposition of disempowered-liberated when translated into American, middle-class, White, Christian/secular terms is not necessarily applicable to these Muslim women. They accept religious and cultural restrictions that are not common to most women of the dominant majority, so they are liable to being perceived as trapped in a web of alien culture and religion.

When they move in dominant majority circles, and are outgoing (to show that they are not "oppressed") they must at the same time communicate that they are not like other "non-oppressed" women (or "normal" women), but that they accept religious limits on their behavior. Latifa (whose behavior is analysed by Diya earlier), struggles with a complex situation.

S: How would you not want to come across?

Latifa: You know, your typical traditional Muslim female, the type you see on TV, very conservative in that sense – in the sense of ideas, lifestyle – ... And sometimes it does come with baggage – the headscarf, but I think once people talk to me, and in our first conversation **they realize I'm a little different**, they do discuss their curiosity which could be disguised as reservations at first. And I think I mentioned in my email, drinking is always an issue. **And then I mean yes, I'm cool to chill with and talk with and be friends with but doesn't necessarily mean – like, I do have my limits and sometimes they mistake me for – because I am a little normal, that –**

S: That you'll do anything?

L: Yeah. **"No, no, I do have certain values!"**

S: You're kind of in a strange place – they can't place you.

L: Exactly.

S: So you have a lot of explaining to do.

L: Oh, my goodness! Yes. But you know, I'd rather explain – there's definitely a lot of pressure – and it comes with baggage. Am I resentful? No, because I love talking about it if they're willing to ask about it. I'm not preaching –

S: Are they generally positive when they hear you?

L: More positive than negative I'd have to say.

S: What kind of responses might you get?

L: You know, like ‘that’s not so fun’ – for example with not drinking and not clubbing. What else? ‘Aren't you hot in that?’ Did you read my response to the guy who said ‘You can take it off anytime’? That was so funny. [laugh]

Latifa struggles with stereotypes such as “traditional” and “conservative” Muslim woman, an image that is excessively used in American visual culture to represent all Muslim women. She feels that the headscarf is associated with these stereotypes, but that once people talk to her they realize she is “a little different.” This allows them, after appearing reserved at first, to bring up their curiosity about her “different” persona as a Muslim woman. Here again, Latifa appears to accept the common stereotype of the Muslim woman, only to add that she is “a little different.” By this time, they sometimes assume that, since she is “different,” her values are similar to the dominant majority. Since drinking and going to clubs is a common activity for dominant majority college students, they assume that she is “cool” with these activities, but she must then establish that though “cool,” she has “limits.” One male friend “sympathized” with her practice of hijab, and offered her the freedom to remove it in his presence if she “got sick of it.” He assumed an absence of agency, though the hijab was her personal choice in the first place, and played the Western male rescuing the oppressed Muslim woman. He reflects the liberal feminist tendency to try to “free Third world women, in particular Muslim women, from their communities” (Khan 2002: xxiii).

### **Feminism**

Julie Stephens criticizes feminist work that “often collides as well as colludes with Orientalist discourse in a search for the sovereign female subject and in attempts to represent her. Feminist writings grant subject status to those women who fulfill criteria consistent with the feminist position of the author and, in so doing, valorize some subjects of feminist research while seeing others as objectified and oppressed. Thus feminist analysis also frequently reproduces Orientalist knowledge” (Khan 5).

When Muslim women refuse to fall into a one-size-fits-all category of female empowerment, they enter a troubled relationship with certain strands of dominant feminism when the meanings of empowerment, gender, and sexuality are translated differently by American Muslim women.

Veiling—to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies—became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam’s degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies (Leila Ahmed, 1992, 152, cit in Khan 9).

This continues to be the case, and liberal feminist thought embodies some of this approach (Mohanty 1991b in Khan 10).

Tehzeeb grapples with and resists “political correctness” which, she feels, is often employed not to respect and/or critique all norms, but to place them in a hierarchical relationship.

Tehzeeb: And generally that’s the most annoying thing about Americans that they’re so politically correct. Even yesterday I was sitting in red square here . . . So I was walking saying hi to [Colin] the convert [Colin is a relatively strict, religious young man, a White convert]. And then [her friend Matt] was like ‘Yeah, I wanted to ask you a question, not to offend you or anything. But is there

a reason why he always has his pants folded, why are his ankles always showing, why are his pants always short<sup>xviii</sup>?' So I was like yeah, I was telling him about Islam, the *hadith*, *sunnah*, blah blah blah.

And this girl was standing there, she's with her friend, she's a lesbian, and she's in my year, and I'm cool with her, we're not friends but whatever, normal. And she's asking me about it, 'Why don't men have to cover, why do women have to cover?' blah blah blah. And I said, 'Well, in Islam, women have to cover from their wrists to their ankles and men--.' And she's like, 'Oh, why don't men have to cover?' --already assuming, like—they always have this such aggressive attitude about like—[laugh] They're too out, like you know, really like, [over-earnest tone] like women's rights, and political correctness and everything. And she's like, 'Why don't men have to cover?' and I was like 'Men have to cover too; they have to cover, like, from their knees to their bellybuttons.' Okay. And she's like 'Oh, that's a big difference!' and I was like,--and I was kind of trying to piss her off too, because I wasn't even going to try and appease her. I don't like these Muslims who try and appease western interpretations of like feminism and stuff.

So then I was like, 'Yeah, it's because women's bodies are sexier than men's.' And I knew she was going to hate that. So just like it's a fact, 'Women's bodies are more sensual than men's.' So she's getting all [offended] but she doesn't know how to act – [laugh] but the problem is, because I'm not being aggressive either, and I'm so chill, I'm in [campus public space], and she's not my friend, so she's not going to yell at me either, so she doesn't know how to handle it either. But this obviously—she lives her whole life, like women's rights, feminism, lesbian--. And her friend's like, 'No, that's actually just a social construct, that women's bodies are more sexual ... and that's the reason why this attitude feeds the circle of whatever, like abuse against women blah blah blah.' And I was like, 'Yeah, okay, don't say it's a fact, that's what people believe now, and it's becoming accepted, and being delivered like it's a fact but it's not a fact. That's your opinion, and it's my opinion that women's bodies are more sexual.' And she didn't have anything to say after that. And things like that, they're always ready to – ... things like that, that's why I don't feel comfortable having close friends who are American I guess. That's not always true. Obviously there's always exceptions.

Tehzeeb's friend confronts Tehzeeb with the assumption that western feminist norms of gender and clothing are superior to the norms of clothing that Tehzeeb explains as Islamic. Tehzeeb's friend is not only convinced that Islamic gender-differentiated norms of clothing discriminate against women, but she is prepared to aggressively attack them as well.

When Heather became Muslim, her greatest struggle was clothing. She hints at how this was related to the notion of modesty and a liberal feminist oppositional stance on this notion. When I asked her what her main struggles were on becoming Muslim, she said:

Heather: I want to think, clothes is huge, not because—sure, it's fine, you just change how you dress—but like, it just represents so much. Because this society is so fashion-oriented, looks-oriented. And on top of that, the whole idea that it's liberating, and freedom, to not wear hijab, and to be able to wear your little miniskirt or whatever you want. And we should demand to still be treated the

same way no matter what we're wearing. And so I think it's a very modernist, new age, feminist approach to be able to wear whatever we want as women. And I think obviously as Muslims it's very unrealistic—or ridiculous almost, to think that, whatever, scandalous dressing leads to a very stable society, a stable house, and the good impression you want to be giving, and the sort of morals you want to be encouraging.

S: How do you get into that mindset? Because people assume on the outside, 'Oh, she became Muslim and it automatically happens because you love doing it.'

Heather: Definitely not. Yeah. Especially here Muslim women are so torn apart by the media and the feminists. So when first confronted with the whole idea of modesty, I think that's the last thing I accepted about Islam. What's the deal, I can't change the way I dress, whatever ... I remember finally, here's this book called *A Return to Modesty*. It's written by an American woman, and she basically talked about how in the Judeo-Christian tradition, modesty is very fitting for a woman because it allows her to have her self respect. And also it's going back to the religion in the essence. And what are we trying to do by showing our bodies by the way we dress? So when I heard that modesty was really encouraged in Christianity and Judaism, I realized that it wasn't just an Islam thing, but it was just Muslims who were practicing it, as opposed to the other two religions.

Note that what rendered modesty initially palatable for Heather was not an Islamic argument but the argument that it was not alien to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and that it was not an exotic practice of Muslims alone. The fixed notion of modesty as something belonging to a "traditional" or Muslim world and not in the Judeo-Christian tradition is neither historically nor theologically accurate, but this does not prevent this view from being commonly accepted.

### **Hyper-visibility**

Latifa told me in an email:

At Georgetown the two things that are different or weird according to people is [sic]:<sup>xxix</sup> ... B.) would have to my HIJAB, it's been a great ICE-Breaker, as well as a pool of confusion that I and others would float in for debate. This one guy once commented that he noticed I compliment girls on their hair a lot, and he thought that perhaps I did feel oppressed with the veil <--(I hate that term, I don't know why it just carries so much negative connotation, so I use it purposely to further describe his request) which was if you ever feel you need to take it off just do it, I would not think any less of you, nor would anyone else. I thought his gesture was very sincere. Him [sic] and I had a conversation about hijab before, and he understood its significance, but at the same time he claimed it is my right to take it off anytime I wanted if I was sick of it even for a day. I thought that was interesting.

It is interesting that the two first things that Latifa mentions as being "weird" according to her peers at Georgetown are not drinking alcohol and wearing hijab. A male friend, under the impression that Latifa requires "rescuing" from her oppressive religion, tells her she can take it off whenever she wants and his opinion of her would not change. He assumes that the opinion of the majority would swing Latifa one way or the other.

Other people's reaction is of pure inquiry and curiosity [sic] ( I presume)- some of course may think that that level of restraint or "conservatism" just is not their cup of tea, but at the same time respect my choice- [because] that is how I emphasize it. I do not comment on their choice of dress, so I indicate that it's really not their place to determine my choice either. ... So I think that is the beauty of hijab, because I am being public about my faith and tradition. Discussions regarding lifestyle and culture and religion are then of course very natural and normal, because people are curious I think and want to know more. These discussions do happen at an early stage when I meet people and intend to plant a friendship- it's just that natural progression that I've experienced. But then again this beauty also can transform to the beast that some people would assume or decide characteristics about me. ... I do stick out.

Latifa thinks that others do not have the right to deliver their opinions on her dress code since she says nothing about theirs, and the unofficial code of relativism and minding one's own business on campus should apply to her hijab as well. At the same time, her hijab makes her difference public, and others make it a matter of public comment as well. At an early point in the development of a friendship, people ask her questions about her hijab, and sometimes this takes the form of stereotypes. This puts her in a position where she must be "able to negate certain people's preconceived notions about [her] lifestyle."

### **College spaces: Between the imam and the professor**

The secular space of college in general and the classroom in particular can make hijabis feel both hyper-visible and marginalized. This can be due to college life activities such as drinking and casual sex and when Islam is discussed in the classroom, and especially when hijab is critically discussed. Both representative responsibility and the weight of stereotype are imposed upon hijabis during such discussions. Due to the variety of perspectives on women's clothing, Muslim women, especially those who wear hijab, are stuck between these different approaches. Conservative religious leaders demand that they adhere to strict requirements regarding hijab, while progressive or modernist Muslim scholars contend that the hijab is unnecessarily emphasized or, even that it is against the letter or spirit of the religion. In addition, there are academics who ridicule or malign the veil as oppressive.

Latifa struggles with the change of educational environment when she graduates from an Arabic and Islamic school to a Catholic university. She remembers being at school and resenting the pressure from teachers and other adults to start wearing the hijab; at college, she struggles with the subjection of hijab to public and secular- as well as progressive- Islamic oriented examination. Latifa offers dress as the main issue that concerns her in class discussions. Now that she is in college, and has been exposed to certain kinds of critique on the hijab issue, she feels ambivalent about it.

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Latifa: I think the issue of dress. [The Islamic school's] Islamic education was very –

S: When it comes to dress, did you use to think of hijab as obligatory?

L: Yes. It was important. Or else I wouldn't have started to wear it. But you know, now more so than earlier do I think it's more of an ambiguous issue and it's not an issue that – even actually back then I was the only one from my group of friends that started to wear it.

Yet college is not the only space where hijab is subjected to critique. At her Islamic school, Latifa and her friends used to react negatively to their teachers' pressure:

Latifa: I guess we did talk about it sometimes, of course because we'd be very reactionary after a teacher would tell us, 'Okay, this is what you're supposed to do.' All my friends were like, 'Well, why is she telling us this and this? We can concentrate on other things.' Of course it was a very natural reaction because they didn't wear it and they didn't appreciate her preaching it to us, like, 'This is the only way you can do it.' I didn't support what she did. I may have a certain view of it but – I guess I don't try to infringe my ideas on others. I think I've always been like that. ... it's just not my place. I've never seen it that way. So definitely issues of dress [have been significant issues of debate in college classes] ... [And] polygamy.

Latifa dreads the discussion cropping up in her Islam class with a Muslim professor with certain rationalist ideas.

L: But you know what? I will feel uncomfortable when Professor Anwar talks about hijab in class.

S: She talks about it?

L: Yes. ... But she's going to talk about the philosophies and practices of Muslims, and she'll say, 'It's not written in the Quran, and people follow pre-Islamic tradition ... that's because they just maintained their earlier traditions – in addition to like, converting to Islam. I think she'll say, 'It's not a religious notion, and you're not supposed to stick out like a sore thumb'.—This is what I heard people say, she lectured about it. Yes—you're just supposed to assimilate in your community. So I think I'll stick out in my class! [Laugh].

The Muslim professor, Prof. Anwar, who teaches the Islam class teaches not only that hijab is not obligatory, but that it has no textual basis, and it is not even a religious practice. The professor contends that women who practice it are going against an Islamic principle of "assimilating into your community." Whether this is true or not, in the context of a U.S. college classroom, it feeds into a cultural assimilationist perspective, as Latifa notes ("So I think I'll stick out in my class!") Hijabis are identified as culturally isolationist (and by extension, deserving of marginality). Whatever the merits of the professor's theological position, she uses her position as a faculty member to voice a single perspective on a controversial issue. In effect she marginalizes the hijabis in her class. The professor does not create a space for the pro-hijab position to be articulated. She closes up the empowering and democratic possibilities of theological pluralism by advancing a single opinion on the issue of hijab. Latifa—a hijabi who is occasionally somewhat ambivalent about the hijab—dreads the class session where this lecture will take place, and would rather not be present. She also wonders if she can question whether the professor's approach fits in the world of the relativistic academy, as well as her own theological approach.

S: How is it going to make you feel?

L: I don't know, I want to be out – it's hard! Like, I'm not going to – I don't mind that people don't believe in it, I don't care, like whatever. But just like – I don't know – when someone tells me that something I'm doing is completely wrong-- wouldn't that be *judging*? And who are we to judge? I mean I don't judge people who don't wear it, I don't say that –

S: You feel they're judging you because you're sitting there, you're visibly sitting there

L: Yes. I mean, I'm not saying - it's not an attack on me but it's an attack on all the people who decide to wear hijab--. The whole point is that we are our own judge ... that we are our own arbiters, ... the knowledge, between good and evil, like we shouldn't impose our understanding or our belief on others. And I don't do that to other people, you know. So I guess -- this is a natural feeling for me, if I'm not going to impose what I believe, --. I may express what I believe but impose is a different way, to teach or lecture—

S: Oh, because she's a professor.

L: Yes, and she has legitimacy, you know? I don't know, I don't even know if I'd be capable of a discussion on this because I feel like it would be a direct attack. Even though she probably wouldn't see it as a direct attack on me—Latifa sitting in the class—no, of course not. But you can't help but feel marginalized when she's talking about the people who are wearing hijab, that its not an act of faith, and it's not like --. ... Yes, it's going to come up and what am I supposed to do? Stand up and say well I think what you're saying is wrong--. ... I could, but why would I debate the professor in front of all these students – a Muslim to a Muslim? No.

The professor advocates progressive religious ideals that incorporate a non-judgmental, open-minded perspective. Yet, to Latifa, her approach contradicts her purported ideals, since she directly attacks hijab as “not an act of faith” but merely a pre-Islamic cultural tradition, and does not incorporate critical questioning of this perspective. The professor’s ideas are protected from the critical questioning she advocates, due to her position as a faculty member.

Latifa: Okay, I understand I do have the opportunity or authority to debate her ideas or scholarship – or not scholarship but her ideas, or whatever she might say. ... But when its something so personal --- I'm not as – perhaps – coherent or – outspoken – especially if there's a large audience. If there's just her and I, then sure. But this is something that clearly she's been teaching for ten to twelve years and what makes me or anyone think that by me contesting it – like, in the class – that she'll actually change it? I mean, ultimately, she'll have the final word and **I'll look like – I'm a blind follower**, you know? There's a risk in it as far as my image goes. Not that I really care but at the same time, then it would get personal. Even though it's already personal – I can't help but feel that it's a personal thing when she talks about it in her lecture. (emphasis added)

In effect, the professor, addressing a majority non-Muslim audience in the class, portrays hijabi Muslim women as “passive recipients of prescriptions of religious texts” (Khan 2002). With the hijab visually identifying her, Latifa cannot disguise the fact that she is also a target of the professor’s “attack.” This makes the discussion “personal.” But the situation is even more complex: in a culture where Islam and Muslims are demonized, this class is a rare opportunity to present Islam in a positive manner to non-Muslims. Latifa does not wish to exhibit a negative image of Islam and Muslims to them by openly criticizing the professor’s views. This makes the Muslim community appear internally contradictory and disunited. In Christianity, this is “diversity,” as Rana points out, but for Muslims it is not an option. The static image is the only one, and Muslims, even when they are trying to correct stereotypes, are working with that image.

Latifa: But then when I contest it and debate it, and whatever-whatever, and she's like, [loudly and authoritatively] ‘Well, dadada,’ -- ... It's like, okay, here's a Muslim professor and here's a student, and there are differences. What would the impression of the class be? ...

S: You think it looks bad for two Muslims to be disagreeing in front of a majority of non-Muslims?

L: Yes. Definitely it doesn't look good. Like appreciating diversity – if she's going to say something as – like, broad – I don't say that, I do say that there are different interpretations, you know and the way you approach it says a lot about your belief. If you're going to say, 'No, it's completely wrong and it's just a cultural tradition' – okay, if it's a cultural tradition then why do so many people to this day and age, still wear it now? Like, honestly—I mean, some people do feel that there is a religious legitimacy to wearing it, you know? So – not that I'm saying that it's not culture – it is culture, I do admit it was a tradition of pre-Islamic Arabia, the female higher class, that they view hijab to indicate superiority and whatnot. ... I can understand what she's saying because I –. Again, am not going to impose what I believe on someone, and I guess my biggest problem is the fact that she's imposing this one—this general belief that 'This is not it, and that's it.'

S: What if she'd said, 'There is an opinion that says this [alternative view];' would that help?

L: I think it would help. Or that 'there are different opinions out there,' and then—you know, be able to justify that by, 'I mean, some people do still wear it.' ... But that she's controlling with her lectures, she's very controlling and domineering with her like, - perspective and interpretation of – you know? ... Well, I don't have a problem with the hijab issue unless it's being imposed or—approached in that manner, you know? And again, well, of course I have personal issues because I am a girl who decided to wear hijab. ... So that's of course why I have an automatic reaction, or automatic problem with it, because like, I *do* do it. And so many other people do it too. Just – I mean, - I'm not going to say that it's mainstream – but a lot of people do it, so for her to say something as strong as --. This is of course what I've heard, she hasn't said it yet. But of course I'm very wary to go to the class where she will talk about it. Because it's really uncomfortable. Like, I do feel as though – it's not – I mean – personal attack, no, but I'm going to end up feeling marginalized and just weird. Looking down as in [looks down] like -.

S: So suppose your class was composed of only Muslim students – and her; would it be better?

L: Yes ... Would I feel more comfortable? Yes, definitely.

S: So it's kind of like the non-Muslims looking on—and thinking.

L: Yes.

S: She's wearing hijab: she's got it all wrong.

L: Yeah. ... I don't know! [in distress] What do you – do you think –... you think I should? ... Don't you think since I am so visible about it--?

Latifa is not arguing with the theologically controversial aspects of the veil. Her problem is with the single-sided perspective which the modernist professor is advocating, and the fact that she is *advocating* it, and attacking the veil. She feels that in a classroom where she is wearing the hijab, an attack on the veil (as theologically inappropriate, not required, and/or not a religious practice) is an attack on her personally. The power dynamics of the classroom, occurring within the political dynamics of a post-9/11 United States, as well as the fact that the professor and Latifa are both Muslim, while the class is majority non-Muslim, make it impossible for her to represent an alternative perspective comfortably. She feels as if she is the target of ridicule, orchestrated by the Muslim professor.

Wisal, a hijabi MSA officer who has been involved with MSA and MYNA work prior to college, is in the same position as Latifa, though Wisal expresses no ambivalence about hijab.

Wisal: And I don't think – I'm more vocal than others are but I think I fall in the middle because I just – I don't like to be pushy about stuff. But I like to correct wrongs at least. I'll make a statement if I feel like there's—

S: Stereotyping?

W: Yes or there's – like in my Islamic religious thought and practice class there was a whole thing about – I knew Prof. Anwar she's not really pro-hijab or anything like that. ... So when she did the class period on it I was really tense and stuff like that. And I felt like I needed to represent myself at least in the class, someone who's sitting in that class wearing hijab, everyone is turning around going, 'Oh, why does she wear it, if it's not--?' ... She does a class on women's rights and women in general and she focuses on it for a little while. So I raised my hand and made my statement about why I personally did it, not necessarily pushing it, in the issue of, 'Well, I think everyone should do it,' ... I made it very clear that there's diversity within the community and that I don't feel like people should be forced to do it or pressured to do it, I think it's an individual choice – I made it very clear. But I still felt like my position at least needed to be represented somewhat in terms of the debate or dialogue.

S: Did you wish she'd done it?

W: Yes! Of course. I think it would've been a lot better if she'd been more – I don't know, true to the actual conflict or debate within the community. Her side isn't the one that's – it's definitely there but it's not the only one, you know? And I think a lot of times that was my issue with the class—her misrepresentation of real Islam as opposed to her ideological conceptions or theological version of it. and you know I was like if these kids entered a Muslim community – although I don't necessarily think that Muslim community's going to be the standard bearers of Islam, - they're going to be really confused as to what kind of Islam they're seeing! [laugh] 'Oh, professor Anwar said that--! That's not true!'

We have here the question of who represents Islam and Muslims, and due to the poor representation of both, the struggle remains as to whose perspective will become the “true” one to the non-Muslim gaze. The diversity within the Muslim community incorporates both pro- and anti-hijab perspectives, but especially post-9/11, the pressure has mounted to downplay the pro-hijab, “conservative” viewpoint. Prof. Anwar represents the perspective that is relatively palatable to the American dominant majority, and Latifa and Wisal represent different points within the other.

Teresa, a white Muslim who wore hijab for a period of time told me how a non-Muslim professor made a comment that she felt was disrespectful to the hijab. At that time there were two hijabi women in the class. Professor Sabbagh had said that she had a photograph with a celebrity but she didn't like to show it because “she was all scarved up.” She also said that she didn't like having to wear the scarf because it made her feel physically constrained. These comments, however, were part of a pattern; Teresa felt uncomfortable as a hijabi in this class, as well as with the tenor of class discussions.

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## Conclusion

My participants, American Muslim women of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, all grown up in the US, fall into the people of the *pagus* that Bhabha describes as "colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities – wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (64). They learn how their words and their actions are mistranslated through the lens of race, religion, and gender, all of which are "wrapped" into the veil. This mistranslation is similar to that experienced by the Turkish worker in Germany, in John Berger's words:

"He learnt twenty words of the new language. But to his amazement at first, their meaning changed as he spoke them. He asked for coffee. What the words signified to the barman was that he was asking for coffee in a bar where he should not be asking for coffee. He learnt girl. What the word meant when he used it, was that he was a randy dog." (cited in Bhabha 165).

Muslim women find that they are visibly different due to dress codes, whether or not they wear hijab, if they observe restrictions on the dominant fashion of the day. Even race (white) and class (middle class status) do not overcome the difference that is indicated by clothing. Muslim women employ various strategies to encounter the gaze that categorizes them as different or alien: some use silence, while others challenge the gaze. Hijab affects mobility in terms of spaces, careers, behaviors, activities, and even intellectual adventure, but at the same time it may bestow mobility by sending the message to the male gaze that these women are religious and/or sexually unavailable. The particular nature of patriarchal cultures as well as the Islamic juristic texts interact in ways that make assimilation—in terms of clothing—easier for Muslim men than for Muslim women. However, Muslim women who do not veil and observe other behaviors that fit the static Orientalist image of Muslim women are interrogated about this. Even Muslim authority figures on college campuses from all ends of the theological spectrum end up exerting pressures on Muslim women to conform to their demands regarding clothing.

These women learn how their identity work is misinterpreted as the burden of stereotypes weighs down upon them. A headscarf is employed to mean religious devotion, membership of a community, and ethnic heritage, or used almost as a mnemonic device to remind oneself of religious practice; it is misread as a symbol of female oppression, of anti-feminism, of weakness, disempowerment, victim status, and/or affiliation/sympathy with terrorist, dangerous, or xenophobic groups.

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#### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> *Hijab* (Arabic), means "curtain," and may mean the face-veil (which is usually called *niqab* in Arabic) and/or the head-cover, but in North America hijab is generally used to signify the head-cover.

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that the "religious" gaze is not one type of gaze, and at the two colleges where I interviewed women, progressive, conservative/Islamist, and liberal religious types of gaze scrutinized these women, their power varying from context to context to some extent.

<sup>iii</sup> A brief note about methodology: from October to November 2002, I used a talking diary format, asking my participants to freely talk about what was going on in their lives currently. I undertook a trip abroad in December and January, and resumed the study resumed in February. By this time, I knew the research sites and the participants well. I supplemented the free-ranging interviews with directed questions around the concerns that kept recurring in interviews. Finally, I asked directed questions of all the participants that brought together themes from various interviews in order to unify the data from each participant into a coherent picture. My participants were twenty-five young undergraduate women, almost equally divided between these two universities. My participants are of various ethnic backgrounds: South Asian, Iranian, Arab, African, Caucasian, and African-American. These ethnic groups represent the main Muslim ethnic groups in the U.S. I included freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, so the sample represents the full range of college experience. My subjects are all high-achieving, career-oriented young women.

<sup>iv</sup> Though it is a fascinating subject in itself, I will not discuss—for reasons of space—Muslim women's engagement with theological issues of interpretation on hijab (which literally means curtain or barrier, but in contemporary religious usage is used to mean the head-covering) and clothing. Nor will I discuss how Muslim women engage with issues of dress in Muslim spaces—particularly Muslim student associations—on these issues.

<sup>v</sup> *Haram* (Arabic), religiously forbidden.

<sup>vi</sup> *Da'wah* (Arabic), calling people to Islam. It is used to mean all forms of word or deed that may result in non-Muslims becoming attracted to Islam. Heather is talking about offering information about Islam.

<sup>vii</sup> This is an important factor in why the mere number of "incidents" is an insufficient indicator of the reality of prejudice and hatred experienced by minority group members. Such individuals will become savvy about predicting and avoiding negative situations. Statistical facts on actual hate crimes do not fully convey the experience of everyday life as the member of an otherized group such as Muslims in the US. Ethnographic accounts of subcultures must be created for better representation of their experiences.

<sup>viii</sup> She demands acceptance of her view that alcohol is unacceptable in certain campus situations, such as honors clubs. She argues that previously, as a non-Muslim American, she was "completely respectful" of non-drinkers, and that a number of students—Mormons, Jews, Catholics—did not drink either. See my paper, "The Double-Consciousness of American Muslim Undergraduate Women: Through the Lens of Alcohol," presented at the Association of Muslim Social Scientists conference, 2003.

<sup>ix</sup> Contemporary North American Muslims, especially youth, use the term hijabi to signify a woman who wears a head-cover/hijab, and/or other forms of modest clothing. Often, women who do not wear this head-cover are called non-hijabis. I make use of these colloquial terms in this paper.

<sup>x</sup> Arabic terms for articles of men's clothing: *Thobe* is the generally white "dress" worn by Saudi men; *abaya* is a cloak worn over clothing (women and men both wear *abayas*); an *igal* is an article of a man's head-gear.

<sup>xi</sup> *Kufi* (Arabic), skullcap.

<sup>xii</sup> *Shalwar* (Urdu): usually, South Asian-style baggy pants.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Sunnah* (Arabic), Prophetic practice. The Prophet Muhammad kept a beard and recommended it.

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<sup>xiv</sup> This also shows that a man wearing culturally non-Western clothing, especially Middle Eastern or South Asian clothing, may even inspire fear on a college campus, in addition to isolating himself.

<sup>xv</sup> *Muhajjiba* (Arabic), a woman who observes hijab.

<sup>xvi</sup> As many Muslims understand Islamic dress codes, women should cover their bosoms and legs. This means that most swimming attire becomes immodest clothing, as swim-suits tend to reveal much of the body, and are very form-fitting as well, a feature which Muslims consider to be immodest.

<sup>xvii</sup> For example, see Abul-Aalaa Maudoodi's *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*.

<sup>xviii</sup> Zareen sees hijab as a commitment you cannot revoke. I had other participants who tried the hijab and stopped wearing it. I personally feel that Zareen considered it far more serious because she never seriously considered wearing it, and to her it takes on the seriousness of a romantic ideal.

<sup>xix</sup> *Halal* (Arabic), generally means (food, income, etc. that is) lawful. Here, food that conforms to Islamic dietary laws.

<sup>xx</sup> *Ummah* (Arabic), the worldwide community of believers.

<sup>xxi</sup> I would disagree that it is "Islam" that is an agent of this process. I would argue that certain forms of Islam, such as Islamism, often—but not always—are guilty of this. "Islam" is far too complex, multilayered, and diverse in interpretations to take on such guilt.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Abaya* (Arabic), a cloak, generally black, used by women in parts of the Middle East.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Mutawwa* (Arabic), public employees in Saudi Arabia who promote religious and moral observance. They have been reported to monitor the clothing and behavior of both men and women, but women's clothing is, of course, easier to monitor. They have been reported to verbally call on women who are dressed in a manner that they consider inappropriate.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Umrah* (Arabic), the lesser pilgrimage, performed in Makkah and Madinah, the holiest cities of Islam.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Hajj* (Arabic), the greater pilgrimage, also performed in Makkah and Madinah.

<sup>xxvi</sup> One of the primary Islamic practices, most important after faith, is ritual prayer (*salat* in Arabic). There are five obligatory ritual prayer-times in the day and night. This is apart from prayer as in private supplication which is, needless to say, not restricted to time or place.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Fasting throughout Ramadan, a month in the (lunar) Islamic calendar, is one of the primary Islamic practices, and in importance comes right after *salat*. Many Muslims that are otherwise not otherwise religiously observant fast during Ramadan.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The Prophet Muhammad recommended that men's clothes should not drag on the ground, since it was a sign of pride at that time for men to wear long robes and drag them like royalty. Many traditional religious Muslim men continue to observe this practice by rolling up the hem of their pants.

<sup>xxix</sup> The first thing that Latifa lists here is "not drinking." See Mir 2003.