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**Veiled Passion:
Negotiation of Gender, Race and Religiosity
among Young Muslim American Women**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation investigates the identity construction among second-generation South Asian Muslim women by examining the meanings of practicing their ethno-religious tradition of veiling in various social contexts in the post-9/11 era. Based on ethnographic study within two Muslim college student associations in sociogeographically different areas in New York, it demonstrates the ways in which, through the limited options given to them under their ethnic patriarchy and racial status, these women actively make a decision to choose, discard and reform the existing norms, practice and boundaries so that they are able to increase autonomy and control in their social lives.

The findings of this study underline the importance of conceptualizing minority women as a producer, consumer and advertiser of their own youth culture as opposed to just a recipient of the presented racial and gender status in the theories of youth culture and literature of feminist studies. Also, contrary to the classic views for “stigma” in studies on deviance, the demonstration of resiliency and flexibility among these women’s groups underpins the fact that difference and deviance can be translated into a symbol of strength as well as a driving force for young ethnic minority women to cope with social adversity, stemming from various disadvantages that they experience based on cultural sexism, racism, patriarchy and imperialism.

Secondly, this process of recreating an existing culture indicates the construction of a new class identity among an increasing number of American-raised, college educated minority women in a multicultural and global society. It theorizes that despite the fact that each immigrant community maintains their transnational ties with their home countries through technological advancements in travel and communication, Western-raised women reversely distant themselves when there are significant economic and cultural gaps between their home and host countries. Along with their positive valuation of American culture and socioeconomic assimilation, these women assert their incompatibility with youth in their parent’s home countries. Simultaneously, they develop close bonds with other American-raised groups, identifying with commonalities at both physical and cognitive levels across national boundaries.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Come on in Etsuko. I can show you my room,” Aisha said as she invited me in during the party.¹ The decoration was simple and understated, using monochromatic colors. There was a small wooden study desk and computer, a dressing table, a plain brown rug, and a mattress covered with beige blankets, all surrounded by wood paneled walls. There was a neatly organized bookshelf in the corner that was filled with her computer science textbooks and books about Islam. As I entered the room, I saw a large framed portrait of her standing with two other young women and a young man hanging on the wall next to the desk. “Who are they?” I asked, referring to the photograph. “Oh, they’re my sisters and brother. Our parents took us to a studio to take that picture about three years ago.” Looking at it, I wondered why in the picture she was already wearing the Islamic headscarf even though it was taken before she started veiling. When I asked about why she was wearing a veil in the picture, she smiled and responded, “Oh, look really closely. The hijab you see in the picture isn’t real. I added it later. Look, can you tell?” She took the picture down from the wall and handed it to me. Sure enough, a piece of black construction paper had been cut out into the shape of a hijab and glued over her hair. It was done with such perfection and attention to detail that it was hard to see the addition. “Why did you do such time-consuming work,” I asked? “In your own room you don’t really have to worry about any men besides your family members ever seeing this picture.” Still smiling, she said, “Well, it really doesn’t matter.... I just can’t think of seeing myself without hijab any more.... You know, my life has completely changed after starting this. Actually, I regret that I didn’t start it earlier.”

My first visit with Aisha, a 19 year-old college student and daughter of Pakistani immigrants who was living in northeastern Long Island, New York, in September 2002, left me with a lasting impression of her intensity in insisting on defining herself as a wearer of the Islamic headscarf, *hijab*. Indeed, her attachment to her ethnic/religious roots stands in bald contradiction not only to the popular image that sees veiling as a symbol of the Islamic oppression of women, but to classic theories of ethnicity that link the loosening of ethnic ties to upward mobility (Gordon 1964; Warner 1953; Whyte 1943). It is true that many women of Arab and South Asian-origin of Aisha’s generation hold secular views; however, she is far from alone in returning to the custom of veiling. Today, a substantial (and perhaps growing) number of second-generation, Arab and South Asian-origin collegiate women are (like their non-immigrant counterparts)

¹ The names of all individuals in this study have been changed so as to protect their anonymity.

willingly turning back to what has widely been seen as a fundamentalist religious practice.²

The Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, states the following: "Say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears there of, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands"(Chapter 24:30-31). Although the interpretation of this verse varies, a large number of Islamic religious leaders worldwide advocate veiling as a basic practice for adult Muslim women. In addition, modern fundamentalist Muslim practice, which aims at adhering to the core religious doctrines of Islam and the traditional teachings of those who knew and followed the prophet Muhammad during his time on earth, generally advocates veiling of one type or another.

Many of the veiled college women that I met had not, however, been raised in particularly observant families. In fact, many of the (immigrant) parents of these women were not especially influential in leading them to see veiling as a "natural" or desirable practice. On the contrary, a number of their mothers had, themselves, never worn the hijab, even before arriving in the United States. And some of my subjects told me that their fathers are very unhappy that they are veiling.³ In general, these women are both socioeconomically assimilated and native-born. How and why they choose to return to their ethno-religious roots in this particular fashion, instead of aiming for a more complete Americanization is the subject of this dissertation.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and consequent political tensions negatively affected the lives of many Muslims residing in the United States. According to the FBI's annual hate crimes report, incidents targeting people, institutions and businesses identified with the Islamic faith increased by 1,600 percent in the year following the attacks of 9/11 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). Young women residing in the United States who wore the hijab were especially vulnerable, as their attire became the most visible marker of Islamic affiliation.⁴ Because of the increase in assaults and harassment targeting veiled women,

² Although there are no official statistics to indicate this phenomenon, according to the Muslim Student Association National, currently there are over 175 chapters and 500 student organizations in colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, a dramatic increase from 10 in 1965. About half of the members of those organizations are female, and the majority of them practice the religious dress code of veiling in their everyday life.

³ These accounts are largely based on my preliminary interviews with Muslim female students and their parents in various local areas of New York and its vicinities.

⁴ For scholastic discussion on this issue, Judith Lorber (2002) "Heroes, Warriors, and 'Burqas': A Feminist Sociologist's Reflections on September 11." *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 3. pp. 377-396. Also, for examples of incidents, see *Newsday* articles: "US. Muslim Women Must Speak Out for Freedom" on January 23, 2000; "Essay/Against the Veil, Form Head to Toe" on December 20th, 2001; "City Life/Intolerance Follows Muslim Women Here" on October 9th, 2001; "America's Ordeal/Muslim Women Seek Change" on September 23, 2001; "Terrorist Attacks/NY Muslim Women Taking Precautions" on September 18th, 2001; "Fresh Voices/Muslims Here Are Suffering" on

the Council on American-Islamic Relations had even urged them to avoid public areas during this chaotic period. Volunteers and activists in many areas began escorting hijab wearers as they performed such basic activities as going to the supermarket, the hospital or school in order to offer some form of protection from potential assaults.

The committed and continuing visual presentation of Islamic identity through veiling in such exacerbated anti-Islamic circumstances is puzzling; why have some women chosen to emphasize and highlight what has become a stigmatized identity by wearing the Islamic headscarf in the face of escalating violence, danger and negative reception? This question can be answered simply by evidence of religious faith alone. Yet, these American-born, collegiate women have gone beyond religious practice, willingly eschewing many of the activities enjoyed by peers in order to affirm an identity that is as much pan-ethnic as it is religious. Through an ethnographic study of the meanings of veiling for these actors on both the individual and collective levels, I examine what I argue is a dynamic process, the (re)construction of a resurgent religious identity among second-generation South Asian Muslim women in the post-9/11 era.⁵

Brubaker and Cooper (2002) characterize “identity” as “an analytical idiom sensitive to the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness, and the widely varying ways in which actors (and the cultural idioms, public narratives, and prevailing discourses on which they draw) attribute meaning and significance to them” (p.21). Largely employing this view, the term, “identity” in this study refers to a sense of groupness or solidarity which is jointly produced from “the categorical commonality and relational connectedness among individuals who share the objective and/or imaginary commonality” (Brubaker et. al, 2002: 22). This definition underlines the significance of combining two different perspectives of identity, namely essentialist and constructionist perspectives, in framing the issue of ethnic identity for racial minority groups. While the essentialist view of identity largely refers to one’s socially and politically allocated identification of such self-based categorizations as race, gender and class, constructionist theorists underline the actors’ subjective viewpoints as the origin of particular behaviors, and thus, see identity as a reflection of the “unstable, multiple, fluctuating nature of the contemporary ‘self.’” For constructionists, then, identity is “fluid,” “changing” and “fundamentally situational and contextual” (Brubaker et. al 2002). Especially in the case of non-white groups, I would argue, identity should be considered from both essentialist and constructionist views.

In their study on Jewish identity among the second-generation, Nahirny and Fishman (1964) demonstrate that despite their eagerness to reject some aspects of their cultural inheritance (attributes, such as language and traditional customs), second generation Jews retain some important forms of ethnic identification. There are “abstract values” and “ideals” that ostensibly symbolize their ancestral heritage, as opposed to the “old ways” and lived “realities” that comprise the “tangible ethnicity” of the first generation. Similarly, Herbert Gans (1979) argues that white ethnicity is expressed by the “symbols” and “feelings” of being ethnic without the need for “practiced culture.” Mary

September 17th, 2001; and “Terrorist Attacks/Muslims Fear Fellow New Yorkers’ Revenge” on September 12th, 2001.

⁵ The terms, “second-generation,” “American-born/raised,” “native-born/raised” are used interchangeably in this study for the convenience of the discussion.

Water (1990) also suggests that descendants of the early European immigrants freely chose from applicable ethnic attributes and de-emphasized on their ethnic identity depending on the social context.

These constructionist perspectives raise several questions, however, in terms of their applicability to nonwhite ethnic groups. Importantly, while the presentation of ethnicity is primarily a matter of the actor's choice for individuals defined as "white," matters are different for members of "nonwhite" groups. Their ethnic affiliation or at least "minorityness" is always "visible," and thus, their choices are far more limited than their white counterpart's choices. For this reason, while ethnic identity is not necessarily fixed, it is more frequently "forced" for nonwhite minority groups. Given this critical distinction, this study neither aims to establish the fluidity nor the constancy of identity, but to examine in which contexts young minority female actors preserve, diminish or transform their ascriptive identities, and when, why, and how they choose to do so.

Theoretical Framework

While this study focuses on a unique cultural practice carried out by a particular group of women, it is not exclusively limited to identity construction among second-generation Muslim women. On a broader level, it is fundamentally linked to theories of youth culture and deviance while also incorporating a feminist perspective. The increase in veiling among young, elite women, especially after 9/11, was unanticipated (and indeed, perceived as deviant by many adults, including some parents). Furthermore, as Edward Said indicates in his view of orientalism, these women are more apt to be exoticized than white women due to their appearance. Perhaps for these very reasons, examination of the values motivating this particular group affords us a window into the social situation of young, ethnic minority women in contemporary America. This study argues that the respondents are participants in a particular "youth culture," one of a number of different, although interconnected, pre-adult cultural formations.

Talcott Parsons (1942) coined the phrase "youth culture" to describe a distinctive world of youth structured by age and sex roles, with a value system in opposition to the adult world of productive work, responsibility, and routine. For contemporary analysts, the term "youth culture" has come to define a particular way of life, characterized by certain beliefs, values, symbols, and activities that are shared, lived, or expressed by young people (Frith, 1984). Frith (1984) argues that as social scientists, our goal is not only to identify young people's shared activities but also to reveal the values that lie beneath their activities and behavior. While youth culture may be in conflict with the adult values of conformity and responsibility, it also serves as a valuable analytic resource to help make sense of the shared issues of young people as they develop a set of day-to-day practices that define a unique, pan-ethnic, youth cultural milieu.

Most analysts assert that non-conformity with and deviance from adult norms and values are central to the development of youth culture. Scholars, however, have taken a diverse set of approaches in describing the central elements of deviance and rebellion. Taking the perspective of symbolic interactionism and focusing on micro-level social processes, Erving Goffman (1963) described how an individual whose physical traits and behavioral and psychological characteristics do not fit the "norm" is labeled as a deviant and stigmatized by imposed (or in his word, "spoiled") identity. Goffman argues that

individuals labeled as deviant tend to “manage” their spoiled identities either by withdrawing from social interaction or by attempting to “pass” as “normal.” Robert K. Merton (1949), on the other hand, utilizing a middle-range approach views deviance (and juvenile delinquency) as a response to anomie originating in an imbalance in the social system between socially approved goals and the availability of socially approved means of attaining those goals. According to Merton, individuals respond to the system’s imbalance in five different ways, depending on their acceptance or rejection of the socially approved goals and/or the means of achieving them: conformity (accepting both goals and means); innovation (accepting the goals but rejecting the means); ritualism (rejecting the goals but accepting the means); retreatism (rejecting both); and rebellion (rejecting both). Merton suggests “innovation” as the most common form of deviance. Through his approach, Merton positions the source of deviance directly on the social structure and the culture rather than simply on macro structural forces or on the micro-level processes in which the deviants themselves come to interact with others and with societal institutions. Applying Merton’s middle-range approach to the study of deviance, Albert Cohen (1955) describes how gang membership provides lower-economic class boys, who can not achieve their desired social status through normative means, with the opportunities and means to attain respect through other forms of achievement.

In contrast to Goffman’s and Merton’s approaches, such scholars as Stuart Hall and Richard Jefferson from the Birmingham School employ a more holistic approach. Rather than focusing only on the causes of juvenile delinquency, scholars of this school examine the meaning of youth culture and document the rich experiences lived by youth (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). Influenced by the Marxist idea of cultural production, Birmingham School researchers largely conceptualize youth as cultural producers and consumers rather than as delinquents. Furthermore, this view emphasizes the characteristics of youth cultures as the distinct means and patterns of life in which socially identifiable youth groups come to deal with the distress in their life experiences and give expressive forms, or “maps of meaning,” to their social and material existence (Clarke et al., 1976: 10). Giving a particular focus to the “look” of various youth cultures, the Birmingham School perspective also locates the subject matter in relation to three broader cultural structures: working-class parent culture; dominant culture; and mass culture (Gelder, 1997).

First, the conception of a working parent culture sees youth’s public display of nonconformist styles and deviant behaviors as something more than simply rebellion against their working-class parents. More significantly, studies in this area suggest that the unconventional styles and behavior of youth are a means of expressing working-class youth’s resistance to middle-class authority. For instance, Clarke’s study on skinhead youth groups (1976) states that this seemingly deviant behavior is a symbolic attempt to reaffirm the traditional working-class core values of “community” rather than simply an act of senseless rebellion against their parents.

Second, the Birmingham School scholars also view youth cultures as a product of a hegemonic relationship to the dominant culture over subordinate ones. Antonio Gramsci (1971) conceptualizes the term “hegemony” as the power of a society’s ruling class to exert total control, through for instance government power, economic resources, and ideas, over subordinate classes. Studies of youth culture from the subordinate classes – the working class and racial/ethnic minorities in particular – demonstrate a repertoire of strategies, responses, and ways of coping and resisting the dominant class authority that

has clearly articulated collective structures. For instance, Clarke et al's (1976) study on working-class youth shows that youth from lower-class backgrounds construct distinct subcultures around their living environments by demonstrating the justification of the ghetto as well as a class-conscious struggle to negotiate their identity and to create a space of their own: however, as a consequence of creating their own space, their class-based culture serves as a mechanism in their alienation from society at large.

Third, this school views youth culture as a form of mass culture because members of this social group are both consumers and simultaneously producers of mass culture. Mark Abrams (1959) argues that youth consumption patterns and market choices reflect a new youth culture defined in terms of leisure goods and activities. Thus, groups of young individuals collectively generate distinct youth cultures that transcend existing racial boundaries although they do not erase class boundaries since youth continue to be controlled by powerful business interests, including marketers, advertisers, and distributors of the dominant class culture.

With several significant conceptual advancements derived from these classic paradigms, the recent literature on youth culture highlights the following three new approaches. First, as opposed to youth culture presented by the Birmingham School, which views youth culture as class-based categories, contemporary studies on this subject emphasize the diversity of youth cultures as a multidimensional nature of resistance. Along with this perspective, contemporary studies identify the distinct characteristics even within the categories of white and nonwhite youth, boys and girls, and heterosexuals and homosexuals. Going beyond analyses of only working-class youth, contemporary research signifies the distinctive characteristics of youth, with an emphasis on the impacts of class, race, ethnicity, gender and geography on their cultural expressions, appearances, symbols, signs, and activities (Austin and Willard 1998; Back 1996; Bennett 2000; Blackman 1995; Cross 1993; Esptein 1998; Kitwana 2002; Padilla 1992; Redhead 1993; Sefton-Green 1998; Skelton and Valentine 1998; Ruddick 1995; Yablonsky 1997; Wooden and Blazak 2001).

Second, informed by the Birmingham School tradition, new research underlines the role of agency on the part of youth, and emphasizes the proactive approaches toward the cultural production and consumption among youth of different class, racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. For instance, Andy Bennett (2000) views youth as a culture in its own right, arguing that youth themselves are capable of generating norms and values. Youth use their bodies, ghetto walls, city streets, as well as the press, television programming, and online publications as sites for cultural expression and practices. In doing so, they present their experiences and aspirations to society at large, often making use of the most advanced forms of technology and other effective means to introduce their views.

Third, contemporary studies do not see the emergence of youth cultures simply as a form of resistance to class subordination, but also as a form of engagement with the dominant culture in order to articulate and reaffirm their own multifaceted lived experiences and identities. For instance, Bakari Kitwana (2002) points out that while black hip-hop culture has become commercialized and popularized in mainstream American culture, it has continued to be expressed both publicly and privately in a myriad of ways solely by black youth. More than just graffiti-writing, break-dancing, dj-ing, and rap music, black hip-hop culture now includes verbal and body language, along

with a certain attitude, style, fashion, and proclivity toward different types of activism. This diverse repertoire has defined black youth identity and worldview as distinct from not only other Americans but also from an older generation of African Americans.

While contemporary literature of youth culture and deviance develops beyond the classic models in these ways, there are consistent criticisms that women, especially of nonwhite ethnicity, are still underrepresented in studies of this area. Women have played a critical role as producers, consumers, and distributors of an emerging youth culture, yet, emphasis on delinquents and masculinity derived from the classic models has largely overlooked this trend (Johansson 2007; McRobbie 2000). Contemporary feminist scholars assert that gender shapes identities and perception, interactional practices, and the very forms of social institutions in race- and class-specific ways. It is important to examine groups of women in a variety of racial, class, national and ethnic backgrounds in the theoretical development of this area.

The young women introduced in this study are not “representative.” Yet, by examining the value and motivation behind their resurgent veiling in the context of an anti-Islamic environment, this study examines the problems that young ethnic minority women must deal with, and constructs a theory of possible responses to racism and religious bigotry in the United States today. More specifically, resting on the conceptual pillars provided by the literature on contemporary youth culture and deviance, my analysis has three aims.

First, this study documents the diverse ways in which, since 9/11, young Muslim women have been affected by structural forces such as hegemony, racism, sexism, and anti-Islamism, I try to show how, for the groups that I followed, this experience shaped socialization, which in turn affects the ways in which members express, represent, and negotiate what has become a stigmatized (or “spoiled”) identity. Here, I attempt to add a new dimension to the recent feminist literature on minority youth culture. (See especially, Julie Bettie’s *Women without Class* (2002) for an examination of the intersection of race, class and gender identity.) My study of young second generation South Asian Muslim women emphasizes the ways in which identity is constructed in relation to young women’s race, ethnicity and sexuality.

Second, this study shows youth culture as an active creation, describing the critical role that young people play in critiquing, transforming and reframing existing norms into distinct cultural practices. While struggling with their marginalization in larger contexts, the young women in this community were still trying to be active in and capable of choosing among, developing, and deploying their own norms, values, and cultural practices. By doing so, my respondents negotiate assuming traditional roles, religious patriarchy and social pressure to conform to the norms and practices assigned by their male counterparts, immigrant parents and larger society.

Finally, this study illustrates the complex process through which these women internalize the seemingly contradictory demands of Islamization and Americanization in their everyday lives and construct a distinct second-generation identity in the process. In particular, I show how their veiling, which seems so contradictory to American practice, is, in fact, informed by their acculturation to the core American ideologies of economic success, democracy, capitalism, and gender egalitarianism. Much literature of migration and second-generation youth theorized by such scholars as Robert E. Park (1928), Milton Gordon (1964) and Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portés (2001) presumes that the

process of assimilation is linear one. These typically assume that, immigrants and their children aim at behaving as close as possible to an “American,” by learning the mainstream culture, and/or by concealing their ethnicity in public space, although they might still practice their ethnic culture at home. Yet, my dissertation indicates the process of assimilation ensues through a much more complex range than just simple linear lines. It takes on multi-directional positions, going forward and backward, depending on the resources available for the immigrant youth group and the social contexts that they engage in at the time. As I will show in the following chapters, these young minority women understand their veiling and associated gender roles through traditionalist view points in one context; in another they transform them into a highly Americanized fashion; and in other they combine the two conflicting cultural norms to make most sense of their choice of veiling in the public sector.

The main argument of this study is that resurgent veiling among young Muslim women in the United States is both a subjective and practical reaction to consistent racism, sexism and anti-Islamism that they face in their social lives and is also a means to express a new (second-generation) pan-ethnic sisterhood identity in a multicultural society. Thus, I would contend, veiling is not simply a matter of resistance to parents, class pressures, or the dominant white youth culture, but rather a carefully constructed way of dealing with a set of conflicting values and practices.

The subjects of this study are not alone in this regard. Chong, for example, in her 1998 study of the role of religion among second-generation Korean Evangelical Protestant groups says that “the strong sense of ethnic identity and exclusivity observed among second-generation church-goers reflect a form of defensive ethnicity against their perceived “marginal” status within American society as a non-white minority group” (p.262). Thus, despite its perceived role as a vehicle for preserving the cultural interests of the first generation, “the paradoxical appeal of religion for many second-generation members lies in this capacity to provide a kind of ‘refuge’ from this sense of marginalization, and along with it, positive social identity and group empowerment” (p.262).

Yet, while my study parallels Chong’s in many ways, it also suggests that the nature of resurgent identity is not just “defensive.” The narratives and fieldwork that inform this study clearly indicate that my respondents, by constructing a new connection to their (perceived) cultural heritage, were actively engaged in fighting what they consciously viewed as ongoing racism and sexism. That is, their very marginality created a space, a limbo, a kind of fluid environment in which they were able to appropriate and refashion a distinctive cultural practice, rewriting their identities to include definitions of themselves as both resilient and magnetic. Given the limited options available because of their patriarchic religious tradition and their ethnic status, these women actively try to find ways to choose, discard and reform existing norms, practices, and boundaries, increasing their sense of social autonomy and control at least in their perception. By illustrating these women’s development of their sisterhood circle not only as a “shelter” from racism and sexism but also as a gendered expression of ethnic pride, this study presents the ways in which they negotiate conflicting roles as non-white young women in contemporary America.

Ethnographic Case Studies and Theory Construction

Social analysis based on ethnographic description has often been used for studies of identity. Participant observation and informal interviews allow us especially to analyze composite interactions among and across groups in their natural environments (Lofland, 1966; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Whyte, 1955). Yet, how an ethnographic researcher can conceptualize the relationship between data (or a case) and theory in his or her study has been a challenging question.

Agreeing with Michael Burawoy's extended case method and Glaser and Straus's Grounded Theory, John Watson (1992) suggests that a "case" can be used to enhance, modify and rebuild or construct new theory. Watson conceptualizes a case as an exemplar of a general law, saying, "[c]ases embody causal processes operating in microcosm" (p.121). The logic of the case study is to demonstrate a causal argument indicating how general social forces take shape and produce results in a specific setting. That demonstration is intended to provide at least "one anchor that steadies the ship of generalization until more anchors can be fixed for eventual boarding" (p.121).

Jack Katz (2002) characterizes ethnographic studies as moving from thick description to explanation: in other words, shifting from a focus on gathering description of social life to the analytical re-organization of data onto explanatory lines. In order to make this transition, Katz suggests we should initially ask a "how" question in ethnography rather than a "why" question because when data passages are especially compelling they contain lenses indicating why social life takes the forms we observe. The focus of this study, which investigates why American-born collegiate women choose to wear the headscarf despite extensive social discouragement, employs this methodological vision to a considerable degree as I detail later in this section.

Expanding on Katz's insistence on the integral relationship between data and analysis, Robert R. Alford maintains that the model relationship between data and theory lies in "dialectical explanation." He argues that a theoretical question is a search for an explanation of something and answers the question "why." An empirical question asks for a description of an association or pattern of the events, behaviors, activities, beliefs, perceptions, and interests that constitute social life. Thus, an empirical association becomes evidence that is relevant to answering the theoretical question.

Suggesting the importance of asking "how" instead of "why" to develop causal explanation in the course of ethnographic data collection, Katz says that "just asking a 'why?' question results in unsatisfactory, disappointing data giving us only the conventional and comfortable explanation...." He adds, [that] "why I did it is never really as simple as top of the head explanations that 'moral reasoning' suggests" (p.446). This is especially the case when a researcher investigates an enigma, a paradox, or an apparent absurdity in the subjective group's choice and/or deviant behavior. According to Katz, "why the subjects do unusual things and why the movement grows is because by doing them, they create qualities of experience that they do not otherwise know. In this special case, where revelation is the subject's motivation as well as the ethnographers' objective, the how is the why" (p. 68).

During my fieldwork, I focused on "how" questions, constructing a thick description of how my subjects wore the hijab (clearly a "deviant" behavior in terms of

the American cultural lexicon) in various social contexts. In other words, instead of asking “why” these women veiled, I focused on “how” they conducted themselves and what kinds of social behaviors went along with veiling. Moving from creating thick descriptions of dressing styles, forms, and manners, what they said about themselves, and the interactions that accompanied veiling almost naturally led me to a causal explanation of their social behavior as my fieldwork proceeded.

Following Katz’s suggestions, I also set up a flexible relationship between my data and theory that facilitated my moving back and forth between them in the process of my fieldwork, data organization and analysis, and writing. By doing so, I started to see the possibility of conceptualizing what seemed to be a set of deviant practices as not just “results” of some social forces but also “causes” for their further social action and the transformation of identity. This process enabled me to identify interrelationships between the micro-level actions of my respondents and macro-level social circumstances.

Methods

I employed two ethnographic methods in my fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviews. I participated in and observed activities of two selected Muslim sisters’ groups associated with the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at two public universities in New York from September 2002 to December 2005. One of these universities, which I call Eastern State University, is located in an upper-middle class suburban area on the north shore of Long Island. The other, which I call Metro University, is in a lower-middle class metropolitan area. These two groups are comparable along a number of dimensions. Both are affiliated with large, secular, public institutions. Although the size of the group at Eastern State University is relatively larger than that of Metro University, these two associations are among the largest Muslim student organizations in North America, having a membership base of 500 to 800 individuals on and off campus, and including about 150 to 200 active members who participate in activities on campus at least once a week. About 60 percent of the membership of each organization is men and 40 percent (organized in “sisters’” groups) is women. The overwhelming majority of sisters’ groups in both associations wear the hijab on a daily basis; only a few members of each group do not. Most of the sisterhood are full-time undergraduate students, predominantly of South Asian origin, ranging from age 18 to 23; more than 80% are Pakistani in origin, followed by Indian, Bangladeshi and Afghan, including only a small number of Middle Easterners. The majority are daughters of post-1964 Muslim immigrants.

One significant difference between these two groups is their class background and the associated sociogeographic environment. Most of the students at Eastern State University are upper-middle class, with fathers who are highly educated professionals (physicians, academics, scientists, engineers, business owners, and the like). Their mothers also work as professionals or assist their husbands in a family business. In addition to having parents who have experienced socioeconomic assimilation, the members of the Eastern State University group grew up in upper-middle class “white” and “Christian” suburban areas. In contrast, a large number of students at Metro University come from lower-middle or working-class backgrounds and generally grew up in urban enclaves dominated by recent East and South Asian immigrants. Although a

few of their fathers own small stores and one is a lawyer, the majority of these parents work as store clerks, contractors, parking lot attendants, waiters, etc. Their mothers work at similar jobs, although some stay at home.

(Figure 1-1 here)

Studies focusing on young American Muslim women are still scarce in the literature of social science. The majority of research on Muslim women focuses on immigrant adults in Western societies (Killian 2003; Khan 2000; Predelli 2004; Read & Bartkowski 2000; Reed 2003) or those residing in Islamic society (Afshar 1993; Ahmed 1992; Badran 1995; Brook 1995; Charrad 1998; El Guindi 1981, 1999; Hijab 1988; Mernissi 1987; Milani 1992; Mince 1982; Muse and Barthel 1992; Ramazani, 1983; Rugh 1986; Shaaban 1988; Zenie-Ziegler 1988).⁶ Although some scholars such as Jane Smith (2000), Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (2002) and Karen Isaksen Leonard (2003) describe veiling among second-generation women, their discussion is very limited and not based on empirical research. Leonard's (2003) and Haddad, Smith and Moore's (2006) accounts of veiling among American Muslims as representing freedom, liberation and relief is useful, but is only speculative. Much of the other literature that discusses second-generation Muslim women, (such as Hasan, 2002, 2005 and Abdul-Ghafur, 2005) is either memoirs, collections of essays or anthologies. My study, an ethnography that systematically compares two distinct groups of second generation women of varied socioeconomic backgrounds provides the empirical grounding that has been lacking in prior studies.

Conducting fieldwork from within contrasting socioeconomic sites was particularly constructive in two regards. First, it allowed me to examine the significance of "class" in identity construction and boundary formation. The otherwise relatively comparable characteristics of respondents at both institutions enabled me to examine systematically how class background and its associated local racial relations interact with a tendency towards ethnic resurgence among my subject groups. Second, examining two groups which are almost identical in terms of their members' ethnic and racial backgrounds increased the reliability of my conclusions. As the following chapters demonstrate, I found a number of similarities between the two groups in both their veiling and their group dynamics. This consistency has overall strengthened the conclusions of this study, while, at the same time, showing that class is less significant than other factors in the decision to veil.

I conducted participant observation in a total of more than 150 on- and off-campus activities of these two sisters' groups. Each sisters' group consisted of 60 to 80 members. Each group had a set of leaders--a sisters' representative, secretary and

⁶ For instance, see El Guindi (1981), Mernissi (1987), Milani (1992) and Charrad (1998) for discussion of veiling as representative of women's freedom and strategy to block harassment by their male colleagues. See Mince (1982), Ramazani (1983), Rugh (1986), Shaaban (1988), Zenie-Ziegler (1988), Ahmed (1992) and Brook (1995) for discussion of veiling as a reaction against the growing wave of globalization and a symbol of "national freedom and dignity." See Muse and Barthel (1992), El-Solh & Mabro (1994) and Goodwin (1995) for discussion of veiling as a tool to preserve a degree of modesty and sense of dignity for elite young women in Islamic society.

treasurer, who were elected by the members of the association annually. These women were responsible for organizing various events and committee meetings, as well as publishing newsletters and maintaining a website. All of this work was volunteer, and many association activities were not university subsidized.

As a group member, I participated in religious gatherings, including prayers and Quran reading circles, Jumu'ah prayer (worship services every Friday), Figh (general Quran study meetings), Tajweed (Quran study meetings for sisters), the Quran recitation, Arabic classes, meetings with a sister from a local mosque and other Quran discussion groups, as well as non-religious events such as general body meetings, a fundraising dinner, an on-campus lecture series, a field trip to New York City, soup kitchen service, annual student conferences, Ramadan dinners and anti-war protests. I also participated in more secular activities, such as weekend-trips, picnics, farewell parties, ice-cream socials, pajama party nights, ice-skating, bowling and volleyball and basketball games. Finally, I attended several off-campus activities of the associations, including participation in American MSA conferences, a bus trip to a Six Flags theme park, field trips to Muslim communities in Manhattan, volunteer work at the Islamic Summer School on Long Island, and other similar events. I recorded both individual and collective utterances, behaviors, interactions, and performances in addition to taking pictures in all of these social arenas. I also collected data from several other sources, including e-mail circulation, newsletters, virtual chat rooms among the members and event flyers.

At the end of my fieldwork in each site, I conducted in-depth interviews with three group leaders and 17 other members of each group (totaling 40 interviews). Later, I went back to both sites and conducted ten additional interviews at each site with men who were also members of the MSA in order to supplement my fieldwork findings. Interviewees were selected through a snow-ball sample. All interviews were held with one respondent at a time either in my office, the respondent's house or dormitory room, or in a student lounge on campus. (I asked each of my interviewees where she or he would feel most comfortable talking and set the location of the meetings according to his or her preference.) For the purpose of the study, I left the interview questions open-ended while paying special attention to the following three points: 1) how did the interviewee come to join the association and to veil publicly? ; 2) what was the social experience of the respondent before and after starting to wear the hijab? ; and 3) how did the respondent get along with parents and members of the parental generation, peers and male counterparts? All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to text. Each interview lasted between one and three hours. The interview format was very successful. The respondents appeared relaxed and were very willing to talk about their lives and viewpoints. As a result, my notes contain extensive material, with results of very open discussions on a wide range of topics.

Despite my initial concern that the groups would react negatively to me, a non-Muslim researcher, I was welcomed by the members from the earliest stages of my fieldwork. After my first visit to a weekly Arabic study meeting at Eastern State University, I had a conversation with some of the women leaders for about an hour, and by the next week I was invited to one of their off-campus gatherings. I made significant efforts to build on this early rapport with them, actively volunteering for their events and participating in informal gatherings during intercessions. As a non-Muslim I do not wear a hijab, however I did veil when participating in prayer services with them to reverence

their religious observance. I also chose a conservative clothing style, wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts during meetings with them. Because of my increasingly close relationship to these women, I was even invited to some important life events, such as wedding receptions, commencements and bridal showers.

The leaders at Eastern State University told me that because I am a humble and serious woman, they trusted and respected me even more than some of their sisters who do not respect their dress code or seldom attend their events. Some of the members who do not veil confessed that they felt even more comfortable talking to me than to their leaders because they did not feel any pressure from me about the need to start wearing the hijab.⁷ For this reason, throughout my fieldwork I realized that my very “non-Muslimness” gave me greater access to both the leadership and to new association members than I had expected. Indeed, assuming that I was unfamiliar with their ethnic and religious norms, members were more likely to articulate their sentiments, not only about their veiling, but about their relations with parents, peers and male counterparts. These confidences were especially helpful in my attempts to examine identity construction within this cultural enclave, a process that is generally private, formless and unspoken to others.

(Figure 1-2, 1-3 here)

Chapter Plan

This study consists of six chapters. Each chapter examines the meaning of veiling in a different social context. In the next chapter I discuss the motivation for veiling in the context of family relations. I look at the ways in which my respondents used veiling, a practice that seemingly reflects religion-based patriarchal domination to increase what they considered limited autonomy while, at the same time, altering expected gender roles within their families. Chapter 2 discusses the significant effect of social class on parents’ reactions to their daughters’ veiling, and consequently on the rationale for veiling that daughters’ present. At the same time, I argue that “class,” itself, is not a major factor in the decision to veil. Thus, the women who come from families of lower socioeconomic status tend to use veiling as the bridge which unites their families, filling the cultural gap between immigrant parents and Americanized children. Literally embodying the “commonality” of religious practice and a sense of “togetherness” with their parents, veiling facilitates identification of these women with their parents. On the other hand, the women from upper middle-class families tend to face strong parental opposition to wearing the veil. These parents believe that veiling imperils their daughters’ occupational and economic success. For their daughters, veiling is a means of quiet rebellion against immigrant parents who have broken, or try to conceal affiliation, with Islam and are perceived by their daughters as denying their ethno-religious identity in exchange for their economic success.

⁷ Being one of the most significant motives for their identity construction and boundary formation, this hierarchical relationship between hijab wearers and non-wearers in each local group is discussed in a later chapter.

Chapter 3 discusses women's motivation for veiling in the context of potential mate selection. Drawing from theories of ethnic exogamy and assimilation, I discuss the ways in which male and female participants, who search for preferable marital partners in the transnational, arranged marriage market contribute to the creation of new gender hierarchies. Based on my interviews with both men and women who are members of the associations, I explain how men and women attribute significantly different meanings to being American Muslim, and how the process of mate selection draws cognitive boundaries between "us" and "others." Finally, this chapter describes the ways in which the resources of young people in Western countries like the United States are positive bargaining chips for young men but not for women.

Further investigating the issue of mate selection, Chapter 4 examines how gender inequality and different interpretations of what it means to be a college-educated American Muslim are associated with the decision to veil. Here I show how some American Muslim women choose to veil in order to increase what they perceive as limited marital options. The sisterhood promises that along with veiling, presenting oneself as a "good Muslim woman" – who is conservative, religious and non-Americanized – improves one's position in the marriage market. By wearing the hijab, the sisters voluntarily place themselves under the male gaze: yet, they find it completely justifiable and satisfactory if it leads to enhanced marital prospects and a successful married life with suitable American-raised Muslim men.

Chapter 5 describes how the women in each group turn what is generally seen as a religious garment into an item of fashion. Drawing on the idea of "symbolic religiosity" advanced by Herbert Gans and theories of dress enunciated by such theorists as Erving Goffman, Fred Davis and Jonne Entwistle, I argue that my respondents treat veiling as much as a fashion statement as a religious obligation. Cultivating a unique aesthetic sense and creating a "group look," they collectively have redefined the veil in secular and "symbolic" terms. By doing so, sisters from different national backgrounds have constructed a new set of social boundaries based on their mode of dress.

Chapter 6 discusses the meaning of wearing the hijab in the context of friendship and sisterhood. Here I show that women in these groups collectively view the hijab as the central icon of a conceived Islamic sisterhood. Broadcasting the notion that wearing the hijab is not only a meaningful representation of shared identity and loyalty to other Muslim women, but also a heroic action, they strengthen their communal ties, while at the same time, drawing clear boundaries between themselves and secular Muslim women. Their narratives underscore their view that although veiling publicly situates them in a sea of anti-Islamic sentiment, belonging to a sisterhood, that separates them from a racial, ethnic, and gender stratified society, provides a reliable social space, a sense of belonging, and a means of feeling socially secure.

Chapter 7 explores the meanings of veiling in the context of political aims. The narratives of my respondents reveal the ways in which, after 9/11, socially stigmatized young Muslim women used veiling as a major political tool for fighting anti-Islamic sentiment in the local as well as the global context. In this regard, I follow such theorists as Melucci and Alcoff in seeing these groups as "bicultural feminists" who are participants in a particular "identity movement." Finally, I present two conclusions about meaning: 1) the cultural "difference" and "disadvantage" that South Asian Muslim women feel has also been the source of group mobility, strength and resiliency, and

political activism: and 2) religious identity has come to play an increasingly significant role in boundary formation for this group. Such reidentification (albeit secularized) should be considered as scholars evaluate the situation of Muslims and the Islamic faith in the American context.

Chapter 2

Battles of American-born Daughters

Class and sociogeographic location generally explain the parental responses to veiling for daughters on both groups. While the majority of my respondents in the Metro University area are supported by their parents in their decision to veil, quite a large number of the women who live in the Eastern State University area have experienced parental opposition. In this chapter I examine the veiling in the context of parental attitudes. Fifteen of the Eastern State University students described veiling as a symbol of a strong Islamic identity, but their remarks suggest that they also use it as a means of silent opposition to secular parents. At the same time, since many of the women at both universities have been subject to strict supervision by fathers and other family members, veiling functions as a means for gaining trust from their parents, and for increased autonomy in their social lives.

An increasing number of feminist-oriented migration studies focus on the ways in which women negotiate their economic upward mobility and traditional relational patterns with their husbands at home after coming to the United States. For instance: Sheba George (2005) shows how female nurses from Kerala, India grapple with the reconstruction of gender and class relations in their marriages in the context of their professional achievements in the United States; Donna Gehrke-White (2006) describes the ways in which a Pakistani immigrant woman studying medical school in the United States balance her relations with her husband who became “Mr. Mom”; Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) describes the new power of immigrant women who learn to navigate government bureaucracies; and work by Abraham (1995) and Chiang, Cho, Kim, Lui and Zia (1997) illustrate the ways in which groups of South Asian women activists in New York organize against marital violence and yet, many women still refuse to report those incidents to the officials because they are afraid of being criticized for betraying their husbands by other co-ethnic community members. While many of these studies focus on the new roles available to immigrant women and the consequent power conflicts in their family relations, my study focuses on the perspectives of second generation daughters coming of age in the United States. The stories of the women introduced in this chapter show how they use veiling, (which is often taken to be a sign of submission to traditional patriarchal arrangements within their ethno-religious group), increase autonomy, limit their fathers’ authority, and gain influence in family decision making in the confines of traditional ethnic patriarchy at home.

Parental Reactions

My interviews indicate that fathers’ reactions toward their daughters’ decision to veil depend on socioeconomic location. Out of twenty interviewees in each local area, seventeen of those at Eastern State University said that their fathers expressed discontent when they began to veil on a daily basis, starkly contrasting with only two fathers who had similar reactions at Metro University. For instance, Aisha who started wearing the hijab in the summer of 2001 describes her father’s the reaction as follows:

Aisha: When I came down the stairs to go to school that morning, my father saw me. He looked surprised, but amazingly didn't say anything at all. But that made the moment even scarier because I knew that he was not happy about it... After he left for work, my mom told me that I should have considered it more carefully... That evening, my dad told me to take it off. I was really saddened by that.

Yet Aisha and the majority of the Eastern State University group continued to wear the hijab despite adverse reactions from parents, although a few were forced to discontinue the practice as parental opposition heightened after the incidents of 9/11. Two of those members, Dawa and Frida, describe their relations with their fathers:

Dawa: I used to wear the hijab, but after 9/11 my father told me to end it, so I had to stop. I really wanted to continue but my father simply wouldn't let me do that... I hope I can get his permission soon and I'll start wearing it again like my other friends.

Farida: My father said to me, "if you want to go out, you have to take off your hijab. You can't go out with that." So, it was sad...

Dawa's and Farida's comments underline the fact that some women stopped veiling after 9/11 because they could not gain their fathers' permission. Indeed, members in both local areas described their fathers as holding immense power within the family, the majority saying that they attended the local university because their fathers would not allow them to move out the house. In addition, the absence of grandparents and infrequent presence of other relatives may intensify the hierarchical relation between fathers and daughters in these families.

One thing that most of the literature on migration agrees upon is that unlike immigrants in the early 20th century, while recent immigrants urge their children towards educational assimilation, they also place stress on preserving home-land traditions within their family (Leonard 1997: Min 2003: Lee & Zou 2005). In fact, Rudrappa (2002) describes the family as "a repository of ethnic culture and ... an anchoring for minority identities" (Min 2003: p.7). However, my work suggests a more complicated situation, at least for Muslims. The expanding anti-Islamic sentiment elicited by the events of 9/11 has directly affected Muslim fathers' increasing concern about the safety of their daughters, resulting in increased attempts at control, especially among fathers living in the Eastern State University area, where the population of Muslims is extremely small. Ironically, however, instead of encouraging their daughters to embrace their cultural roots, fathers seem to have felt compelled to order their daughters to conceal their religious identity. This demonstrates the fragility of ethnic traditions when hostility to the ethnic group is high as was the case in the aftermath of 9/11. This was especially the case for young women I worked with, since they have not only been vulnerable to assaults by strangers, but also because their lives were already constrained by patriarchal familial practices.

Some of the women in my study described other social restrictions reflecting the power and authority that fathers exercised over their bodies. Some Muslim daughters in

the Eastern State University area had been locked in their house; others were prohibited from attending religious meetings or going out with other sisters who were wearing hijabs by their fathers. The heightened threat of ethnic violence intensified fathers' efforts to control the household and often this increased vigilance was generally directed at daughters. According to my interviews with male members in both locales, men had considerably more freedom in their social activities even in the wake of 9/11. For instance, while many women mentioned that they had strict curfew and limitations on going out with their friends, the men reported almost no parental restrictions. Moreover, about one third of the male members at both groups wear beards or wear Islamic attire, yet none of their parents forced them to refrain from presenting these public ethno-religious markers.

Still, in contrast to women living in the Eastern State University area, the majority of the group members at Metro University commented that they received overwhelming support from their fathers for veiling, even after 9/11. Out of 40 interviewees, 15 of those at Metro University and only 2 of those at Eastern State University reported a positive parental to veiling. Faria and Zaida at Metro University for example describe their fathers' reactions as follows:

Faria: My dad never actually said anything to me. He and I don't have that kind of relationship where I tell him everything about my life and we're not that touchy feely. So, even when he's proud of me, he doesn't really hug me or show me that kind of emotion. But the day I first wore hijab, he took out all the money in his pocket and gave it to me (laughing) He didn't have a smile on his face but I know that's how he was showing his happiness.

Zaida: My father didn't really say, "Why did you start?" or anything... He didn't say anything... but I know that means he is happy with me wearing hijab.

As is the case for many families of South Asian-decent, fathers in this study were stoic in nature and rarely offered overt demonstrations of support for their daughters' behavior. Still their emotions were made obvious enough to be felt deeply by their daughters.

The difference in reactions from fathers in the two sites originates in their differing sociogeographic locations and is likely linked to assimilation levels. In the Eastern State University area, where the population of South Asians and Muslims is extremely small, parents had limited access to a larger ethno-religious community. Also, as much literature on model-minority immigrants indicates, white-collar immigrant parents tend to separate their home and public lives as a social strategy for professional success; they view workplace and school as places to demonstrate their ability to assimilate their home as an ethnic enclave in which to maintain their "traditional" practices (Kalita 2005; Khandelwal 2002; Rudrappa 2004). It is likely that these patterns of behavior intensified the likelihood that Eastern State fathers would control their daughters' activities.

In contrast, parents who reside and work in a larger co-ethnic and religious community, as do the parents of the Metro University members, were more comfortable with public displays of ethno-religious affiliation. In fact, quite a large number of Metro

University members said that they received support from their neighbors and the larger community when they adopted a religious dress code. Some even said that their parents went so far as to throw a party with their neighbors and friends. For instance, Faria commented:

Yeah, my mom was thrilled. She had been wanting me to wear it forever and ever and ever. When I wanted to do it she was really happy and the whole community threw me a huge party. They invited all the little girls 'cause they wanted them to see me and said, "Look, you do this and see how wonderful it is," which was really cute.... I just live in a really wonderful community....we all are one huge "family."

Monica McDermott (2006) in *Working Class White* describes the difference in the meaning of being working-class and white in two urban communities, where the rates of white-black populations are divergent. In Boston where the white working class is the majority and takes pride in ethnicity and also tends to identify with old-world groups such as Italians and Irish, in Atlanta, where Blacks are a majority, being working-class white is something to be ashamed. In Atlanta the perception is that having white skin should guarantee middle class status. Similarly, the varied reactions of parents toward their daughter's veiling may well depend on the ethno/racial composition of the local area and parental levels of economic assimilation. Muslim families in the Metro University area have a stronger support system and denser social networks that foster the maintenance of ethno-religious traditions and identities than Eastern State University parents. Moreover, it is not rare to see women wearing the hijab or other traditional South Asian costumes on the street at the Metro University location. Thus, although the two groups of women are both vulnerable to the increasing anti-Islamic sentiment, local circumstances made the fathers at the Metro University area more optimistic about their daughter's decisions to veil immediately after 9/11. In contrast, the women at Eastern State University explained that their fathers were opposed to their wearing the hijab because they were concerned about their daughters' safety in their local area where the size of the Muslim community is extremely small.

Lee and Zou (2005) and other scholars of immigrant studies suggest that current Asian American youth culture has largely emerged in response to exclusion from two socio-cultural arenas: from predominantly white mainstream society and minority groups with whom they feel they have little in common, and "in response to their parents' immigrant culture, which many youth perceive as unbearably strict, foreign, and un-American" (p.318). Because most of today's Asian American youth are either American-born or raised, their conflicts with their parents stem from differences not only in generation but also in language, culture, and customs. For this reason, unlike their native-born African American and white counterparts, they must navigate between two different worlds and cultures. Applying this idea, the remainder of this chapter discusses the three major ways in which these second-generation Islamic women balance the widely divergent gender expectations from their family, religious institutions, and larger society in their social lives in relation to their parents' reactions to their veiling.

Distinct Identity from Secular Immigrant Parents

Many of those Eastern State University women, whose fathers reacted negatively to veiling, view the practice as embodying their spiritual distinction from their parents. For these young women, the opposition is frequently directed toward their mothers, who do not veil. Questioning why their own mothers do not understand why this religious practice is significant for them, many of these daughters identify themselves as enacting a form of Muslim womanhood that sets them apart from their mothers. For instance, Aisha in Eastern State University describes her view of her mother as follows:

We know what we're doing, in a sense, we really see the importance of it, but my mother doesn't see why. She says, "We can be just as good without wearing it," you know, things like that. So, when I started, I told my mother why I was wearing it...and she just kinda' said, "Oh, so what about all the other Muslims? They're not good Muslim women because they don't wear hijab?" And I was just like, "No, I'm not judging anybody else. It's just something that I believe is right, and I want to do..." But I don't think she understood that.

The above narrative underscores the confrontation between Aisha and her mother in terms of their understanding of Islamic practice. While her secular immigrant mother neither sees wearing the hijab as a direct representation of her observance nor places as much significance on veiling, Aisha clearly sees the hijab as the center of her Islamic faith and identity. As was the case for Rebecca Kim's second-generation Korean evangelical respondents (2006) and Madeline Duntley's (1999) sansei (the third generation Japanese Americans), these women have constructed a set of their own practices and rituals, and in opposition to their immigrant parents, are more religiously oriented. Their dress is a representation of the difference from their immigrant mothers. More of my respondents recognize that they may have been drawn to veiling as a result of their disadvantage as Muslims raised in a predominantly white and Christian society. Several noted that while their mothers had the "luxury" of being surrounded by Muslim culture and had easy time learning about Islam as children, they had to make efforts and had few resources for learning about their religion. Thus, for them veiling required much careful consideration. For instance, Farida, Tahira and Sara, students at Eastern State University, describe how their attitudes toward veiling diverge from those of their mothers:

Farida: Here in America, I think a lot of the youth who are Muslim, they want to find what Islam is and the way it started and they go very much by the book. It's really different from our parents. My mom would like to cover when she hears the call to prayer or she has to pray herself but normally she doesn't. When I asked her like, "Would you ever wear hijab?," she said like, "Yeah, you know but I'm working and it's tough..." I don't think she would ever wear hijab even if she were not working, though.

Tahira: Yeah, in Pakistan she wore it. You know, all the women there, generally wore it but when she came to America, she stopped. I asked her why and she said that she didn't know any Muslims here and stuff. She was just, ya know, it sounded like she was making an excuse to me.

Sara: She thought, I guess in Pakistan it is more of a cultural thing. Like, all women wear this [hijab] when they go out. It's part of the norm. It's part of the dress. But in America it was like, "Oh nobody else does it.... So it's not required here?," kind of.

For my respondents, veiling is primarily a visible representation of their religious faith. As a group, they have reconstructed the meaning of a religious code as to function as a sign of an identity that is distinctively different from that of their non-veiling mothers. Their actions confirm Bandana Purkayastha's contention (based on a study of families of South Asian in the U.S. (2005)), that first generation parents emphasize certain aspects of ethno-national identities that are linked to *their* structural position as middle-class, non-whites in the United States. This partially explains the puzzle that several second generation participants encounter in returning to South Asia: what is taught to the second generation as "our culture" by their parents in the United States does not always fit locally and culturally into the South Asian practices. Families in the United States selectively emphasize particular versions of these ethno-national identities, that is, they "pick from a shopping cart of ethnic understandings and practices" (Purkayastha 2005: 88). In organizing their non religious practice, through their interaction with peers of south Asian descent, my respondents both questioned and contradicted the practices of their mothers.

A number of classic studies by such researchers as Albert Cohen (1955) and Austin and Willard (1998) contend that the deviant behavior of young males can be seen as acts of rebellion. Yet, that is not the case of the women I studied. Although many members of Eastern State University see wearing the hijab as demonstrating their difference from their parents, they see the generational conflict as stemming from strong affectional ties. For instance, Saba and Faria at Eastern State University said their feelings:

Saba: My dad didn't like the idea of me wearing hijab. He was saying that because I'm in college, it might make it difficult for me to get a job. I think he is right. But I just thought I'm going to work hard and have faith.... I'm just basing everything on faith, whatever happens, happens.... I really appreciate my dad 'cause I think he is very worried about me with the situation going on right now.

Faria: My father is not too supportive. But I guess he was just worried about my safety. Especially after 9/11, he just warned me to be careful because there is a lot of racism going on out there, especially Muslim sisters being attacked and stuff. My father was just worried about my safety.

Yet their understanding of their fathers' objections to veiling is in contradiction to their strong desire for self-determination. Sara says, "I really appreciate my dad 'cause I think he is very worried about me," and Faria rationalizes her father's opposition as "he was just worried about my safety." The deep-rooted ethnic patriarchy practiced at home even after their arrival to the United States prevents these daughters from going against their fathers on any occasion or level because by doing so they are automatically labeled as "disloyal" and "betraying" of their parents by other family members as well as outside community members. So despite their conflict with their parents, these women stress their continuing gratitude toward their fathers. In this way, the decision to veil does not accord with the "rebellious" model of classic white male youth culture. As Sara says "I think he is right. But I just thought I'm going to work hard and have faith," for the women at Eastern State University the struggle is between a sense of obligation to be obedient daughters and their own desire for autonomy.

Navigating Family Relationships

Many of Eastern State University of my respondents said that as their fathers came to accept their veiling, the relations with their father and mother have gradually changed. About two-fifths of their mothers (and a few of those in the Metro University area) started to wear the hijab themselves, typically a few years following their daughter's decision to veil. (There are fewer mothers who started to veil following their daughters in the Metro University area than in the Eastern State University area because about half of the former group had already been veiling when their daughters started while none of the latter did.) Some have done so because, inspired by their daughters' keen devotion to Islam, their own religions' observance has revived. Others do so to protect and to defend their daughters from anti-Islamic bashing and assaults. And some, who see their husbands give up some measure of authority in accepting their daughters' decision to veil, do so. Regardless of reasons, however, the majority of my interviewees describe their veiling and their mother's veiling as creating positive change, reducing tension and producing more loving relations between their mothers and fathers. For instance, Kubra and Mona at Eastern State University described their fathers' reactions to their mothers wearing the hijab:

Kubra: When my mom started wearing it, my father was a little hesitant because of all the things after 9/11. He was saying, "People are going to think that you are a terrorist ...it is really dangerous. You shouldn't wear it." I think he was just really nervous for her in the beginning. But then, he witnessed the changes around her. He started to see how beautiful her life became and how her attitudes changed, and her character blossomed into this beautiful character after she started to wear hijab...This changed his mind and now he supports both of us wearing hijab.

Mona: In the beginning my father was asking my mom, "Why do you wear this? You don't need to wear it,"... but now when my mom sticks out from her hijab, he goes and tucks it in for her. I think it's very cute. He

knew that she would appreciate it but had to put up his manly front. He doesn't say anything but I know he is happy now.

Robert Smith (2005) in *Mexican New York* notes that as immigrants move back and forth between their host and home countries, immigrant men and women and their U.S.-born children renegotiate their relations and build new gender roles. The above narratives underline similar trends. These daughters see wearing hijab as bringing about a positive change in the relations between their parents, giving their unexpressive fathers a chance to express their concern and tenderness to their mothers. As Mona says, her father now expresses his admiration for her mother more openly by fixing her hijab, and Kubra sees her father starting to respect their self-expression.

In addition, some women at Eastern State University comment that sharing the religious and social experience relating to veiling has made their connection with their mothers stronger than before. These American-born daughters raised in a white-dominant neighborhood acknowledge themselves as distant from their immigrant mothers because of their dissimilar experiences in their socialization, and thus, different ideas toward regarding their life paths. Yet, they said that they started to feel closer to their mothers when they saw them starting to wear hijab. For instance, Zaira, who is a senior at Eastern State University, and Fajira, who is a junior there, describe their views toward their mothers as follows:

Zaira: My mom never wore hijab even when she was in Pakistan. She actually started a couple years after my sister and I started. We even sometimes teach her different ways to wear hijab, and we talk a lot about Islam. Now, I feel I have much more in common with my mom and I found that she is so cute, learning all that new stuff with us...

Fajira: The first person to wear hijab in my family was me. I started as a freshman in college and then I remember my family was all like, "What are you doing?" (laugh) My mom hadn't started at that point but a couple of years later she started. I don't know why she started,... but I'm happy that now we can talk and do a lot of things in common together, like Islam.... We even share hijabs, too.

As the above narratives suggest, these American-born daughters are acting as cultural pioneers in their immigrant families, trying out traditional practices in new terrain. As a result, some young women in this study see a positive outcome from wearing hijab in their relations with their mother. Viewing the hijab as a symbol of sisterhood among Islamic women, these daughters indicate that veiling helped them to see their mothers differently. Much of the literature of migration suggests that the second-generation, especially those who are socially and educationally assimilated into mainstream society as "model minorities" tend to increase the distance from their immigrant parents (Gordon 1964; Lee and Zhou 2005). Although this is in part the case for my interviewees, from their perspective wearing the hijab also contributes to bridging the gaps between themselves and their immigrant mothers, and

changes (even if only slightly) traditional gender roles within their families. Despite differences in social experiences and in religious training, the young women I studied believe that sharing this particular religious tradition rebuilds the connection between mother and daughter.

Gaining Liberty by Veiling

My interviews with women in both Eastern State and Metro University areas indicate that the adoption of the veil also partially reduced their fathers' control of their social lives although it still remains a consistent force. The women's narratives underline their sense that they have been caught between the expected role of daughter and their desire as independent women to follow religious norms. In doing so, they utilize the hijab as a convenient negotiating tool in order to increase their autonomy and freedom in other aspects of their lives. For instance, Mena, a senior at Metro University, describes veiling in this way:

It's funny because when I actually started wearing hijab I felt liberated...[I felt] freedom that I didn't have before because my parents started trusting me more. They are like, "We trust her now that she is covered. So, no one is looking at her... none of the guys." Actually, my father now doesn't stop me from going out with my friends as often as he used to. In that sense, it helped me a lot.

According to DasGupta's (2005) studies on the Indian immigrant community, the chastity and purity of daughters is held in high regard, evidenced by stricter parental restrictions placed on the daughters. Espiritu (2003) also describes a similar finding for Philippina daughters. Likewise, the women in Asian immigrant communities are carefully monitored by their parents into adulthood and often until their marriage. They must put up with strictly imposed curfews, returning home much earlier than their male siblings (Alumkai 2004). In more extreme cases, women might not be allowed to leave the parental home in pursuit of an education. Min (2004, 2005) argues that for these reasons second-generation Asian American women struggle with their parents' "traditional" (that is, ethnic) gender expectations as they adapt to American norms. "Second-generation Asian American professionals, accept some ethnic cultural elements as positive but challenge others, being very critical of patriarchal traditions and gender stereotypes associated with their ethnic culture" (Min 2004: 8).

Similarly, my female interviewees said that they have experienced excessive supervision from their parents since childhood. Visibly, that control has been represented in their clothing. Their mothers, especially, insisted on dressing them conservatively, in long-sleeved shirts and pants. They also tried to prevent them from integrating into any youth cultures outside their ethnic community. On the other hand, the majority of the male interviewees said that their parents were neither regulated their clothing styles nor their social activities. Yet, ironically, in adolescence, some of these women, like Mena, found a way to liberate themselves, at least partially, from parental control by practicing an even more conservative dressing style. Utilizing the common belief that veiling could protect them from being approached by men on the street, they gained increased control

over their bodies. And, indeed, some see the veil as a ticket to making their own decisions about both careers and academic goals within the confines of patriarchic control. For instance, Nira, who started to wear the hijab when she was a senior at Eastern State University, said:

Nina: Now I really want to study Islam because I haven't really had the chance to in my life, and my parents aren't too supportive of that. They say, "Oh you want to go to school to study Islam? What does that mean?" But there is so much to learn, you know? But since I'm living with my parents, the only option that I really have is to either go to medical school or get married. I believe by wearing the headscarf, I can show how serious I am for studying Islam at school to my parents.

For Nira, wearing hijab is a means to gain the ever important parental approval for her choosing religious studies as a major. Many women in this study feel immense pressure to follow their fathers' directions in their choice of school, academic major, future career and marriage. Wearing the veil allows them to negotiate with their fathers about these matters. Instead of rebellious opposition, they reconcile the conflicting roles of daughter liberated American youth, and Islamic womanhood.

Discussion

This chapter illustrates the ways in which wearing the hijab has functioned as a strategy for negotiating the conflicting gender roles as an independent American woman and daughter of a South Asian family among some second-generation Islamic women. However, parental reactions to the practice differed according to sociogeographic location and level of economic assimilation. For those at Eastern State University who did not receive parental approval, veiling became an icon, spiritually and physically separating them from their secular immigrant parents. For those women whose mothers followed their lead, the practice became a turning point in reconnecting with their immigrant mothers. In addition, some women enjoyed a sense of empowerment, identifying their veiling as a key contributor to positive changes (even if it is very slight) in the relations between their parents, giving their unexpressive fathers a chance to express their care and tenderness to their mothers. Finally, for many in both areas, veiling became a negotiating tool for increasing independence and autonomy within the restriction of ethnic patriarchy. Thus, even as they emphasize the sacred meanings of wearing the hijab, these daughters use it to gain more autonomy from the dominant patriarchic control over their lives.

This chapter also confirms the theoretical perspective that family is not just a fixed institution in which reproductive functions are maintained along with the preservation of ethnic tradition; rather, it is a more fluid and flexible entity which transforms the meanings of tradition and hence, gender expectations within it as a result of interaction among different family members. The study also proposes that this alternation of the function of family is not always directed by immigrant parents themselves; rather, their children can be a major source for this potential new direction of their own ethnic family by reintroducing, consuming and modifying the meanings of tradition in the context of a

new set of social settings. The various reactions toward the religious dress code among the parents in this study outline the conflicting gender expectations and their associated struggles that many second-generation women face in their everyday lives within their own families. While largely being recipients of their ethnic-oriented patriarchy, these women still question, resist and recreate a tradition as a strategy to balance their social lives both inside and outside their homes.

Chapter 3

A Bargaining Chip in the Transnational Arranged Marriage Market

This chapter examines gender disparity in mate selection in the context of growing transnational marriage markets among South Asian American Muslim adolescents. This group that I studied is unique in its traditions of mate selection in several ways. First, while those second-generation adolescents achieve a high level of economic and social assimilation, they still strongly value the system of arranged marriage as opposed to romantic courtship. Second, due to their immigrant parents' maintenance of their connection with their extended families in their home countries, the arranged marriage market is expanding transnationally. I examine how cultural characteristics and new trends across the United States and South Asia transform gender relations between second-generation young men and women. The findings show the system through which this new trend of transnational arranged marriage reproduces gender hierarchy among South Asian American adolescents.

Nahid, a newly-wed senior at Eastern State University describes her views about marriage:

“I didn't know him that well 'cause I'd never really spoken to him in person. But when his parents asked my parents, I said “yes,” and three months later we married... You know, I heard somewhere that if you get stuck in an elevator with someone, the chances that you'll end up falling in love with that person are very high. I think that's true. I thought if I put my efforts and religious faith into my relationship with him and dedicate time to our marriage, I would be happy with him and it would eventually work out.”

Despite the fact that she had limited contact with her husband before marrying, a graduate student two years older than Nahid, she is confident that her idea of “getting stuck in an elevator” will prove applicable to her situation. For her, the relationship with her husband that resulted in marriage started by chance, and although she expressed the stress that she felt arising from such a situation, yet she was satisfied that the marriage would eventually turn out well. Her religious faith would transform a relationship in which they started as strangers.

This type of statement was common among the members of the Muslim sisters' groups in both areas. I heard the metaphor “getting stuck in an elevator with someone” repeatedly from both single and married women in describing their views about marriage. Typically, the male's side of the family presents an offer of marriage to the family of the woman who will be married. The woman with her parents' guidance then decides whether to accept the offer. Although there are many Muslim sects, my respondents said that the religious practice of gender separation principally prohibits a woman from directly interacting with her potential husband until she decides to marry him. Because of this belief, in fact, it is not uncommon for married interviewees to mention that they had not met their husbands until their engagement or in some instances until their wedding day.

These women also believe that there is no concept of a romantic relationship between single men and women in Islam, since the followers are all equally united to one another by a religious concept of brothers and sisters under Allah. For this reason,

although an arranged marriage gives women somewhat limited autonomy in the selection of a mate, arranged marriage is considered the most appropriate way to find a spouse for the Muslim women in both communities studied here as a means of embodying their religious faith.

Some women also accept this tradition of arranged marriage as a symbol of loyalty to their parents. For instance, Gaira, who a freshman of Indian origin at Metro University, said to me, "I really trust my father. He always thinks of me first and knows what kind of person is the best for me. So, arranged marriage is perfectly fine with me." Many other women in both areas also commented that marriage without the blessing of their parents was an unthinkable act of betrayal as a daughter of a South Asian family. This shows that traditional ethnic patriarchy still remains strongly within these immigrant families regardless of their economic assimilation levels and fundamentally limits these women's autonomy in their mate selection.

As South Asian immigrant parents often work to preserve their ethnic traditions and maintain their connection with their homeland through frequent visits to extended family members and through the use of advanced telecommunications, the transnational arranged marriage market is expanding. My study found that the marital market for American-born men and women based in the parents' home countries has created a new gender hierarchy system. In this chapter I illustrate the increasing problems of South Asian immigrant daughters in the dual context of transnationalization, ethnic patriarchy, and gendered distinctions in adolescence.

Theories of Mate Selection and Exogamy

In general, the young generation's attitudes toward exogamy (marrying someone from a different racial or ethnic group) are more positive than that of older generations. Exogamy is often seen as one of the marks of social and cultural assimilation by classic theorists such as Melton Gordon (1964) and Robert E. Park (1923). Yet, studies show that the frequency of out marriage varies by race, gender and level of assimilation. For instance, it is the case that among many East Asian immigrant groups, women are more likely to marry members of different racial and ethnic groups than their male counterparts (Wen-Shing Tseng et al. 1977; Shinagawa and Pang 1990). Kulczycki and Lobo's (2002) study of Arab Americans shows that for both sexes, those American-born young men and women with a higher education were more likely to marry outside their ethnicity. "The cultural and structural assimilation of Arab Americans is facilitating intermarriage, with indicators of acculturation being the strongest predictors, especially for women." (Kulczycki and Lobo 2002:124).

On the other hand, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan's (1990) study shows that black women experience more restriction from within their community for seeing men from other racial groups, especially white, than black men do. This illustrates a high level of social control in mate selection, especially for women in the black community. In addition, Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart and Landry's (1992) and South's (1991) studies show that black men's intermarriage affects the marital prospects of black women negatively by narrowing the pool of economically attractive marriage partners, especially in metropolitan areas. That is, the more highly educated black women are, the smaller the

pool of compatible men becomes since the marriage market is defined by those black men who are most likely to intermarry.

Similar to the cases of black women, this chapter also describe the way in which the more successful the Muslim women in this study are in their economic, social and cultural assimilation, the more disadvantaged they become in the marriage market. At the same time, for their male counterparts, these factors produce the opposite outcome.

In the following sections, I first describe the attitudes of American Muslim women toward their American male coethnics. After describing American Muslim men's views toward female coethnics, I discuss the systems of increasing gender hierarchy in this transnational arranged marriage market.

American-born Men vs. South Asian Men

Although women in this study support the traditions of arranged marriage itself, it does not mean that they accept any man who is proposed for them. In my interviews with 36 single women, 33 of them said that (considering today's increasing transnational arranged marriages,) they would definitely prefer an American-raised Muslim to someone from South Asia as a future husband. Interestingly, they said that they do not care about the race or ethnicity of their future husband as long as he is American; they are strongly opposed to marrying someone who comes directly from the home country of their parents. For instance, Fria, a junior of Pakistani origin at Metro University, and Raja, a sophomore of Bangladeshi origin at Eastern State University, express this view as follows:

Fria: I don't care about my future husband's ethnicity, but I want to marry someone who was born here. I don't want to marry someone who is over there or just came to this country a few years ago. If I marry that kind of person, I have to support him financially, and write out bills and stuff. I also have to get a green card and do immigration stuff for him.... See, I don't want to go through those kinds of things.... It makes me sound bad and unfair but I wouldn't be able to do it.

Raja: Yeah, I don't want to marry someone who was brought here just a few years back... because you know, guys have to provide for and support their wives.... I know I shouldn't think that way.... But I DO. I really do.... It makes me sound really bad, but I don't want to risk my life.

In his study on women and ethnicity, Bhopal (1997) states that "class has become a more important identity signifier as women have attained greater education and occupational experience, leading to the relegation of ethnic cultural identity as an unwanted source of constraint." Among the women in this study, however, the "level of economic assimilation" is more significant. Fria and Raja both suggest that they place no weight on their future husband's race or ethnicity, but being accustomed to the American style and standard of living is very important to them and, thus, they reject men from South Asia. Quoting the traditional gender roles prescribed by the Quran, they commonly suggest that providing for financial needs and shelter is primarily a husband's role. At the

same time, they highly value economic success and material fulfillment as a part of American life, and they say that maintaining their current standard of living is a significant element in their hopes for marital happiness. Furthermore, listening to the stories of their parents' economic struggles, maintaining frequent communication with their relatives in South Asia, and exploring the news of their "old" countries through internet and satellite TV programs, these women develop an impression that living conditions in those countries are far different and much less agreeable than in the United States. Because of traditional patriarchy and associated gender roles as a wife and mother of a South Asian Muslim family these women recognize that they will have limited autonomy in financial decisions after marriage: thus, it becomes even more important for them to make certain of their future maintenance and standard of living rather than their male counterparts. For these reasons, they are convinced that men from the home countries of their parents will not be able to provide them with the financial well-being that they desire. They think that such men are less likely to find satisfactory careers, at least in part because of their immigrant status and supposed lack of skills and education. For those reasons, these men are far less desirable as potential mates in the minds of these American women.

This tendency is also seen among other elite South Asian second-generation women. Purkayastha (2005) and Raghuram (2000) point out that many professional American Hindu women whose parents are from the lower castes in India still accept arranged marriage; but they do not like to marry someone who is from home villages of their parents because of the low number of educated prospects from within their respective castes. Similarly, the women in this study identify themselves as being highly educated and economically promising "American women," as opposed to those male counterparts in South Asia who are lacking in education and career promise; accordingly, they draw clear hierarchical boundaries.

Women's narratives indicate the significance of assimilation not only in economic but also cultural terms as among the prerequisites for marital partners. Many of them express their views about the cultural practices of men from home countries of their parents as old-fashioned and uncivilized. For instance, Zada, who is of Afghanistan-origin and Fahima and Sari, who are of Pakistani-origin at Metro University, describe their rejection of men from South Asia in this way:

Zada: I want to marry someone who is from this country. I don't care which ethnic background he is from. I just want a husband who is very similar to me 'cause it's just easier, you know? It's very important.... If I had to go to Afghanistan and pick someone, I couldn't because their mentality is different. Because I see men who came from Afghanistan, and I see the way they think is so different. Like when they need some money, they think they can just go and borrow money from someone. No, you can't just do that! You have to go to the bank! You know?

Fahima: I don't want to marry someone from Pakistan. Well, my sister married a Pakistani. After they married, he came here. He is good and trying to get used to being here but you can see that it's hard for him. You know, the way things are done here is very different from over there. He often asks us,

“Why can’t we do this?” You know, here, everything has to be legally worked out but over there, you can get away with a lot of things.... For example, here, you have to work for every penny and it goes by the hour, you know, over there, everything is so different, everybody is laid back and takes their time... maybe because I grew up in New York, where everyone is like, “Hurry up, rush, rush, rush.” You know? ... The idea is very simple. A husband and a wife really have to be compatible with each other.

Zada and Fahima’s comments clearly indicate that they distance themselves from the men of their parents’ home counties as potential marital partners. They feel those men are not “similar” to or “compatible” with them because their entire socialization has taken place in completely different cultural worlds. Fahima’s comment, “Everybody [in Pakistan] is laid back and takes their time..., maybe because I grew up in New York where everyone is like, ‘Hurry up, rush, rush, rush,’” highlights her strong identity as a native New Yorker, growing up in one of the most urbanized and fashionable cities in the world in comparison to those newcomers from South Asia who, she thinks, unashamedly carry on their “old” cultural norms and practices in public.

Sari, a freshman of Indian -origin at Eastern State University, comments on her male counterparts from South Asia as follows:

Sari: The way they dress.... “Okay. We don’t dress like that, you know? Yeah, to us, they look [like] they don’t know anything... and they have an accent. If you come here and have an accent, it’s not a good thing. I think a lot of things that bother people about them is their accent. One guy that I know, when I first saw him I thought he was really good looking but when he talked to me, I was like, “oh, my god!” (shaking her head) I think it’s the accent.

Sari suggests that men raised in South Asian countries are not desirable as potential marriage prospects because their clothing styles and language are not Americanized. As middle-class, collegiate women growing up in New York, associating with those who are not “stylish” means lowering one’s status among their peer groups. Also, Sari’s comment, “to us, they look like they don’t know anything,” indicates that these women tend to consider those newcomers as socially weak. Viewing the dress and accents of these men as major factors in evaluating their masculinity, strength, intelligence and leadership, Sari suggests that these South Asian men seem sexually unattractive to her.

Espiritu (1995), in her study of the history of Asian Americans, explains that one of the reasons for the significantly higher rates of interracial marriage among East Asian American women (as opposed to East Asian men) is the continuous feminization of the body image of Asian men by the mainstream media, arts and literature. As Western society has highly feminized Asian men’s body image because of its racist ideology, according to Said (1979), this image significantly influences East Asian American women in their choice of mates, leading some of them to choose Caucasian or Black partners whom they view as more masculine, intelligent and sexually attractive than their racial counterparts. Similarly, influenced by popular American culture, as expressed in fashion and lingo, women in this study develop views of men raised in South Asia as

pitiable, naive, dependent, and sexually unattractive. These women prospect that their freedom in social activities will be significantly reduced after marriage according to their assigned gender roles under religious and ethnic patriarchy and thus, the quality of their social lives will be predominantly determined by their husbands' ability to access mainstream society as well as the American Muslim community. For these reasons, their future spouse's level of cultural and social assimilation becomes an even more significant factor for these women than for their male counterparts.

As opposed to the feminized image of South Asian men, American-born/raised South Asian men are viewed by my respondents as intelligent, open-minded, independent, and spiritually strong. For instance, Faria explains the reasons why she prefers to marry an American Muslim man as follows:

Faria: I don't care about his race or ethnicity as long as he is a good Muslim. But my preference is someone who is American-born because I need an educated guy, someone who is smarter than me. I want someone who is very knowledgeable about Islam... I want to work with him and make myself spiritually stronger and closer to Allah... you know, it's really important for me.

As the above narrative underlines, Faria adheres to highly conservative views of husband-wife relations (seeing them as in conformity to Islamic principles,) in contrast to her attachment to "American" values in other aspects of her life. Faria sees social assimilation through high educational achievement as a significant criterion for her in mate selection. She prefers American-born/raised men because she believes that they are more educated than those from her parent's country and, expects that such a husband would lead her to grow spiritually stronger.

The interviews also show that these women prefer American-born/raised men because of acceptance of egalitarian practices in relationships with their wives. Observing the highly male-dominant relationships between their parents at home, these women also believe that young men from South Asian countries are still extremely conservative and authoritarian in their treatment of women. Interestingly, in explaining their religion, these women commonly identify the Islamic ideology of gender relation as closer to Western ideologies (which encourage egalitarianism) than South Asian ideologies (which still validate considerable male dominance). For instance, in discussions of gender relations that took place during the sisters' Quran study circle, they often noted that the prophet Muhammad had an educated wife, Aisha, and that he took good care of her and also allowed her to work outside the home. They conclude, therefore, that "real" Muslim men should be accepting of their wives becoming educated and pursuing careers. They often said to me that women are subordinated to men in many Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, but that this custom did not originate in the religion: it came from national or ethnic traditions that are controlled by men who exploit and misinterpret what the Quran actually says. For this reason, many members of the sisterhood who aspire to professional careers, also think American-born/raised Muslim men are more desirable than those from their parents' home countries because they are less influenced by the conservative, South Asian ethnic patriarchy and more accustomed both to Western ways of thinking and

Muslim ideals in regard to gender relations. For instance, Aida and Sara, seniors of Pakistani-origin at Eastern State University, describe their views as follows:

Aida: I prefer to marry someone who was born, raised and educated in this country 'cause I want my husband to allow me to work. You know, I sometimes hear that guys think, "I don't want my wife to work outside."... You know, I want to work. According to Islam, if the wife doesn't work, it's okay, but if she does, it's not okay to say that she can't work. Especially if my husband is someone who grew up in Pakistan and I ask if I can work, he has to break his ethnic tradition. He has to adapt and change his life style. I don't think it's easy to do that.

Sara: I prefer to marry an American-born man. Maybe it's not right to think that I don't want to marry this person or that person. I know you can't really judge a person depending on where they come from. But I am sitting here, in the middle of American culture... and I know how guys over there think all girls have to sit at home, cleaning and cooking all day. Guys over there see that their mom is cooking and dad is working outside... and they think that this is gonna be their life. But no, Islam is not like that. You have to read into Islam. You know, in Islam a woman doesn't have to stay at home all the time. She doesn't have to cook if she doesn't want to. You know, she can say, "I don't want to cook," or "I don't want to live with my husband's parents." But I don't think guys over there can accept that kind of stuff because of their culture. I think it's all about culture.

In his study of Asian Americans, Fong (2002) suggest that many Asian American women prefer to marry someone from outside their own racial group because they want to avoid traditional Asian patriarchy and are seeking more egalitarian family relationships. Similarly, Aida and Sara perceive that American-born Muslim men more easily accept the idea of gender equality in their marriage than men from South Asian countries. They think that American-born husbands would support their career goals because of their familiarity with the Western ideology of egalitarianism. Ramji's study (2003) on second-generation Indian professional women shows that native-born traditionalist women continue to marry within "conventional" circles, meaning co-ethnic marriage, yet still look for men with "the right balance between old and new, showing Indian-descent American men who still feel pride in being Indian rather than completely Westernized." (p.69) Similarly, the collegiate Islamic women of the sisterhood look for religious American-born men because of the balance between "Western modernization" and "Islamic authenticity" that they expect to find in them. They concede that these religious American Muslim men would be the major financial provider and decision makers, but would also allow their wives the freedom and autonomy to pursue professional careers.

Finally, my interviews also suggest that the rejection of men from South Asia is not a result of a balance between a strong American Islamic identity and a desire for independence, but also a response to the social context of racism in the United States. For instance, pointing out her minority status in this society, Fahima at Metro University describes her reasons for rejecting transnational marriage as follows:

Fahima: I don't want to marry someone who just came to this country, who is very traditional looking. If I have to marry a traditional guy, I would want to go back to Pakistan because over there I'm the majority whereas over here I'm the minority. You know, I don't want him to come over here and if I go to a party I have to explain why he wears that kind of clothes or talks that way. You know, I don't want to keep dealing with that all the time. I would rather go to Pakistan and live a good life, instead of being discriminated all that time over here. I'd rather be there and be the majority.

Ramji (2003) suggests that the importance that wealth, class and nationality have in spouse selection needs to be understood not just in terms of qualities internal to a group (economic status and nationality, etc.), but also in terms of external influences (racist ideological and structural forces). Fahima's comment vividly signifies that she feels having a Pakistani-raised husband would adversely affect her life, marginalizing her in public. She thinks that a Pakistani husband would place limits on her social life and increase her experience of discrimination, intensifying the negative aspects of her racial and religious affiliation, because of her association with a foreign person. Fahima's comment, "You know, I don't want him to come over here and if I go to a party I have to explain why he wears that kind of clothes or talks that way.... I don't want to keep dealing with that all the time," underlines that marriage to a foreign man, who they perceive as unsophisticated, means isolation from their peer group. For this reason, my respondents think American Muslim men would aid in maintaining ties to mainstream American Muslim youth community. Although their minority status would not change in the larger society, and they would continue to face discrimination, they think that they could, nevertheless, enjoy an extensive social life in the dense American Muslim network if they had American-born/raised husbands rather than foreign ones.

American-born Women vs. South Asian Women

As the previous sections show, men who are American-born/raised, college educated, middle-class and familiar with "American" culture are more attractive as potential mates. In contrast, the very same characteristics are often perceived as negative attributes in women. My interviews with men in both communities implies that their images of American-raised women in general are "materialistic," "aggressive," "irreligious" and "sexually liberal," compared to women in South Asia and, thus, not qualified for ideal wives or mothers. For example, Muhammad, who is a senior of Pakistani-origin at Metro University, describes his views as follows:

Muhammad: Well, actually, I don't want to say that I want to marry someone from here or Pakistan. I just want to marry someone who has a vital mentality. If you are mature and know what is right, why not? But if I have to choose, I would choose one in Pakistan. I know most of the girls here were born in this country and grew up here. They are kind of open-minded, but honestly, I am a kind of a conservative person. So, I am not sure if they understand me....

Although Muhammad thinks that those two groups of women should not be stereotypically labeled, his comments, “they are kind of open-minded, but honestly, I am a kind of a conservative person,” implies that an “open-minded” American-raised woman is too liberal to be considered as a future wife, compared to a South Asian counterpart. Also, in saying “I just want to marry someone who has a vital mentality,” he shows an uncertainty about American-raised women’s commitment to Islam.

Although the male members in both communities do not outwardly express negative views toward their American-raised female counterparts, many imply that American-raised women in general are not as religious or traditional, compared to those from their parents’ home country because of their familiarity with American ways of life and the popular ideology of Western feminism.

Although cultural assimilation is viewed as a positive attribute for men, it is a negative for women. For instance, while fluent English is perceived as reflecting intelligence and sophistication in men, it is interpreted as a sign of turning away from ethnic traditions in women. Since traditionally speaking, a wife is expected to live with her husband’s family, the parents on the male side generally expect their daughter-in-law to be fluent in their dialect. Many American-raised women who do not satisfy this linguistic condition are considered undesirable because they cannot live up to the traditional roles of a good wife. This evaluation does not necessarily come only from prospective husbands but from their parents and members of their extended families. I found this tendency to be especially strong among the men at Metro University, whose parents were less likely to speak English fluently. Feeling pressures to maintain family traditions, these men are likely to marry women from their parents’ home country. For instance, Zakin, who is a junior of Bangladeshi-origin and Haban and Zayd, who are seniors of Pakistani-origin at Metro University, comment:

Zakin: I personally prefer to marry someone from here. But I am thinking of living with my mother and father. My mother wants me to marry someone from Pakistan because my parents don’t speak English that well. So, they are going to have a hard time if I have a wife who can’t understand and communicate with them.

Haban: Yes, of course my parents prefer me to marry a Bangladeshi. If I marry someone who is white or someone raised here, it would be really hard for them to communicate with her. Personally, I don’t care. But I know they do.

Zayd: I think I would choose someone from Pakistan rather than those who grow up here. As long as I can communicate with her, I don’t think that would be a problem. I’m just concerned about communication. That’s all. My parents usually say that they don’t care about the national origin of my future wife but indirectly emphasize their language ability. So, if I marry someone who doesn’t speak Urdu, that would be a problem.

In addition, families on the male side often view U.S.-born and raised women negatively precisely because of their educational accomplishments. According to tradition in South Asia, where women marry at an early age and families prefer having

sons rather than daughters, college women are sometimes considered too old to give birth to a satisfactory number of children, thus, reducing the chances of bringing sons to the family. They may also be seen as too independent to stay at home to care for her husband and his family. Furthermore, while American men's clothing styles are seen as a sign of urbanity and intelligence, the apparel of their female counterparts, including brand-name bags and items influenced by American youth culture, is often translated negatively as being "too sexual," "immodest" and "materialistic," and raises questions about their social activities before marriage.

Women's Disadvantage in Arranged Marriage

In the previous sections, I described the ways in which American-born Muslim men and women construct a hierarchy of preferences in the transnational marital market. While women view their American-born counterparts as ideal future husbands, men tend to be unenthusiastic about the possibility of marrying an American-born or raised women. And many will look for a wife abroad, out of a sense of obligation as sons in order to please their parents.

In addition to the perceived asymmetrical marital possibilities for men and women in this community, both understandings of religious law and the tradition of arranged marriage create more disadvantages for women than for men. In fact, even the freedom to choose among marital candidates is very limited since women are expected to "be chosen" and are rarely allowed to directly interact with men. In the traditional marriage market, South Asian women are displayed for the "male gaze" and familial approval.

Additionally, there is generally a much smaller pool of potential spouses for Muslim women in diaspora communities because my respondents believe interfaith marriage is acceptable only for Muslim men. According to some fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic law, Muslim men may marry women from any religious background if their wives agree to convert after their marriage. However, Muslim women may only marry a hereditary or already converted Muslim man. Also, since a bride's (but not a groom's) virginity is a required condition for marriage, while parents give their sons freedom to interact with people of other backgrounds, daughters' social activities are much more likely to be strictly monitored and confined to family members or close friends within the larger immigrant community.

Finally, the desire of the female's family to receive a marital offer from men of a co-ethnic group further narrows the pool of eligible men. However, immigrant mothers of the women in the Metro University area, who are directly connected to their co-ethnic community in their everyday lives, seem to place more stress on the importance of gaining an offer from men of a co-national origin group than those coming from the Eastern State University area. Faria, a junior of Afghanistan-origin at Metro University, for instance, describes her mother's expectations:

Faria: I think they do care. You know, it's funny. It shouldn't matter. But my mom cares more than my dad. My dad is like, "okay, if he is Muslim, a good Muslim, then good." But mom is like, "No, he can't be anything but Afghan." I don't know, one time, I asked her, "Arab?" She said, "No."

“Indian?” “No.” “Hispanic?” “Black?” “No,” and I asked her, “Why?” She said because she is more concerned about what the community says, you know, like it’s better to keep with your own kind. Because as far as getting married, she says that I should stay with my own. Another thing is that our cultures are very different, with things like, language. I think that that is one of the things that she is worried about the most. The language.... She doesn’t speak English. So, she is like, “How am I going to communicate with your husband?”

As the above narrative illustrates, Faria and many of the other women in the sisterhood at Metro University are also under a good deal of pressure to please their parents in making marital decision. Their parents, especially mothers, who speak English poorly and have had little contact with other cultures besides their own, express great concern about communication with future sons-in-law as well as the need to maintain national-ethnic boundaries. Although parents of Eastern State University women are relatively more familiar with American culture, they are similarly, although less consistently, expressive of concerns. Lyra, who is a senior of Pakistani-origin at Eastern State University, expresses the family pressure to have a husband of Pakistani-origin:

Lyra: If I go out with a non-Paki, my parents are gonna say, “Oh, what are you doing?” It’s a big deal.... So, I said I want a Paki to my brother. He is like, “No you shouldn’t think that way.... Why and what do you want that for? You can’t even speak two words in Urdu....” That’s true. Because I grew up here, it’s not like “Oh, I know everything about Paki”.... It’s true, you know? I can’t even speak the language well. Personally, I don’t care. It really doesn’t matter to me. But then, I know my parents would question it if I go out with non-Pakistani guy.

The above narrative underlines the dilemma that Lyra and the members of the sisterhood face in their negotiation with their parents over mate selection. As daughters of South Asian families, they feel a strong sense of obligation to satisfy their parents’ wishes. At the same time, their high level of assimilation combined with their strong faith in Islam (, which admonishes followers to erase racial and ethnic lines among Muslims,) lead them to question the significance of finding a co-national origin partner.

Although both male and female sides of the families stress the significance of maintaining the ethno-religious boundaries in marriage, American-raised women tend to have fewer chances to meet a marriage partner who can satisfy both their own and their parents’ needs. For men, their preferences for women from their parents’ country over their American counterparts tend to match that of their parents’ desires. But women’s desires tend to conflict with their parents’ wishes because of their preference for “Americanness” and religious faith over ethnic and national authenticity.

Lisa Sun-Hee Park (2005) in her study on the children of Chinese and Korean American immigrant small-business owners suggests that while children are expected by their families and by American social imperatives to become “good Americans,” the cultural and economic structures of Chinese and Korean immigrant families and an

unstated, yet still deeply felt, American racism make such acculturation difficult. Park argues that children in these families resolve this conflict by striving for achievement in education and the acquisition of material goods. They attempt to secure social citizenship through an advanced education, economic security and the ability to purchase markers of upward mobility that can be publicly displayed, such as luxury cars and homes. Only this kind of outcome can repay their parents' sacrifice and confirm their success. This is certainly the case for the members of the sisterhood. They have worked hard to satisfy their parents' expectations and American social imperative that they be "successful" citizens in this host land. At the same time, they have many of the markers of upward mobility -- high educational achievement, New York style fashion, the accents of native English speakers. In addition, their connection to an extensive Muslim youth network enables them to cope with enduring racism and their feeling of marginality in the larger youth community. Yet, their continuous efforts at achieving upward mobility and acculturation (including the desire for an American-raised Muslim husband) are opposed by their parents as they reach marriageable age, creating considerable conflict.

Immigrant parents of daughters are clearly conscious of the particular context in which they are rearing their children. They recognize that those raised here will have differently contextualized identities than those raised in South Asia, bringing certain risks to co-national marriage. At the same time, however, most are ready to trust love-marriages, noting the high rate of divorce in the United States and attributing it to the American way. For these reasons, some parents send their American-raised daughters back to their home cities and villages to wipe away their acquired "Americanness" in preparation for marriage. According to Leonard's (1997) interviews with South Asian immigrants, some even describe this custom as "not for relocation, but a rehabilitation."

Some parents in this study arrange marriages for their daughters to men from their native villages and cities, even against their daughters' will. This is especially likely when daughters do not receive any offers from co-ethnic families in the U.S. In such cases, parents may arrange marriages with cousins believing that a marriage within a family can minimize the differences between American-raised daughters and their husbands. For instance, Farida and Humaira at Metro University describe their and their friend's experiences:

Farida: Well, I married my first cousin in Pakistan. He is coming to the U.S. next month. You know, after graduation, no one proposed to me. So, my parents arranged a marriage with him in Pakistan. Well, I've known him since we were children and he is a fine person. But to be honest, I didn't want to.... You know, how other sisters talk about Muslim men in other countries... but I had no choice.

Humaira: Saba got married with a Pakistani man last month. You know, her father asked his cousin in Pakistan to find her husband. She didn't want to but she had no choice.... Her parents "asked" her if she wanted to marry him, but in a way she couldn't say no, anyway.... So, yeah, a woman "has" the right to say no if she doesn't want to, but in reality she doesn't.

South Asian children, especially daughters, are expected to obey their parents' wishes in making life decisions. Yielding to family elders is emphasized as a sign of loyalty. Within such cultural parameters, marriage without the blessing of their parents is unthinkable for these daughters. It is true that this tradition of arranged marriage is different from forced marriage; the potential bride may decline. Yet, as Humaira notes "her parents 'asked' her if she wanted to marry him but in a way she couldn't say no, anyway.... So, yeah, a woman 'has' the right to say no if she doesn't want to, but in reality she doesn't." Thus, there is unavoidable pressure to accept undesirable offers, when they have been fostered by parents and family members.

Discussion

This chapter describes the gender hierarchy created by the South Asian transnational arranged marriage market contribute to the creation of new gender hierarchies for preferable marital partners across the United States and South Asia. It reveals how being an American Muslim youth has significantly different meanings for men and women. For young men, socioeconomic and cultural resources acquired in the United States function as positive bargaining chips, whereas the opposite is true for women; thus, men are able to make high demands of candidates for marriage, while women are faced with a reduced pool of eligible men. The women's overwhelming preference for American-born men over foreign born, directly reflects their high level of assimilation. Yet, more importantly it underlines their struggle with consistent racism, sexism and ethnocentrism in larger society and unfair treatment due to their gender according to traditions. Desiring to marry an American-born man, these women try to make most of their autonomy within the restrictions of ethnic and religious patriarchy in their future marital lives.

In addition, the discussion in this chapter contributes to our understanding of the intersection of race, gender, religion and class in studies of family and migration, revealing the gender inequality that results when an ethnic community has strong expectations for endogamy in the face of cultural assimilation, decreasing the pool of future partners for women and increasing it for men. Given the strict parental supervision of these women and their limited power, they are often caught between multiple contradictory expectations: their obligation as daughters to obey their parents and the expectations of the host youth culture, which prizes independence and autonomy. As education and assimilation become crucial markers of identity for these women, they are also caught in a conflict between a parental desire for ethnic homogamy and their own belief in ethnically-blind mate selection. Women from ethnic groups in which marital arrangements are highly patriarchal, including arranged or semi-arranged marriages, and in which, cultural norms require parental approval for marriage may feel this dilemma even more strongly than other groups of women. In ethnic communities in which daughters have limited autonomy in their mate selection, the gender relations in the marriage market are imbalanced, advantaging men and leaving women subject to the "male gaze."

In the next chapter, I will discuss how veiling is associated with this new form of marriage market inequality in the Muslim youth community and the subsequent meanings of being an American Muslim.

Chapter 4

“A Good Muslim Woman”

Men act and women appear.... Women watch themselves being looked at.... Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger 1972)

This chapter examines the meanings of veiling for young Muslim women in the context of gender relations. Feminist ethnographic studies have contributed to revealing the hierarchical gender relations (which are complex and often unnoted) in different settings. Yet, in stressing the viewpoints of women about their experience, they have failed to fully appreciate the impact of male counterparts on that experience. Because women’s motives for dressing in a particular style take shape in the context of an ideal feminine image that is highly responsive to gender norms within a group, this chapter especially focuses on the meanings of veiling as viewed by both male and female members of this study. Narratives of men and women illuminate the process that has generated a new gender ideology and a corresponding set of power relations centered on veiling. These findings, however, strongly suggest that class is far less relevant here than in most other aspects of immigrant lives.

The Theoretical Landscape of Gender, Discourse and Islamic Veiling

Feminist theorists have long explored the interrelations between the culture-specific constructions of gender and the more circumscribed inter-subjective negotiation of gender relations. As such, they see identity construction as a process of everyday practice that is characterized by ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle. In this scholarship, the theory of discourse is one of the main tools used to further our understanding of the means by which gender relations are constructed and reconstructed (e.g., Todd & Fisher 1988; Currie 1997; Wodak 1997; Barkowski 1997, 1998, 2000). The theorists of discourse argue that their method best illuminates the way in which cultural forms, such as gender, religion and ethnicity, are constructed, contested, and fundamentally intersect as social phenomena. This is certainly the case here.

The Islamic veil, the hijab, is not by itself a sufficient symbol for conveying the varying social relationships between those connected to it. Rather, it is through cultural discourse that these networks are produced and established. For example, social practices that imbue the veil with cultural significance include the rhetoric of religious leaders who equate veiling with a commitment to Islam, as well as the actual elimination of unveiled Muslim women from some Islamic institutions.

Theories of discourse also shed light on the contested character of cultural forms. Cultural symbols are capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways and often become a source of struggle and contestation. Conflicting interpretations of the same traditional cultural symbols may be extended or promoted by those groups which share a common religious heritage. As evidenced in my analysis below, groups of young Muslim men and women in my study offer strikingly different interpretations of the veil and the Quranic passages pertaining to this religious dress code. Yet, gendered hegemony gives a

significant advantage to men to persist in their views, thus leading women to eventually confirm to them.

Finally, theories of discourse lead researchers to multidimensional and overlapping characteristics of cultural forms. Discourses are not isolated ideologies; rather, they are culturally specific means of understanding the world that intersect with competing viewpoints. As I discuss below, devout young Muslim women living in the two local areas are not just simply exposed to the inner-oppositional gender debates engaged in within their Islamic circles, they also construct their gender identities in light of non-Muslim discourses of gender and ethnicity prevalent in the United States today as their resistance to a male-dominant discourse for their assigned gender roles.

Drawing from insights taken from theories of discourse, along with feminist notions of subjectivity and bodily practice, this chapter demonstrates that the discursive nature of veiling provides the young female practitioners with the symbolic resources that are necessary for negotiating their everyday social experiences. It shows how competing male and female discourses on the veil enable these young American-born women to legitimize their veiling while at the same time, subjectively empowering and liberating themselves from some of constraints of a patriarchic religious tradition.

In the following sections, I first discuss what my male respondents said about veiling. After examining their viewpoints, I analyze how the members of the sisterhood internalize, digest, and ultimately get some benefit from male-dominated gender ideologies about their veiling.

Representations of Religious Masculinity and Authority

Many Muslim clergy and Islamic elites currently prescribe veiling as a custom in which “good” Muslim women should engage (Afshar 1985; Al-Swailem 1995; Philips and Jones 1985; Siddiqui 1983). During my fieldwork this idea was repeatedly invoked by Islamic scholars and other speakers at conferences hosted by this study’s subjects. Adopting a similar stance, male interviewees from both locales generally say that veiling is a marker of a woman’s religiosity and acceptance of what they see as the gender roles prescribed by the Quran. For example, Muhammad, a senior of Pakistani-origin at Eastern State University, describes the criteria that he desires in his future wife:

Muhammad: I want to marry a woman who carries Islam in every aspect of her life.... Ultimately, I would propose to someone who wears hijab, who does cover. That’s my first choice, if you want to call it that way. I mean, yeah, I definitely look for someone who covers, who is humble, not one who is wild or crazy or feminist, you know. If you study Islam, you know that women have equal rights as men, it’s just a man has a little bit more... depending on the circumstances.... So, a good Muslim woman is someone who knows her roles. Women should know their role and men should know their role, too. It’s just one straight and simple.

Graybill and Arthur (2000) in their study on Mennonite religious communities in the United States argue that a woman’s appearance is considered by men to be the external manifestation of inner attitudes. Because objective evaluation of a woman’s

commitment to a certain faith is impossible, symbolic forms of self-expression are closely monitored by men. Visual cues are analyzed for signs of conformity to male-dominant group standards. Correspondingly, Muhammad's narrative illustrates the process of seeing the actual veil and connecting it to the idea of the inner religiosity of his female counterparts. Internalizing the meanings of this religious dress code as emphasized by his religious leaders, he uses this cultural marker as a primary lead in detecting a "good Muslim woman." Thus, women are judged based on a semiotic code of veiling as being "humble" and "good" and non-veiling as "crazy," "wild" and "feminist."

Although some men I interviewed did not explicitly connect a woman's appearance to her religiosity, their narratives still expressed this nuance. For instance, Latif, a senior at Metro University, and Nabil, a junior at Eastern State University, define a "good Muslim woman":

Latif: For me, a good Muslim woman is a person who is strong in an Islamic way.... I mean if she definitely includes Islam in her life to become a better Muslim. I know people have different opinions. But yeah, I personally believe in hijab. But if she has something in her as evidence that constitutes to wearing hijab, I am still okay with that. But I personally prefer hijab if I consider the possibility of marriage.

Nabil: A good Muslim woman is one who is in good practice with Islam. I mean, someone who learns from her mistakes. Honestly, if I choose a woman, I would say I would go to one with hijab. But even if she doesn't wear hijab and she has the same characteristics as hijabees, why not? because no one is perfect. Anyone makes a mistake in her life and she can fix herself.

Latif and Nabil's comments indicate that for them veiling is reflects (semiotically) the inner characteristics of women. Latif's comment, "But if she has something in her as evidence that constitutes to wearing hijab, I am still okay with that" and Nabil's comment, "But even if she doesn't wear hijab and she has the same characteristics as hijabees, why not? Because no one is perfect" emphasize how powerful veiling is for these men in their evaluation of potential marriage partners. For them, the hijab signifies that the wearer is a good, religious woman; one that they would consider proposing. Conversely, the absence of a hijab is an indication that the woman is imperfect and undesirable.

As I described in the previous chapter, there was almost no direct physical or verbal interaction between men and women in the groups I studied. Because they find it almost impossible to come to know the members of potential marriage partners through dyadic contact, appearance is an especially important clue for estimating the inner characteristics. As seen also among other religious diaspora groups (see esp. Warner and Witter (1998), Ebaugh (2000) and Min (2000)) and especially in Islamic communities in the United States, these young American-born Islamic men, who come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, collectively reproduce and reinforce what they see as the "theological" meanings of the hijab (as conveyed by religious leaders). Their discourse indicates that they see veiling as a symbol of religious and of appropriate femininity. More, they regard women who do not veil negatively.

Supporting this trend in the male discourse, some respondents interpret women's veiling as a symbol of male authority and masculinity in the domestic as well as social sphere. For instance, Habib at Metro University and Rami at Eastern State University said:

Habib: I think hijab shows how deeply sisters commit to Islam.... Frankly, if I'm looking for a girl, I would look for a good Muslim girl, who has a good character. If she wears hijab or doesn't wear hijab it's not a big problem but definitely a factor... if she doesn't, I would tell her... maybe I would give her some knowledge... like, this is why you should wear hijab.

Rami: Well, if I look for someone I would like to marry, I definitely look for someone who wears hijab. If my future wife doesn't, I will ask her. I'll persuade her to wear hijab. I know hijab is not there just to wear it. Hijab gives you protection. It also gives you respect. Respect is always a "give and take." Women should know that when they wear hijab, it also gives them respect.

For Habib and Rami, then, veiling is not solely a symbol of a woman's (or their future wife's) religiosity. The practice may be even more important because it also confirms their own religiosity and masculinity. Habib's statement, "I would give her some knowledge... like, this is why you should wear hijab," expresses his sympathetic view toward a non-veiled woman but, at the same time, his desire to guide an unveiled Muslim woman to the "right" path and appropriate gender roles. Similarly, Rami feels that the onus is on him to lead his future wife to veil, commenting, "If my future wife doesn't, I will ask her. I'll persuade her to wear hijab." As he explains, with regard to the "give and take" involved in respect, he sees to his female counterparts as vulnerable in comparison to men, unable to get respect from men unless they give up part of their bodily autonomy. Thus, Rami expresses his belief in a religiously based gender hierarchy in which men are privileged over women.

As these interviews demonstrate, the American-born male members collectively understand and embrace hijab as a symbol of gendered power differentials. Internalizing the Quranic views emphasized by their predominantly male religious leaders, they view women's veiling as the external manifestation of inner attitudes and religiosity, and denoting their consent to a particular set of gender roles and norms and a submissive social position. More, veiling imbues men with a sense of religiously sanctioned masculine superiority.

In the following sections, I examine how the female members of each community respond to the men's views about their veiling and how they negotiate the hierarchy of religious patriarchy.

Acceptance of Religious Femininity and Submissiveness

My interviews with MSA women in both settings show that they accept the patriarchal meaning of the hijab, described above but that, at the same time, they develop their own grounds for their decision to veil. Many see the hijab as a useful tool for

governing their behavior in public. My interviews underscore veiling as not only a “reflection” of their pre-existing religiosity but also a “driving force” in their spiritual growth. For instance, Aanisah, a junior at Eastern State University, and Basimah, a senior at Metro University, describe their motives for veiling:

Aanisah: Well, I read the Quran myself and I looked into it... and I thought I should wear hijab. I thought that if I have a hijab on I won't be doing crazy things, just walking around and being like oh you know, whatever.... It gives you a kind of feeling of humility... like you don't feel like you can do whatever you want.

Bashimah: I used to wear hooker boots, short skirts and short sleeves and used to go to comedy clubs and other places. I was a VERY BAD girl. But after starting to wear hijab, not any more....People see me as a Muslim woman now. If I still go to a club or bar with this [hijab], they might think, “Oh, THIS is what a Muslim woman does.”

Aanisah and Bashimah's descriptions show the strategic value and rationality of veiling. They reinvent meanings and make the most of the autonomy that the veil provides as a strategy and response to the dictated confines of patriarchy. Their comments underline the fact that they have adopted the popular patriarchic meanings of veiling, but utilize it to control their own public behavior, (re)molding their self-presentation to fit orthodox images. Internalizing her male counterparts' semiotic coding of veiling and non-veiling, Aanisah sees herself in the hijab as having “humility” and without it as one who does something “crazy.” Similarly, Bashimah perceives her change in her choice of dress as beneficial, functioning as a beacon for avoiding her former behaviors. She says, “People see me as a Muslim woman now. If I still go to a club or bar with this [hijab], they might think, ‘Oh, THIS is what a Muslim woman does.’” Voluntary acceptance of the veil's semiotic coding of inner religiosity linked to its role as a means of controlling their own bodies was vividly highlighted at the sisters' party during a Muslim students' conference in 2004.

At 8:00pm there were over 200 female students in headscarves, waiting for the show to start. The banquet hall was crowd and bustling with their chatter. Soon, two women in long hijabs appeared on the portable stage, smiling and waving to the audience. After introducing themselves, they invited the first performer, a South Asian-looking woman with a light blue hijab, to the stage. As soon as she introduced herself, she took off her jacket and hijab, and started to dance to a fast-tempo pop song. She moved her body using suggestive motions, bending down repeatedly, opening up her legs, swaying her hips, and shaking to the beat of the music. Then, she grabbed a pole in the middle of the stage with both hands and began to crouch and then stand slowly, repeatedly, moving her hips as she stood up. In accordance with her performance, more than the half of the audience started to take off their hijabs one by one, energetically cheering her on.... (New Jersey, April 2004).

The above description suggests that for the women in this sisterhood, sexuality is contained by veiling: they feel that they are able to freely express it in the absence of the hijab. For these practitioners, the headscarf is thus a motivating force for self-discipline. They started to take off their hijabs as they enjoyed a stripper-like dance performance at the party, acknowledging that under ordinary circumstances, they are not allowed to express sexual feelings. For them, individually and collectively wearing the headscarf is a primary instrument for controlling their own sexuality, behavior and emotions.

Along with their conformity to the male-controlled ideology of veiling as a representation of their spiritual faith and femininity, some women also consent to this symbolic constriction of their bodies by emphasizing their strong belief in the difference between men and women, a common feature of the discourse in their religious circle. Nuha at Metro University describes her views:

Nuha: Society is not complete with just women wearing hijab; the men have to do their part too, which is to be modest, and to control the thoughts that come out of their mind regarding women.... basically, you know, that's man's nature. For the women, we have to cover and also lower their gaze and guard their modesty 'cause that is best for us, you know. So, it's cool, because it's like complete like that. You have your women covering and being modest and not like thinking about guys, like this and that, and you have your guys being modest too. That's the only way that the society is going to function properly, you know.

Nuha perceives women exposing their bodies as distracting to men, a barrier to men's religious faith and therefore, dysfunctional to society as a whole. She repeats a discourse emphasizing distinction between men and women, but presents it as a representation of gender egalitarianism. For this reason, she says she willingly gives up her autonomy saying, "You have your women covering and being modest... and you have your guys being modest, too. That's the only way that the society is going to function properly," Nuha suggests that veiling not only allows her to fulfill her religious faith but also to be compatible with (not submissive to) her male counterparts.

Like Nuha, while simultaneously acknowledging the fact that the veil limits their freedom in their everyday social lives, many women nonetheless continue to veil. They verbally rationalize their veiling as a useful driving force for nurturing their spiritual growth as well as a contribution to the stability and functioning both of their own religious community and the society at large on one hand; on the other, these responses underline that the motivation of these practitioners still largely come from strained conformity to the view of veiling as a direct symbol of religiosity or obedient submission to men (as their male counterparts suggest.)

In the next section, I will examine another view expressed by respondents, that suggests that they reject, at least in part, religious justifications of gender inequality.

Empowerment of Veiled Frailty

Nahid and Zareen at Metro University describe their self-understanding as follows:

Nahid: It's funny because when I actually did start wearing it (hijab), it was more like I actually felt liberated... a freedom I didn't have as a woman before. Now, everything is much better. I don't have to think about how guys think of me. It is easy to detect guys, you know, good guys or bad guys who just look at me as a sexual object. I really feel that I am PROTECTING myself.

Zareen: As a woman you don't want to be defined by your appearance by men. You're working on the things that you are in control of, your character, your modesty. You're not about your looks but the person that you are, you know. You've matured, which is the way a lot of women feel when they started to wear hijab.

Nahid and Zareen describe veiling not as a restriction but as a symbol of their liberation from the male-dominated ideology of women. Nahid describes an unexpected transition in her self-identity, saying "It's funny because when I actually did start wearing it (hijab), it was more like I actually felt liberated... a freedom I didn't have as a woman before." Here, she uses the male-dominated discourse of the sacred, veiled woman to prevent the "bad guys" from approaching her. She says, "I am protecting myself," rejecting the stereotype of the veiled woman as passive and obedient to male authority. Instead, she highlights her new found feeling of independence and autonomy. In a similar way, Zareen wears the hijab to avoid placing herself directly in view of the male gaze. She states, "You're working on the things that you are in control of, your character, your modesty. You're not about your looks but the person that you are," observing that she gains more autonomy and freedom by veiling.

In addition to the feelings of liberation and self-confidence that result from veiling, many of the sisters also feel newly empowered in their social lives. For instance, Sara and Habiba at Metro University describe their observation of their male counterparts:

Sara: I definitely see the change in the way brothers look at me after I started to wear hijab. You know, wearing hijab doesn't mean that you are more modest or religious than other women. It's just a personal choice. But I feel that guys look at me as something different from the many other women who don't wear it in our community. They look up to me like, "You represent Muslims. You're not like them. You're not like that." That's totally rewarding.

Habiba: I noticed after wearing hijab guys respect me more. Everybody thinks I'm very religious, serious and mature. So they treat me accordingly, seeing me as a pure, modest woman. Actually, I organized some events as a committee member last semester. Brothers helped me a lot. They were very nice. But honestly, I really believe that if I hadn't worn hijab, they wouldn't have listened to me or treated me as seriously as they did.

Mernissi (1987) and Charrad (1998) in their studies on women in contemporary Middle Eastern societies state that increasing numbers of young women, especially

educated ones, veil voluntarily because they think that veiling provides them with freedom and autonomy. Since the veil is considered a sacred symbol in many Islamic traditions, some women use it to prevent public harassment by men. Some also contend that veiling permits them to take on a leadership role at work with the least possible amount of social discrimination from their male colleagues (El Guindi 1981; Milani 1992).

The sisterhood women make similar use of the traditional representation of the headscarf as an empowering tool to improve their subjective as well as practical social position. Sara and Habiba's observation of a dramatic change in their relations with their male counterparts is a common feature of the interviews with women both at Eastern State University and Metro University. Interestingly, Sara in her narrative strongly denies that the hijab is a sign of a "good" Muslim woman. At the same time, she describes with pleasure the dramatic improvement in the way that men treat her, saying, "I feel that they look at me as something different from many other women who don't wear it (hijab) in our community...." In this way, she strategically internalizes the symbolic value of veiling, utilizing it to obtain respect from her male counterparts, which she believes otherwise would not be possible.

Similarly, Habiba clearly recognizes the practicality of melding the symbolism of veiling with her own image, becoming a "religious, serious and mature.... pure, modest woman" by simply putting on the veil. She describes this understanding, saying "if I hadn't worn hijab, they wouldn't have listened to me or treated me as seriously as they did." Thus, she uses her veiling as a strategy to erase the hierarchical border with her male counterparts. Fahima, a freshman at Eastern State University, describes a like motive for starting to wear the headscarf:

Fahima: I used to be upset at the way guys approached me. I felt like I should have had more respect. Then, I realized when I observed the other sisters, they were being treated with respect, and that was what I wanted. So, I was glad when I actually started to wear hijab and I really felt that I was being treated with more respect.

For Fahima, veiling is a practical solution to improve unsatisfactory treatment by men. As a formerly unveiled woman, she affirms the existence of strong social discrimination against those who do not conform to the male standards. The narratives above signify that these women's motivation to veil is extensively related to their experience of discrimination and harassment based on their gender and their desire to resist a male-dominated ideology of women both inside and outside their youth community.

Veiling in the Arranged Marriage Market

After the midnight prayer, Aisha and I were sitting on a couch in the hotel lobby, waiting for other members in our group. The lobby was full -- more than 100 male and female young Muslim students were hanging around and chatting in same-sex peer groups. I looked at a group of five female students, all of whom wore colorful, short headscarves. One of the women in

the group was looking around and eyeing two male students who were chatting with each other at the reception desk. When one of the male students looked back at her and their eyes met, she abruptly turned her head back to her group. She whispered something in her friends' ears. All of the other women's eyes suddenly turned toward the male student. Soon after, they glanced at one another and giggled. When we next met, just before the 5:30am prayer service, I asked Aisha what these students were doing. She smiled and said, "You know, many sisters come here to meet guys." Aisha signaled with her eyes that I should look at the groups in front of us, and she whispered in my ear, "See, she is checking out the guy over there."

My fieldwork and interviews with the Muslim young women indicate that veiling had practical functions in a variety of such social settings, including the arranged marriage market. In this community, the religious laws of strict gender separation do not allow women and men to approach one another. Yet, women in the movement do not simply wait for men to propose to them. Rather, they enhance the possibility of meeting potential mates by actively participating in such social gatherings as MSA conferences and local students' meetings, where many promising American-born religious men gather. In such places, in addition to the membership to a local MSA sisters' group, veiling is an unspoken requirement (akin to an entrance ticket) for female attendees. In fact, during my fieldwork I met several women who said they wear the hijab only when they attend MSA gatherings. As the above description suggests, by presenting themselves with the veil to their male counterparts, and "checking out," "eyeing" or indirectly flirting with them in restricted, but public, spaces, women can increase the possibility of attracting U.S.-born or reared suitors. In fact, about half of the married women in this study whose husbands are American-born/reared said that their husbands were members of other local MSAs. In some cases, their husbands first saw them at local MSA meetings, collected information about them from often (male) members of their MSA. In others, their husbands were current or former members of the same MSA and knew them through their group activities. Although they never talked to each other for any purpose other than organization of campus activities, using the organization's male network (or the women's brothers if possible), they were able to make their interest clear. In either case, marriage would be proposed in the traditional manner, through their families. Women who regularly participate in the events tend to be more sought after as potential wives. For instance, Aisha, who was the sisters' representative at Eastern State University, received several proposals of marriage at her graduation and chose to marry a former MSA president, a British-born American-raised medical student whose father is the CEO of a large hospital in Connecticut. Both families are also from Pakistan. So, Aisha's parents were very happy about their marriage from the beginning. Indian-origin Nahida, who was also one of the leaders of the sisters' group at Metro University, married an Indian-origin former Eastern region MSA student officer who recently earned a graduate degree in business and runs a retail company with his father on Long Island. Marital offers from promising and co-national origin American Muslim men allow a woman to realize her own dreams in marrying another U.S.-born or reared Muslim and to meet her obligations as the daughter of a South Asian immigrant family. Of course, veiling does not guarantee that a woman will secure a desirable marital partner. But it

definitely accentuates her femininity and signals that she is a “good Muslim woman,” Increasing her autonomy in mate selection. Karima and Asma, who are both Pakistani-origin and newly wedded seniors at Eastern State University, also emphasize the power of veiling in their experience of the selection of a marital partner:

Karima: I started to wear hijab last year, when I was 18, in my first year of college. After that, I got five offers [of marriage] almost all at once. I'd never talked with any of them in person but they said that they saw me at conferences. My parents and I examined their job, income, education, family background, and, most importantly, if they were good Muslims. My parents and I chose the best one among the five and I decided to marry him.

Asama: My husband said that his mother and sister saw me somewhere. At that time, I had already worn a hijab. So, I guess they could tell that I was Muslim. They told him that there was a good Muslim girl and asked him what he thought about proposing to her. I had received other proposals at that time but my parents and I found him the most promising and compatible with me. He is also Pakistani American, so, we chose him.

Muse and Barthel's (1992) study on young women in Egypt shows that the veil offers a small measure of physical autonomy in a society in which personal freedom is gender delimited and patriarchally defined. In some Islamic nations, a college education actually threatens a woman's social standing, which is usually acquired through public acknowledgment of an early marriage. Here, as the above comments underline, veiling plays a significant part in facilitating women's chances to choose marital partners, even within a tradition of rigid patriarchy and arranged marriage. Needless to say, veiling was not the only factor that caused some women to receive multiple proposals; yet, it is clear that their conformity to the male-dominated ideology of veiling was a vital condition for initiating them. Where women are expected to marry at a young age and higher education is not valued, the pool of future marriage candidates for collegiate women is automatically narrowed. For instance, the following interaction between Habiba and Aisha at Eastern State University demonstrates the pressure and anxiety they have in relation to their future:

On the way back from Zada's wedding party, Habiba spoke to Aisha, “You know, we are already 22.... Zada got married at 19. Last year, Waqi got married at 20. I think I really have to find my husband before it's too late.” Aisha quietly nodded and said with a low voice, “I know....” Habiba sighed and murmured faintly, “It is a shame that I am still single.”

While a more maturity and a college education are seen positively for men, they carry negative connotations for women in this religious community. In addition, as the previous chapter illustrated, the gender hierarchy, along with the trend toward transnational arranged marriages, is disadvantageous for American-born women like my respondents. In this social and cultural circumstance, these women see that veiling

increases their chances of receiving proposals from promising American-born religious men and of marrying at a proper age so as to be able to escape pressure from their family and community members although at the same time limiting freedom in other aspects of their social lives.

Thus, on the one hand, the women of the sisterhood are passively displayed in a showcase for the “male gaze,” on the other hand, they enjoy increased chances of having more autonomy in finding a husband. In this process, Karima and Asama understand that donning the hijab served as a significant marker of religious identity while at the same time symbolically highlighting their modesty and femininity, thus attracting more men who meet standards that both they and their parents can agree on. In this way, a religious dress code that is viewed at least by men, as a symbol of gender hierarchy and religious conservatism, is transformed by women into a symbol of liberation and empowerment.

Discussion

This chapter described the ways in which American-born Muslim collegiate women negotiate the male-dominated gender ideology associated with veiling. The comparison between male and female members’ views of veiling indicates that as the theory of discourse suggests, the two groups interpret the same cultural symbol in completely different ways. While both men and women in the MSA minimize the ethnic-specific meanings of veiling, men collectively return to and reinforce the theological representation of it, applying a hierarchical gender ideology that promotes their own (religious) masculinity. On the other hand, the sisters’ response suggests that their veiling does not necessarily imply either modesty or total submission to the ideology that promotes it. For some women, it is a driving force for spiritual growth. For others, it is a symbol of liberation and self-confidence. And on some occasions, it becomes a strategic tool to gain empowerment and to expand their limited autonomy in the male-dominated and parents-led arranged marriage market.

Instead of accepting the male-oriented discourse without question, my respondents transform and challenge it. They actively negotiate the gender hierarchy by using this “most visible symbol of women’s submission” to reframe their interactions with men. Instead, in some instances, veiling allows them to locate themselves just under the direct radar of the “male gaze.” Yet, it is important to note that despite their repeated suggestion of veiling as a resource to empower women, the sizeable inequality of power between men and women in this youth community coupled with ethno-religious traditions still locate the latter in a passive and submissive position in which they are, nevertheless, “chosen” by men.

Class background does not play a major role in this gender negotiation process. Rather, in the complex process of reconciling subjectivity and self-presentation, they also reconcile their conflicted identity and social experience as educated, Islamic young women who have grown up in the United States and whose self-presentation is constantly monitored and judged by three seemingly different gender ideologies in their male-dominated religious community, immigrant family, and in the larger secular society.

Chapter 5

Runway Veiling

The small room in the hotel was crowded with more than 100 young women in various colored headscarves walking around from one vendor to another. After glancing at the entire room from the entrance, Aisha said to Raja and Zayda, "Let's try that one," pointing at one of the vendors in the farthest corner, who had the largest crowd of female customers. Raja and Zayda nodded excitedly and followed Aisha, who already had started to make her way through the crowd.

After flipping through several scarves on the table, Raja picked up a crumpled pink nylon scarf from the bottom of the pile. She spread it out on the table and then held it up high to judge its quality. Then, trying it on over her own headscarf, she asked Aisha, "How is this? What do you think?" Aisha took a short look and said, "Yeah, okay...if you put on pink lipstick, it'll look better.... But you know, Raja, this really isn't your color." After a couple of seconds of silence, Raja sighed, "I know..." as she put the scarf back onto the pile and started to search for another one.

In the meantime, Zayda picked up a beige cotton scarf with a white flowery pattern. Like Raja, she spread it out in front of her. After taking a long look at the scarf, she asked the vendor if she had other colors with the same design. When told that they were sold out, Zayda shoved the scarf back into the pile, talking to herself quietly, "It's okay...I know I can't wear flowers anyway...." (Field notes, April 2004).

The above scene took place at the bazaar at the Muslim Student Association Annual Meeting held in midtown New York City. More than over 600 men and women from more than 20 colleges on the Northeast coast attended. The meeting committee had reserved one room in the hotel for the bazaar and had invited more than five different headscarf vendors from the metropolitan area. Throughout the three-day conference, the bazaar was constantly bustling with women looking for headscarves with their friends.

The above description of headscarf shopping indicates that for my respondents there is both a secular and recreational aspect to the practice of what is assumed to be a traditional religious dress code. Aisha, Raja and Zayda from Eastern State University were active shoppers at this event, carefully examining the colors and designs of the headscarves on the pile, spending much time and energy choosing ones that would make them look the most stylish. Aisha and Raja's interaction show that they choose headscarves based on their aesthetic sense of color coordination in conjunction with their awareness of what made the most of their individual physical characteristics. Zayda's interaction with the vendor as well as her friend, Raja, also shows that patterns and colors are important in headscarf selection. This illustrates her decision-making process in choosing a headscarf. She was thinking of trying a flower-patterned scarf but then after consideration, decided not to because the color was not "right" for her.

The emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of headscarf selection was common among the MSA women of both Metro University and Eastern State University sisters' groups. For instance, when I asked my interviewees who wear the headscarf on a daily basis how many and what kinds of hijabs they had, among the 40 women, 32 said that they owned

at least 10 headscarves in various colors, fabrics, and patterns with the maximum number being 35; only two respondents said that they had only a few scarves. Many of them also identified one or two headscarves that were favorites because they felt that the color or design made them look their best.

The actions of members of both women's groups at the bazaar indicate that these young collegiate women perceive veiling quite differently from most of its religious advocates. While the accepted theological purpose of the practice is concealment in public, the majority of my respondents carry the hijab as if it were a "fashion" item.

By using the term "fashion," I mean that individuals who veil do so in a highly secular and ever recreational manner, using the headscarf, to enhance their physical appearance (through color choices and coordination with their other garments.) At a more general level, participation in what has become since 9/11, a provocative clothing practice has facilitated the construction of a collective social identity, reproducing ideocultural norms and social connections. It is important to note that by identifying veiling as "fashion," I do not mean that the members of the sisterhood are not religious. Rather, the focus of this chapter is to reveal the compound process of identity and boundary formation, which this unique religious dress code has come to represent among the members of this particular social group, as a response to the male-dominated theological meanings of veiling.

Theory of Dress

Herbert Gans (1994) conceptualized the secular and recreational patterns of religious practices that are often observed among many Euro-American groups, as "symbolic religiosity." In a similar way, based on their studies of Judeo-Christian identity among European ethnic groups Bellah (1985) and Wuthnow (1999) also underline the recent trend towards "secularization" of religion by suggesting that in contemporary American society one's religious identity is becoming a more private or domestic rather than communal matter. The women who use the hijab as a fashion item seem to share a similar behavioral pattern with these groups. Yet, considering the significant differences in social experience between the white ethnic groups described by other scholars and the South Asian Muslim diaspora population, in addition to the stigma that Islamic veiling brings to its practitioners, (especially in the post-9/11 era), the character of this religious practice as described below does not seem to fit into existing models.

To examine this unique practice of veiling within the MSA community, I draw on theories of dress advanced by Erving Goffman, Fred Davis and Jonne Entwistle. These scholars all argue that the particular meaning of an item of clothing is constantly challenged and may alter in response to subsequent interactions. Therefore, the perceived purpose or meaning of clothes is always provisional and subject to revision or reinterpretation (Goffman 1959; Davis 1982; Kaiser 1990; Arthur 1999; Crane 2000; Entwistle 2001). My study suggests that this is certainly for the groups of Muslim women included in this study – most notably in their construction of veiling as "fashion."

Kaiser (1990) points out that shared dressing practice has a dynamic function in the formation of collective identity, noting that "members of groups and organizations share a common culture. By being part of the group we learn the meanings of group symbols and can even take part in the development and transformation of these symbols (and their

meanings)” (p.351). Similarly, Garot and Katz (2003) state that, “[t]he wearing of clothes is not like a posting of signs, the content of which can be easily regulated. Wearing clothes is an activity with nuances that are infinite in the hands and eyes of sufficiently motivated performers and audiences” (p. 425). Drawing from these concepts of theory of dress, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the ways in which these women negotiate the male-dominated theology of veiling and their gendered desire for self-presentation influenced by secular youth female culture. It also shows that by collectively diversifying the meaning of the veil as a secular and “symbolic,” these American-born Muslim women from diverse ethnic backgrounds draw social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for local hijab wearers.

In the following sections, I first describe the daily hijab ritual in more detail. After examining their treatment of veiling as “fashion” and their connections to the gender hierarchy in their community, I analyze the functions of this unique dressing practice in collective boundary formation.

Matching Dress, Unmatching Drive

Fahima invited me to her room, a simple space of monochromatic beige, which was filled with Islamic symbols. There was a large poster with the word “Allah” in Arabic covering almost the entire space of one wall. On the other walls, there were several small white notes written in Arabic. “What do they say?” I asked. She answered that they were her favorite quotations from the Quran. She explained that she put them on the walls because they reminded her to conduct herself as a proper Muslim. The wooden bookshelf set in the corner of the room was filled with books on Islam and the Quran. In a black plastic box on the floor, there were two small rolled up Persian prayer rugs.

After chatting with Fahima for a while, I also noticed that there was a fine wooden chest of drawers just next to the entrance of her room. When I mentioned it to her, she said it was for her hijabs. Intrigued, I asked, “Can I see what’s inside?” She said, “Of course,” and opened the top drawer to show me. It was full of scarves in a variety of colors, designs and fabrics – solid pink silk, white cotton, beige with small embroidered flowers and frills, long dark-green nylon, light blue polyester, large-swaths of silk in gray-white gradations, and cream yellow with authentic Middle Eastern designs. When I asked her how many scarves she had, she said that she had never counted but maybe around 30. Surprised, I asked her another question, “You have so many hijabs--how do you decide which one you will wear each morning?” She smiled and said, “Oh, I just wear the one that matches my outfit. I look in the mirror and decide which one is the best so that I can coordinate my look for that day” (Field notes, New York, September 2003).

Fahima, a junior at Eastern State University, and her parents, who migrated from India during the early 1980s, live in a middle-sized, two-story house in a quiet upper-middle class residential area in Huntington, Long Island. She had been veiling for one year at the time of my visit to her.

One of the most intriguing things about this setting is the clear color contrast between her monochromatic colored room and the bright headscarf collection in her drawer. The room's neutral colors such as gray, black and white combined with Islamic posters, quotations from the Quran, and religious books indicate her simple, frugal life style in accordance with the fundamentalist Islamic discipline. In contrast, the brightly colored hijabs in her drawer symbolize the divergence of her manner of veiling from her approach to other religious matters. Saying, "I just wear the one that matches my outfit. I look in the mirror and decide which one is the best so that I can coordinate my look for that day," shows that like most of my respondents, she considers the hijab a "fashion" item. She pays attention to the way she looks in a headscarf, choosing the one that best matches her outfit each morning.

My informal and formal interviews with sisters at both universities made it clear that the majority share this complex attitude toward veiling as both a religious practice and a fashion statement. When I asked them why they started to veil, they often cited their keen interest in and serious devotion to fundamentalist disciplines, typically answering, "The Quran says so," and "It is a symbol of my religious faith." Yet, when questioned further about their daily practice, the majority of women in both groups generally shifted their focus to secularized and recreational explanations. For instance, when I asked my interviewees to describe their morning routine in choosing a hijab, they typically suggest the importance of "matching" outfits, much in the same way as Fahima, indicating a significant consideration of their appearance. Fayal, a junior at Metro University, commented on veiling as an aspect of personal fashion:

Faryal: Um, I'm really big on matching. I have black, brown, green, white, maroon, off white, red...yeah, and you know I have purple... You know, like, every color. .. and so I just, you know, match my scarf with my outfit that day. Like today, I'm wearing this brown thing, so I wear my brown scarf. Even my shoes are brown. I match everything. [chuckles] Yeah, I like to match. It's so silly I shouldn't even tell....

Zareen, a student at Eastern State University, also answered in a similar way:

Zareen: Yeah, it depends on my mood. It depends on what color the rest of my clothes are [giggles] you know. But uh, yeah...sometimes I feel like wearing a particular hijab and I match the rest of my clothes with it. I wish it wasn't like that, it's not the point, but I guess that it's just like fun to match and stuff.

In their responses, both Faryal and Zareen repeatedly suggest that "matching" the hijab with the rest of their clothes is the key. Faryal expresses her desire to match colors, saying, "I'm wearing this brown thing, so I wear my brown scarf. Even my shoes are brown. I match everything." Zareen's comment, "I match the rest of my clothes with it [the hijab]," acknowledges its recreational aspect, saying, "It's just like fun to match and stuff."

These responses indicate a clear awareness of the contradiction in the use of a hijab, a religious symbol, in order to look fashionable. Fayal shyly evaluates her way of

choosing a hijab as frivolous, saying “It’s so silly I shouldn’t even tell.” Zareen also expresses feelings of guilt toward her using the hijab for “fun,” which she perceives as contrary to Islamic discipline, saying, “I wish it wasn’t like that, it’s not the point.” This dilemma indicates that divergence from the meaning of religious dress code into mere “fashion” is an essential part of their everyday lives. The Islamic religious leaders and male counterparts largely suggest the functions of veiling as de-sexualizing women’s bodies and representing their modesty in public space. At the same time these women conform this male-dominated ideology, by utilizing this as a tool to present their gendered desire for dressing-up themselves in a recreational manner. By doing so, these women try to reduce their sense of subjection and take full advantage of the autonomy that is available to them for their self-presentation bound in the confines of a male-dominated religious dress code.

In my interviews it was clear that complex attitudes toward veiling are common. To answer my standard question, “How did you choose to wear that hijab this morning?,” the majority of respondents admitted with embarrassed smiles that the way they practice veiling contradicts its religious meanings, but that, even so, they take a rather long time to match their hijab to the rest of their outfit. In their daily lives, they transform (at least partially) the meanings of this religious dress code from a religious to a secular and recreational observance as a response to the conflicting gender roles as devout Muslim, yet also young American-raised women living in New York, the center of fashion in the United States.

Peers’ Eyes

In their study of provocative clothing practice among high school students in Los Angeles, Garots and Katz (2003) state, “for most students, appearance has meanings in relations with peers” (p.439) emphasizing the significance of reaction among those sharing the same dressing style to their appearance in their identity construction. Fine (1987) also articulates this idea, noting, “Each group has its own beliefs, behaviors, and customs that provide important socializing functions. Group habits involving clothing and appearance can give individuals guidelines or a source of reference of understanding the self.” (p.125) This is also the case with the Islamic young women that I studied. My repeated participant observation of their peer group activities revealed veiling to be a fashion statement, but one specifically directed to a particular group. In addition, peer assessment of a sister’s “hijab look” had considerable impact, providing feedback on the “right” hijab or the “wrong” hijab for an individual.

The earlier description of hijab-shopping among three women at the bazaar clearly indicates this tendency. Raja first picked a pink scarf, but after Aisha’s negative evaluation, (“If you put on pink lipstick, it’ll look better.... But you know, Raja, this really isn’t your color,”) she changed her mind. This conversation indicates the importance of peer’s opinions when choosing the “right” hijab. More, it suggests that the hijab; as fashion, is primarily directed towards other hijab wearers. Similar patterns were often seen during my fieldwork within both sisters’ groups. The following is a description of another shopping scene involving sisters at Metro University.

Friya picked up a plain, pink nylon scarf from the pile. She spread it out on the table and held it up high to see it for a second. "This is beautiful." Friya said. "Yeah, it is," Huma, who was searching for a hijab next to Friya, agreed. "Yeah, but I can't wear pink." Friya reluctantly put the scarf back on the pile and started to search for another one.

"Why don't you try it on? You might like it," Huma asked. Shaking her head, Friya answered, "There's no way that I would wear a pink hijab. You know, I've tried that color before, but Zarima told me that I didn't look good in it," Then Huma said "Zarima said that?... okay. Then, I guess you're right..." Nodding to Huma, Friya quietly continued her search for a suitable scarf. (Field notes, New Jersey, April 2005).

This interaction between Huma and Friya, both juniors at Eastern State University, took place at the bazaar at a Muslim student conference in New Jersey. The description shows that the opinion of peers affects the decision-making process not only in choosing hijab but in evaluating one's own appearance as well. Friya did not purchase the pink scarf because Huma's influential friend, Zarima, told her that she did not look good in that color. Thus, Friya adjusted her own taste to what often headscarf wearers think is "right" for her.

(Figure 5-1 here)

Similar peer evaluations took place not only when the women went shopping for hijabs but almost every time when they got together. The following reports a greeting scene at Metro University when the sisters gathered at their local Mosque to attend Friday prayer.

Sara, Zareen, Huma and I were chatting with each other, in a corner of the sisters' prayer's room waiting for the Friday prayer to start when Rohi came into the room. "Hey! Rohi!" Sara called waving to her. Rohi joined us, kissing cheeks in greeting. Soon Zareen commented on Rohi's hijab saying "Rohi, this hijab looks absolutely great on you." Rohi wore a black hijab with silver sparkles and tassels at the edges, a light gray jacket, and a long black skirt, accessorized with a black leather bag and high-heeled short black leather boots. Sara immediately agreed, "Yeah, it's beautiful and stylish. Rohi, this is new, isn't it? Can I see it?" and started to examine the tassels of the hijab, holding them in her palm. Huma joined, "Yeah, this looks cool." Rohi proudly smiled. "Thanks. I got this at an Egyptian boutique on Atlantic Avenue." Excited, she continued, "You know, that store is the best boutique. You can buy different hijabs at the lowest price. You can get many different colors, too." Zareen asked, "Rohi, can you tell me where it is? Or can we go with you when you go shopping there next time?" Rohi answered, "Sure. I'll map it out for you. But let me pray first." Smiling, Rohi knelt down on the floor and started to pray. (Field notes, October 2005)

Commenting on the appearance of a headscarf as a greeting and an icebreaker is common among women in both communities. As the above description shows, Sara,

Zareen and Huma all agreed that Rohi's look in her new black hijab and its coordination with her gray and black outfit fitted her beautifully. "Beautiful," "cute," "new" and "cool" are typical terms that my respondents use when complimenting each other's hijab. Sara praised Rohi's hijab, saying, "It's beautiful and stylish," and "This is new, isn't it?" In a similar way, Huma expressed her agreement commenting, "Yeah, this looks cool." Receiving a first-rate review from her peers, Rohi – now a fashion leader – spoke knowledgeably about where to shop in return. Goffman (1959) underlines the function of others' reactions toward one's dress in her identity formation noting that "we locate ourselves within our social and cultural environments and we do the same for others, as we recognize symbolic meanings [of particular dress]" (Evenson and Trayte, 1999). In this way, each of my respondents evaluates her appearance through her peers' eyes and locates her social position accordingly in this particular social situation. This kind of interaction, especially including positive reviews of her hijab, increases her self-esteem and gives her increased confidence as a hijab wearer.

"It's Not Just about 'What' You Wear but 'How' You Wear It."

In the previous section, I argued that the young women at both sites interactively evaluate each other's appearance in their hijabs, modifying their dressing style in order to obtain a good review from fellow hijab wearers. Their comments also underline that this form of practice is not simply a recreation for these women but their collective response to the overwhelming male-dominated ideology of veiling. Kaiser (1990) states that "[g]roup members begin to obtain information about one another. Part of this information includes individual appearances. Through processes of visual and verbal negotiation, a 'group look' may emerge along with other forms of shared understandings.... Moreover, collective processes pinpoint the negotiations by which an acceptable group look (as opposed to an acceptable individual look) can emerge." (p.353) That was certainly the case for my respondents. While individual women can draw on a wide variety of hijab styles; yet I found that each local group maintained a certain degree of uniformity in its members' dressing styles. My repeated participation in their group activities revealed collectively shared fashion trends in regard to the hijab – as well as other items of clothing. Zareen, a sophomore at Metro University, describes the current trend among hijab wearers on campus:

Zareen: My favorite [hijab] is a georgette one.... It's dark blue and very easy to wear.... You know, it's funny because there's a trend even within hijabs and styles. Like the kind of thing in the beginning. Everyone I know used to wear the cotton ones...but then cotton was out ...and so then everyone turned to georgette, and so now everyone, like, wears these georgette ones....

Zareen's comment shows that the women at Metro University collectively develop and modify a trend in their dressing style, wearing the headscarf as a fashion item. As Zareen's description noted, "cotton was out ...and so then everyone turned to georgette, and so now everyone, like, wears these georgette ones," thus stressing that each group member pays close attention to her sisters, in order to keep abreast of the local fashion

trends, adjusting the material of her headscarf accordingly. A similar pattern revealing a collective dressing style also appears in my interviews at Eastern State University sisters, Faryal and Sara.

Faryal: Well... like before, I used to wear it in the back...and then I went to just like one pin here and then the two...things hanging. Then, it slowly changed to this whole up thing, like, you know pinning it up. I heard that Aisha first started to wear it like this....You can see in [Eastern State University], like, so many girls pin it up like this. It's not like this is supposed to be like this or anything. This is just the style that, you know, everyone ends up wearing.

Sara: It's funny, 'cause um... yeah, like at first it was called, like, the "Aisha Style"... Everyone would be, like, "Oh, you started wearing it like Aisha does." So, I kind of started to wear it this way...and then other people who wear hijab started asking me, like, "Oh, how do you wear it like that?" and then, I showed them and stuff.... Then, more people started to ask me how'd I do that (laugh). So it's pretty funny.... It became like this trendy thing (laugh)....

Faryal wore a thick black cotton-like hijab, and Sara wore light yellow silk with a pattern of small white flowers at the time of the interview. Despite these differences, however, they both arranged their hijab in what they called the "Aisha Style," named after the group leader who invented it. In the original "Aisha Style," one ties one's hair back, bunching it up at the back of the head, then uses a regular-sized square scarf to bring it up to the top of the head. The scarf is tied loosely under the chin and fastened with a small silver pin. Faryal wears hijab in this style, but since she uses a large-sized elastic textile scarf, it looks completely different from Aisha's. Also, Faryal wraps the chin and forehead tightly and leaves the back hanging to her waist. She said that she did this style because it made her look more mature than her age. Likewise, Sara is an admirer of the "Aisha Style," but since she gathers her long hair up high on her head and uses a small, light-colored silk scarf, the edges do not hang down her back. This style makes her look more feminine, emphasizing her youthfulness.

Entwistle (2000) in *The Fashioned Body* states that in contemporary American society, dress is used to articulate one's sense of "uniqueness" in order to express one's differences from others; yet, as a member of a particular culture, a woman is equally likely to adjust styles of dress in order to connect her to her community culture as well. As this concept suggests, while continuing to choose a particular type of hijab to express their individuality, both Faryal and Sara ensure that they keep intact the general principles of the "Aisha Style" and visually communicate their fidelity to their local peer subculture.

During the first year of my fieldwork at Eastern State University in 2002, this "Aisha Style" was sweeping the campus among hijab wearers. Both Faryal and Sara's account vividly illustrate the process by which they collectively developed this trend and transformed it into a "group look." Faryal describes this dynamic saying, "You can see in [Eastern State University] like so many girls pin it up like this. It's not like this is

supposed to be like this or anything. This is just the style that, you know, everyone ends up wearing.” Sara also illustrates the popularity of the style, commenting “...then other people who wear hijab started asking me like ‘Oh, how do you wear it like that?’ and then, I showed them and stuff... then, more people started to ask me how’d I do that... So, it became like this trendy thing.” As these descriptions show, these women increase their social network and group identity through collective practice, transforming religiously dictated clothing into an item of fashion, and developing a shared local dressing style.

This phenomenon was also apparent in the response of another “Aisha Style” practitioner. Habiba, who was a senior at Eastern State University, described how she started to wear the “Aisha Style” during my interview with her in 2004:

You know, when I was a freshman, nobody wore their hijab like this. Actually, Aisha started this a couple of years ago. I don’t know where she got the idea, but it looked cool. So, I asked her how to do it when I went to the sisters’ party. She took off her hijab and showed me how. Now, we call this the “Aisha Style,” and you can see many hijabees at [Eastern State University] wearing their scarves in this way. I know that the sisters at NYU have different styles. We can tell where you are from just by looking at the way you wear hijab, you know. In that sense, it’s not just about “what” you wear but “how” you wear it. I guess, that kind of thing gets important.

Like Faryal and Sara (described above), Habiba explained that she and many hijab wearers at Eastern State University follow the “Aisha Style” among themselves, as a “cool” fashion trend. In addition, she notes that as many local hijab wearers conform to the “Aisha Style,” it has become a marker of their local group membership. “You can see many hijabees at [Eastern State University] wearing their scarves in this way. I know that the sisters at NYU have different styles. We can tell where you are from just by looking at the way you wear hijab.” Habiba confidently explained that she and her peer hijab wearers could tell which university a particular woman belonged to by using their own style as a visual criterion. This interaction underlines the fact that seemingly insignificant differences in dressing styles are critical boundary markers -- signifying inclusion and exclusion among “hijabees” as indicated by Habiba’s stressing that “it’s not just about ‘what’ you wear but ‘how’ you wear it.”

(Figure 5-2 here)

Expansion and Existence of Boundaries

Boundary making also takes place when a local hijab wearer does not conform to the group style. For instance, the following description of the interaction between Fahima, who is just starting to veil, and the other veteran hijab wearers at Metro University clearly illustrates this trend.

Fahima came late to the sisters’ party. As soon as she walked in, Rohi, Tahira and Zarima showed their confusion by looking at each other with surprise.

Rohi asked, “Fahima, where did you get that hijab?” Today, Fahima wears a plain white cotton, triangular-shaped, cap-like hijab, needing no styling technique. “I never saw that kind of old-fashioned one.” Rohi continued. Fahima explained with embarrassment that it was her mother’s from India and asked them not to laugh at her. Seeing Fahima’s confusion, Tahira responded to her sympathetically, “Okay, I see.... That makes sense. Well, I have some extra hijabs that I can give you. When I see you next time, I will bring them for you.”

The above description shows Rohi, Tahira and Zarima’s uneasiness with Fahima’s “old-fashioned” hijab. Rohi expressed her confusion over Fahima’s choice by asking her where she got her hijab. By offering her extra hijabs, Tahira also tried to help Fahima to acquire a look that would be more readily accepted among her friends.

While “stylish” and “cool” are used to compliment a fellow’s hijab style as I described in the previous section, terms such as “old fashioned” and “kiddy-style” are often used when expressing disapproval of their fellow hijabees’ choices. By collectively using this lingo, they not only maintain their collective look but also make over those local hijab wearers who they think are not “cool” enough and who do not conform to their group’s style. Julie Bettie (2002) in her studies on female high school students reveals that young Latina women draw their ethnic boundary of inclusion among them and exclusion of white women by using specific, shared dressing and make-up styles as the criteria of their ethnicity. In a similar way, the women in this study collectively draw their social boundary of inclusion and exclusion even within their local sisters’ groups by using their particular dressing style as a marker of their group allegiance.

The existence of a “group look” is realized not only through individual interaction but also through an overall organizational structure. For instance, at the sisters’ gatherings the senior female members often taught freshman how to choose the “right” hijab as well as how to wear the headscarf “correctly.” During my fieldwork, some senior members at Eastern State University were even working on a project to create a guidebook to instruct the freshmen and new hijab wearers on how to tie their hijab. Each senior member has a page to illustrate how to style the hijab along with some tips relating to dressing practice so that the beginners can easily learn what the veteran hijab wearers think is the “appropriate” dressing style. In these ways, the group members from different ethnic backgrounds in both local areas use their “trendy” group look not only to maintain but also to expand and enforce their local membership boundaries. By utilizing this supposedly inconspicuous dressing practice as something akin to a secret code for uniformed friendship among the practitioners, these women construct an exclusive sisterhood community where they could flee the opposed gender roles and meanings of veiling directed by their male counterparts and religious leaders.

Discussion

In this chapter, I examined the various implications resulting from the use of a religious garment as a fashion symbol. Contrary to the traditional purpose of this dress code (to conceal women from the public eye), the sisters’ use of veiling not only shows them to be deeply religious, it also represents their personal uniqueness, and their loyalty to the local peer group. The dynamic visual and verbal interaction among these hijab

wearers leads them to develop a unique “group look” and draw a social boundary of inclusion.

These findings highlight two theoretical arguments. First, they underline the ways in which the young ethnic minority women negotiate the conflicting gender roles within and outside their community. The subjective views presented in this chapter signify the young minority women’s resilient and proactive approach toward their cultural consumption and reproduction on one hand; on the other, it implies that it comes from their subjection to confront the male-dominated ideology of women in their ethnic community and their desire for being independent women. As seen in the transformation of the meaning of veiling from a religious to a highly secular one, they themselves are the generators of new norms, values and practice of their own traditions for sure. These women use their bodies with gender-specific activities such as fashion as sites for cultural expression and practices. In doing so, they present their experiences and aspirations to other youth groups as well as society at large. In this sense, they are not just receivers of the presented ethnic customs and commodities. Yet, it is also true that they hold very limited social and economic capital because of their race, gender and age, and the collective practice of their ethnic and religious markers in such recreational ways becomes a shelter from the stoic male-dominated norms within their community and marginalization in a race- and gender-stratified larger society for these minority women.

This chapter also underlines the strategies for increasing group network among young minority women as a response to their vulnerable social position. By situating their unique gender-specific ethnic culture as the central symbol of their sisterhood community, they collectively enjoy, develop and alternate the trends of their internal cultural practice on a regular basis. This keeps their peer group circle active and dynamic by enabling them to maintain, expand and monitor their group boundary of inclusion in an effective manner at the same time blocking outside women. The creation of this exclusive sisterhood could be a useful strategy for these minority women to avoid isolation and discrimination based on their gender, race and religion in the larger youth community as I detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Joining the Hijabees Club

This chapter examines the distinct meanings linked to the veiling of the women within the two local communal groups. It shows the ways in which these women use their veiling practice as a strategy to construct, maintain and strengthen institutionalized forms of friendship, through “hijabee” sisterhood. My respondents collectively view the hijab as the central icon of a conceived Islamic sisterhood. Wearing the hijab as a representation of courage, shared identity and loyalty to their fellow sisters, they strengthen their communal ties while, at the same time, differentiating themselves from secular Muslim women. This transformation of the meaning of veiling and the construction of group boundaries these young women, underlines the strength and flexibility of these young minority women at the same time the tremendous pressure of acculturation, racism, sexism and anti-Islamism. They have managed to create a comfortable social milieu that accommodates their needs as women, college students, young Americans, and daughters.

Theories of Sisterhood

The MSA “Sisterhood,” like the college sorority, is characterized by formalized bonds among young women, institutionalized women’s friendships and legitimized close and caring relationships between women that encourage a certain solidarity among their members (Hedler 1995). Many scholars of gender commonly see this special form of friendships as a response to male-dominant culture. There are, however, three different analytical perspectives that explain how.

Some classical views of sisterhood stress that this organized form of friendship among women, is articulated by their protest against women’s oppression by privileged men (Fass 1977: Horowitz 1987: Lee 1955: Treichler 1985). These scholars suggest that the motive for sisterhood is to increase the members’ access to male-dominated political and social arenas. Other studies point out the rising trend of conservatism among young women as the main reason for the growth of college sororities (Horowitz 1987: Kalof and Cargill 1991: Lord 1987: Risman 1987: Sanday 1990). The growth of feminist ideology and practice in the workplace, home and other social institutions has given women more choices and independence. At the same time, some women feel that they are losing privileges that were routinely provided by men in previous generations, resulting in lowered their social standing. These latter conservative groups of women try to regain their social position through membership in sisterhood communities that collectively promote traditionalism in their gender roles.

While these two explanations predominantly focus on male-female relationships, contemporary studies underline women-women relationship as another driving force for sisterhood. For instance, Machung (1989) and Renzetti (1987) argue that while many sororities at college still demonstrate concern about gender-related issues such as women’s health, date rape, job opportunities, equal pay for women, and abortion rights, a majority of the members do not consider themselves feminists. Thus, the gender inequality is not affected by sisterhood. Holland and Eisenhart (1990), Oliker (1989) and Hedler (1995) suggest that instead, the motive for joining sororities comes from their experience with other women. For instance, Hedler (1995), in her study on sorority

membership emphasizes the members' two conflicting sets of ideas about women particularly in the "male dominated culture of romance." Hedler (1995) states, "Their membership is an extension of a relational view of women: women need each other, particularly for support in dealing with gendered problems and gender relations; but many sorority members harbor stereotyped views of women: women cannot be trusted, particularly in dealing with gendered problems and gender relations" (p.238). Thus, sisterhood may not hail from the members' direct response to privileged men but, more complexly, as a result of the negotiation between conflicting images of women and the corresponding views about the potential for women's relationships within a heterosexual culture.

Largely deriving from this third perspective, this study describes conflicting women-women relations within a racial and gender-stratified youth culture as a driving force in the construction of a sisterhood community, and also as a motivation for veiling. Narratives introduced in this chapter suggest that the building process in this sisterhood is strongly influenced by conflicting images of other women. While minority women need other women to secure their social space and raise their voice against anti-Islamism and sexism, they are skeptical of the value of fidelity to other women. Therefore, the members mainly focus on policing the existing members' loyalty to their community, in this case by using their veiling as a pledge of sisterhood. Thus, their sisterhood does not represent direct rebellion against gender- or racial-based oppression but efforts and strategies for the protection of their social space and a companionship circle (potentially limited in size because of the women's marginalized social position and because of competition with other women within a racial and gender-stratified youth culture).

In the following sections I first describe the various meanings of veiling deployed within the two sisters' groups. After discussing the ways in which this cultural practice is used in the management of the sisterhood circle and the efforts made by members to expand the circle, I discuss the reasons why so many collegiate women are attracted to this closed friendship community despite its disjunction from mainstream youth culture and the fact that veiling increases the display of anti-Islamic hostility. The discussion in this chapter is derived largely from the theories of dress utilized in the previous chapter.

Starting to Veil

Fieldwork and interviews with the members of both of the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) sisters' group indicate that since 9/11 the decision to veil has been a source of great apprehension and anxiety. In fact, most new members do not wear the hijab when they first begin to attend meetings. Although they do express interest in wearing hijab and respect what it represents for their sisters, deciding whether or not to veil is a difficult decision. Veiling means not only that they are separating themselves from secular youth culture but also entering into a new world where they will experience anti-Islamic hostility in everyday social situations. In addition, as the majority of the members of both student communities aspire to professions, discrimination in hiring is of major concern. Thus, while a few passionate individuals do make a clear and firm decision to begin wearing the hijab, many members fail to experience the strong emotions that lead them to make a rapid and irrevocable choice. Rather, according to my interviews, most sisters take a few years to make their decision, and some who veil remain uncertain

that they will continue to do so in the future. Some women even after long consideration, followed by years of veiling, choose to discontinue the practice either because of negative experiences with non-Muslims or, in some cases, opposition from secular Muslim friends. For instance, Kadem at Metro University describes how the process involved in her decision to veil:

Kadem: I had experienced a huge internal struggle for a couple of years before I decided to wear hijab.... I think I was realizing that I'm making a stark change about myself and it's something that now is going to affect the rest of my life. Now, everyone will see where my beliefs and my actions belong when they see me... before it was internal but now it is kind of in a weird way exposed. So, anybody who I meet will know something about me just by looking at me and everyone can judge me.

Kadem's comment expresses the enormous transition involved in a woman's deciding to show their devotion to Islam publicly. She relinquishes much autonomy in her social life when she exposes her Islamic identity fully to the public. The difficulties that a woman anticipates when she veils are articulated by Aisha, a senior at Eastern State University, and Asul, a junior at Metro University:

Aisha: It took more than three years for me to decide. Before, I had all these reservations, thinking like, "Oh what is this person gonna' think? What is that person gonna' think?" and "How is this going to' affect my job search and my school and people around me?" and all the stuff going around me, like people's opinions, things like that.

Asul: It took a couple years for me to decide to put on hijab because the thing is that once I put it on I wanted to keep it on. I didn't want to go back and forth on it. I guess the hesitation was knowing that people were going to treat me differently and I didn't know what would happen from that. I don't want to have that lack of faith where I take it off and then put it back on again. So, I was preparing myself internally for it. That's what I have been trying to instill in myself the whole time Thank god, it has worked so far.

Both Aisha and Asul feared that their religious purpose would be incompatible with their desire social acceptance; public presentation of their Islamic identity would satisfy their religious faith on the one hand, but it would also expose them to public scrutiny, and distance them from mainstream culture. In contrast to members of the other major Western religious groups on campus, devout Muslim women must go through a significant struggle in order to strike a balance between their religious life and social ambitions their iconic dress code marks their minority status in the terms of race, religion and gender. Thus, their religious freedom is constantly filtered through, monitored, and constrained by exposure to the larger society. As a result of this social pressure, many of the sisters express uncertainty about continuing to veil, as reflected in Asul's comment, "Thank god, it has worked so far."

Veiling as a Sign of Courage

Aware of the emotional struggle and personal costs of fulfilling their religious faith, the members of both sisters' groups admire those who have made the decision to veil as the core symbol of their spiritual determination, courage and independence. For instance, Aisha at Eastern State University talked about another member, Zaida, who is currently a medical intern:

Last year Zaida started wearing hijab. There is a lot of discrimination going on within her hospital. So, she already felt that she's discriminated against because she's a woman and she's not white. So, putting on a hijab was made harder for her....She feels that it is totally gonna infringe on her career.... It would be really detrimental.... So, I mean I think it's awesome that she's trying to continue to wear it, and I think she will be rewarded for it in the end.

Aisha holds Zaida in high regard for her strong resolve in the face hardship and discrimination at her workplace. Seeing the negative implications of exhibiting Muslim faith in a racist, sexist and anti-Islamist atmosphere, she views the hijab as a representation of the independence and courage of other Muslim women. Similarly, Lira, a freshman, and Humaira, a junior at Eastern State University, describe the reactions of other members when they started to wear the hijab:

Lira: That whole first week I had all kinds of different reactions. One of my friends who was Muslim came up to me and just started crying hysterically. She was telling me how proud she was of me and how she couldn't believe it when she saw me, and how she wishes that she could be as strong as me to do something like that. She was just so sincere and it made me cry too....

Humaira: The first day that I wore hijab, my friend came up to me and cried. I remember that I was crying, too, because she really understood what it meant and how much of a struggle it was even if I wasn't making it seem like a struggle. She knew it because she also went through the same feeling when she started it.

The above narratives describe the hijab as symbolizing heroism. Lira cites her friend's reactions, saying that "she wishes that she could be as strong as me to do something like that," thus underlining her friend's view of her as akin to a "super heroine," one who has the courage to stand up against adversity and take the lead in her peer group for the sake of their religion. The emotional reactions of Lira and Humaira's friends and Humaira's comment that "... she really understood what it meant and how much of a struggle it was" highlight the perception shared by many young Muslim women in the secular Western college environment – that they encounter the same emotional and social struggles when it comes to a decision to veil. Through this shared

experience they understand veiling as a representation of the wearers' self-determination, strength, integrity and bravery.

“Cool!!”

Kaiser (1996) says that “members of groups and organizations share a common culture. By being part of the group we learn the meanings of group symbols and can even take part in the development and transformation of these symbols (and their meanings)” (p.356). In addition to defining the veil a sign of “heroism,” the following narratives demonstrate how the sisters transform the experience from anxiety to pleasure through positive feedback, for example through the use of slang such as “cool.” For instance, Navah at Eastern State University and Saba at Metro University describe how they changed their views about veiling as a result of interactions with other sisters:

Navah: I still remember my friends' reaction 'cause I thought it was hilarious. I only told a couple of people that I was even thinking about it... The first day that I wore hijab, three of my friends were walking towards me in the hallway and they came right up to me... I guess they didn't know that I had been thinking about it seriously. So, they were screaming like, “Wow! Navah we didn't know you were thinking about wearing hijab. Oh, you're gonna do that? That's so cool!!” I felt really good.

Saba: I never thought about wearing hijab as, “Oh, I want to wear hijab!” When I first saw people doing it at [Metro University], I thought it was nice that people did it, but I didn't see myself doing it. And then, as I began to see more sisters doing it and began to talk with them, eventually, later on I started thinking, “It would be cool if I did that.”

“Cool” was a common term used by members of both sisterhood to describe women who wear the hijab. It expressed warm acceptance, approval and support, and redefined veiling as voguish, influential and appealing. The reaction of Navah's friends, “Oh, you're gonna do that? That's so cool!!” was such a positive response that it reduced her anxiety and helped her to continue the practice with more confidence. As a result, she said, “I felt really good.” Saba's narrative vividly portrays the process by which she changed her view about this religious dress code through the association with peers who wore the hijab. Initially, she had felt that veiling was something very alien to her and had not thought of it as an option, but gradually she started to see veiling in a more positive, “cool” light as she spent time with other sisters, who facilitated the transformation of her original views. Both narratives illustrate a transition of views, principally influenced by relationships with other sisters on campus through the process of internalizing group culture.

For these young women, the anxieties associated with starting to veil include not only the fear of facing social injustice but also uncertainty about the reaction of their peers. Layra, a sophomore at Metro University, and Sara, a senior at Eastern State University, describe what happened when they started to veil:

Layra: It's like an experiment. When you first start wearing hijab you just kinda' wear it to pray, and then you kinda' leave it on and... you're like, "Oh, this is what I look like when I wear it." You know? [chuckles] Then you take it off and you're like, "Oh..." and people start telling you, "Yeah, it looks really good. You should leave it on." That's funny 'cause they kinda' let it grow on them sometimes.... They hear what other sisters say about their look [chuckles] and they're like, "Okay...I don't look that bad.... maybe, I should start to wear it... Why not?! Just do it," you know?

Sara: I didn't tell anyone that I would start wearing hijab that weekend because I didn't want to influence anyone. On the following Monday, my friends found me in hijab in the hallway of the library. Instantly, they yelled so loudly, "You did it!" and "Oh, you look great and beautiful!!" I was a little embarrassed but also couldn't help smirking. Then, I replied to her, "Yeah, I did it!" I was so excited and extremely happy at that time. So, I just went out and walked around outside for no reason.

Layra's narrative stresses the impact of a peer circle on the hijab wearer. Because she valued the reactions of other members of the sisterhood above those of other peers, she experienced reduced anxiety and embarked on veiling with positive feelings as they adjusted to her new look. Similarly, in Sara's case, the enthusiastic responses of other sisters instantly erased her concerns, aiding in the creation of a positive self-evaluation.

Cartwright and Zander's (1968) and Kaiser's (1996) study of dress suggest that rewards from group members promote a sense of cohesiveness and solidarity among them. Thus, encouragement of their veiling from peers considerably increases intra group ties, especially in the face of widespread and negative reactions from others. Collectively transforming the meaning of veiling from negative to positive, these women reinforce the sisterhood circle and, accordingly, draw a distinct boundary between them and "others" as the following sections describe.

A Symbol of Sisterhood

The banquet hall was filled with female students in headscarves. They were sitting on chairs or tables and chatting with each other. The two toastmasters in long colorful hijabs stood on the portable stage and yelled over the microphone to the audience, "Hey, everyone! Are you ready to party?" All the female students excitedly yelled back to them, "Yeah!!" After they repeated this interaction a couple of times, one of the toastmasters invited the first performer, a young woman with a light blue hijab, onto the stage. As soon as she introduced herself and got the microphone, she jumped down to the floor and, placing her mouth very close to the microphone, started to imitate the sound of electronic music. She started to rap to heavy rhythm: "Yo, yo, yo, yo. Look out! Look out!.... We are Muslim, mighty Muslim...." She put the microphone on the table and started to dance. She stomped her feet on

the floor and swayed her body rhythmically. The audience clapped along with the beat. Some of them stood up and started dancing along with her.... After her performance, the hall was filled with feverish excitement. She stood on the stage and shouted out over the microphone to the audience, "Hey, now I see hijabees everywhere!!" The audience responded to her with a storm of cheers.

More than 300 female college students from various colleges and universities on the East Coast participated in this sisters' nighttime party during the Annual Muslim Student Association Meeting in April 2003. The incident described above testifies to the existence of a dynamic pop youth culture and an electric unity among participants that is not normally seen by outsiders. In addition to the fact that these young women's self-expression and public behavior is strictly monitored and enforced by their parents, male counterparts, and own religious community, they feel that their behavior is constantly scrutinized in public even by non-Muslims. For this reason, some of my interviewees said that they frequented comedy clubs and bars when they were not veiling but have stopped for fear it would lead others to negatively stereotype the entire Muslim female population based solely on their own individual social behavior. Others stop wearing their old clothes, such as short skirts and sleeveless shirts, which are not compatible with the religious requirements for Muslim women in public, but occasionally enjoy wearing them in the privacy of their own rooms or with other Muslim sisters. My fieldwork shows that for these reasons, the women of the sisterhood feel liberated and act in a much more relaxed and casual manner when they are together. At the MSA women's party, that was most noticeably indicated by the dancer's exclamation, "Now, I see hijabees everywhere!" and the audience's enthusiastic response to her statement.

This humorous self naming, "hijabees" clearly represents not only the idea that these women see themselves and their veiling in a much more positive and recreational way than outsiders might think but also that veiling is a core symbol of their shared Islamic identity and exclusive sisterhood, and differentiates them from other secular Muslim women.

While the word "sisters" is generally used to call all Muslim women by a term of mutual respect, "hijabee" is a particular identification reserved for those American-born or raised young Muslim women who wear the headscarf. While women who veil would likely exhibit discomfort, or take offense when non-practitioners use the word "hijabee" to describe them, they do use it themselves – usually as a humorous expression of self identification. For instance, at a farewell party for graduating members, the sisters at Metro University drew a small illustration on message cards of two women in hijabs holding hands and wrote, "You are a hijabee, and now I'm a hijabee, too," next to the drawing. In creating the new word, "hijabee," and regularly using this term to identify each other, these women authenticate and enhance their sense of companionship.

Joanne B. Eicher (1995) in *Dress and Ethnicity* argues the concept that fashion and clothing symbolically tie a community together: the unifying function of fashion and clothing is to communicate membership in a cultural group both to those who are members of it and to those who are not. (It also differentiates within the group through "fashionable" clothing styles as I described in the previous chapter.) And indeed, the women in this study treat the veil as something akin to club T-shirts or sports uniforms.

As practitioners of a highly visible form of dress, the hijabees confirm and demonstrate their strong sisterhood both to members and non-members. Sports teams often use their uniforms to boost internal solidarity and fighting spirit, while at the same time symbolically demonstrating their spirit to opponents on the field. In a similar way, the sisters' headscarves function as a sign of their deep commitment to Islam. That message, delivered by each individual wearer, becomes source of connection and creates a sense of community among them. A hijabee community could possibly be created without actual communication among these practitioners. Yet, the name, "hijabee" reinforces their strong sense of shared identity, drawing unequivocal boundary lines between those that veil and those that do not.

Furthermore, the term "hijabee," like a club name, reinforces the unifying significance of the veil, and demonstrates the American style of the process of boundary formation among this new generation of Muslim women. Joseph (1986) points out that a uniform conceals all identities an individual may have except one: membership in an organization. Thus organizational membership is the single status that is revealed by a uniform; all other statuses become irrelevant in that context. Consequently, while in uniform, organization membership assumes a kind of master status. Similarly, viewing the hijab as central to their identity allows the sisters to ignore their racial, ethnic and national-origin differences within the group, highlighting a common religious identity separating those who choose to wear hijab from those who do not. That is, the Islamic headscarf is not merely a representation of individual religious faith for these collegiate women, nor is the term "hijabee" simply a comical mode of self-identification. Rather, veiling in this context has profound implications as a strategy to create, mobilize and enforce an exclusive sisterhood community. This redrawing of boundaries is clearly expressed in the following narrative. Zaida is a long-term member of the sisters' group at Eastern State University.

Zaida: Yeah. We are from different places all over the world. Some are from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and others are from Egypt and Jordan.... And others are converts.... But we all share the same look and ideas, and are close to each other.... I don't have any siblings, but these are my sisters.... They are my extended family.... Those sisters are a part of my family.

Zaida's statement underlines the fact that shared veiling practice diminishes racial, ethnic and national-origin disparity and reinforces a unity based on religious identity. In this way, the sisters erase the old boundaries of previous generations and redraw identities in a friendship circle.

(Figure 6-1 here)

Veiling as a Pledge

Brass (1991) states, "An ethnic group that uses cultural symbols in this [emblematic] way is a subjectively self-conscious community that establishes criteria for

inclusion into and exclusive for the group” (p.19). Wilson (1985) also suggests that style is the “connective tissue”: it heightens our sense of connectedness to particular groups, making visible our commitment to a particular community. As hijabees see veiling as the core symbol of their sisterhood and distinctiveness from other women, their visible practice becomes a way of demonstrating commitment to the sisterhood circle, and, on some occasions, even functions as a pledge. The senior members of the group communicate this idea to new recruits in implicit yet very bold ways. The following two narratives by new members indicate the existence of this unspoken ritual.

Sable: A lot of the sisters were happy. They were like, “Wow you started wearing it,” and some of them were surprised, but a lot of them were happy for me, you know? I was happy and I felt more a part of this association. This is where I belong, ya know?

Tahira: When I first started to wear hijab, it was a kind of “try-out” in my perception. On one Friday, I wore hijab for the regular prayer on campus as usual. Then, I just didn’t take it off after the prayer. I don’t know why, but I just didn’t feel like it. When I left the room, one sister asked me, “Are you starting to wear it?” I kind of hesitated at that moment and answered, “Yeah... I think so...” The other sisters immediately asked me, “What do you mean? You *think* so?” So, I instantly answered them, “No!” Then, I said, “I mean I *will* wear hijab!” Since then, I have worn hijab.

As the above narratives indicate, there is a fair amount of peer pressure on these new members, and many start to wear hijab out of a desire for acceptance. Seventeen of my respondents expressed uncertainty, feeling that they may have embarked on a serious religious practice for the wrong reasons – namely, for fear of rejection by their sisters, rather than as an expression of their individual religious faith. Sable’s comment, “I felt more a part of this association. This is where I belong,” demonstrates the mutual understanding that veiling is an unspoken, yet crucial condition in order for full acceptance as a member of the sisterhood. On the other hand, Tahira’s description of her experience illustrates one way that a new wearer learns. Originally, she saw the decision as an individual matter and was not sure about continuing to veil. Yet, as she confesses, “The other sisters immediately asked me, ‘What do you mean? You *think* so?’” So, I instantly answered them, ‘No!’ Then, I said, ‘I mean I *will* wear hijab!’, she made an instant and transformative decision as a result of peer pressure and what she might lose otherwise. In the case of Humaira, a student at Eastern State University, this peer pressure was very powerful.

Humaira: I’d actually been thinking about it a long time. I know one of my friends started off probably a month before I did. So, it was really motivational.... Seeing her and, besides, the shame that comes to yourself.... You see your friend doing it, and you know it is the right thing to do, and yet you’re not doing it.... And then I guess Zaida at the

same time started and a whole bunch of sisters all actually started together around that same time.

Humaira's remarks reflect both the pressure on the newcomers to begin veiling and its psychological consequences. Her comment, "Seeing her and besides the shame that comes to yourself.... You see your friend doing it and you know it is the right thing to do, and yet you're not doing it" shows that seeing a friend start to veil leaves one with both feelings of guilt and isolation from a group in which she has little status as a recent member. Although the sisters say that veiling should stem naturally from an individual's desire to make one's religious faith public, it is apparent that the opinions of peers are also very influential, both as positive and negative reinforces in the decision making process.

At the same time as they communicate this implicit message to their new members, senior members carefully monitor new members to see if they are deserving of membership in the sisterhood circle, as comments from Raja and Habiba suggest:

Raja: ... so now she is a full time, before, she was a part time hijabee.... I don't know if you ever heard of a "part time hijabee"?.... They would wear hijab at school and stuff, but like when they go to work or have parties with other friends, they go without it.... They do that because, you know, when they are hanging out with all hijabees they feel awkward that they are the only one who's not wearing it.

Habiba: This other friend I knew, she was doing it because she used to hang around all hijabees. But then she stopped and I hadn't seen her for a while. I don't know why but I guess she was going out with other friends. But then she didn't like them. So, recently she came back to MSA and just started wearing hijab again. So, I guess she's actually a "full time" now, like she started it permanently.

These descriptions of "part-time hijabees" and "full-time hijabees" show that both old and new members see veiling as a requirement for participating in a sisters' social gathering. As Raja's comment, "They do that because, you know, when they are hanging out with all hijabees they feel awkward that they are the only one who's not wearing it," indicates, veiling is similar to the membership card of an exclusive social club. By veiling, new members discover they gain entry into a sisterhood community. As Habiba's narrative demonstrates, because of the general perception of veiling some new members initially choose to be only "part-time" hijabees. They alter their practice, depending on the social situation in order to maintain good relations with both their religious and secular friends.

These narratives show, however, that the senior members clearly distinguish the part-time hijabees from permanent wearers. The classification implies that senior members not only view veiling as a symbol and pledge required for full membership but also use it as a yardstick by which to measure members' loyalty to the community. As the

word “part-time” generally connotes amateur, recreational, less committed, or in this instance, one with lower status members are (unofficially) ranked based on the amount of the time that each member commits to wearing hijab and the frequency of participation in their events.

Hedler (1995) states that “the friendships sisters form within the sorority carry great emotional weight. The idea that sisters ‘are always there for you’ is important. According to seniority members, the bonds of sisterhood are deeper than the bonds of other friendships, and the expectations of sisters exceed expectations of mere friends” (p.240-1). For this reason, while the sisterhood leaders in both settings welcome “part-timers” and see them as potential full-time members, they generally are not recognized as full-fledged members or “one of them” until they completely submit themselves to the veil. Tahira and Zaida, who are both senior members of their local sisters’ group, explain:

Tahira: When people stop you can’t really say anything. You know, you can’t force it on them. You have to understand that they’re not ready to do it, and just hope that one day they will and come back to us.

Zaida: She can’t appreciate what wearing hijab offers her. So, she just stopped. She used to always hang out with us and then she started wearing hijab at school. But then she just stopped because, you know, she was just doing it because everybody around her was doing it, not because she wanted to do it. When people don’t do it like they’re doing it with all their heart, they don’t feel right about it, and so she stopped hanging out with us.

For Tahira and Zaida only women who always wear the veil are worthy of admission into the sisters’ inner circle. They view women who stop veiling as individuals who are not determined, as Tahira’s comment, “they’re not ready to do it,” indicates. Also, as Zaida’s comment, “they’re [not] doing it with all their heart, they don’t feel right about it, and so she stopped hanging out with us,” highlights, the fact that senior members criticize “quitters,” seeing them as adulterating the spirit of sisterhood. And some women see the members who abandon the veil as betraying their friendship. Thus, using veiling as a measure of a potential members’ loyalty to the group, senior members constantly monitor and police newcomers who wish to join the friendship circle.

(Figure6-2 here)

Motivation for Sisterhood

Given the demanding conditions for acceptance in these sisterhood groups, why do women still choose to conform? My interviews with both new and senior members suggest that they do so primarily because it provides them with significant social benefits. Principally, the majority of the members of both communities say that engagement in the sisterhood has helped them to develop spiritually to define their religious goals more clearly, and to live and strengthen their individual religious goals, an Islamic way of life.

For instance, Dayra at Metro University and Saba at Eastern State University describe the effects of involvement in the hijabee community:

Dayra: In my freshman year I was not into that [sisters' group] at all, just going into the prayer room to pray and spend ten minutes in there. I was more into myself in the beginning, not making too many friends at all. But then I got involved, getting to know people, getting to know more Muslim sisters. We organize events and study Islam together. So that was a good experience for me, it helped me a lot and helped me to be a good Muslim.

Saba: You see Muslims who are really really good Muslims. And you learn from them, and you're like, "Wow that's how I should be," you know? And we teach each other, and I feel I'm learning things and you don't even realize it!... By being with them, I gained much more motivation for studying Islam and to read books.

Like Saba and Dayra, all my interviewees said that joining the sisterhood has had a positive impact on their lives. By studying Islam and organizing and participating in Islamic events together, they say that they have gained access to resources that add to their knowledge of Islam encouraging them to follow a religious way of life.. Many also emphasize that exchanging interpretations of Islamic books in a regular study group is a much more effective way to internalize what is in these readings rather than by studying them on their own.

Moreover, many narratives confirm the fact that these women see the sisterhood circle as "a comfort zone" where they feel secure and confident about themselves as Muslim women. For instance, Humaira, a senior at Eastern State University describes her experience in her group:

I wanted to be one of those women and that's, you know, basically what I wanted. So, I thought it would be amazing to be in a community where everybody else has the same outlook as me and the same level of motivation. So, I went there and I saw all these amazing women. We were constantly bouncing ideas off of each other and strengthening ourselves and building our identities even further. It was just a great experience, and I think that's where I strengthened my identity as Muslim the most. You know, in my life it really empowered me to become who I am today and how comfortable I am with myself.

Entering college gave Humaira a prized opportunity to meet other women, who had "the same outlook as [she did] and the same level of motivation." As her comment, "in my life it really empowered me to become who I am today and how comfortable I am with myself," indicates, she believes that her membership in this sisters' group helped her to develop the confidence to try to become the Muslim woman that she aspires to be.

The social benefits of sisterhood were most often referred to by the members at Eastern State University (almost all of whom grew up in predominantly white Christian neighborhoods) as in the following three narratives from members of that group.

Layra: Before college, I'd always been the only Muslim in school. So, whenever they had a cultural event or other stuff, teachers asked me to come to their class and to talk about Islam and Muslims. I didn't mind doing that... but when I came to [Eastern State University] and started to hang out with these sisters, I felt more comfortable 'cause I didn't have to explain why I pray or cannot eat certain stuff any more. It's easy, you know?... I felt I'm not really different from my friends, and that was good.

Habiba: I went to a Sunday school that my parents took me to when I was a kid... But when I came to [Eastern State University], I really developed as a Muslim, I think... You know, just being around Muslims all the time. Because Sunday school was once a week, and at my regular public school there weren't any Muslims. But here I can always be around Muslims, you know? It made me feel at peace, happy, and pleased.

Saba: ... so it's always so nice being around Muslims and, like, I've learned a lot about Islam. Since I've been here, Long Island, even doing little things really makes you more Islamic. Like, you don't realize it, but I definitely don't regret that I joined MSA. I'm so glad I came to a school that had a lot of Muslims. I like that all of these options are open for me and I can just be like, "Okay, let me just walk into this building and there's, like, an Islamic event." That's cool.

Although Layra does not openly complain about a marginalized position in high school, she does note that she felt much more confident and relaxed about her cultural heritage when she started to socialize with other Muslim women in college, where she was "not really different from [her] friends." Similarly, Habiba, who had only limited contact with other Muslims before college, thinks that joining the sisters' association has provided her with a social space where she can simply feel "at peace, happy, and pleased" for what she is. Saba says that she felt that she had had very little autonomy and privacy because "even doing the little things really makes [her] more Islamic" in her neighborhood. In contrast, she sees joining the sisters' group as allowing her to feel socially liberated, a feeling she expresses when she says "all of these options are open for me."

College life in general allows adolescents to explore their identity by meeting and being exposed to a variety of people from diverse backgrounds. While it is true that female students join organizations and sororities for a variety of reasons, the narratives introduced above emphasize that motivation of these minority women, especially at Eastern State University, is strongly related to their marginalized social position. Veiling distances them from the mainstream youth culture and often results in the experience of social marginalization. Yet, those who choose to veil do so because they learn that the

emotional and behavioral investment will pay off as they gain in social protection, a feeling of belonging, and self-confidence from their membership in the hijabee sisterhood circle.

Discussion

This chapter examined the meaning of veiling within the two sisterhoods. The narratives of respondents show that veiling plays a central role in recreating and enhancing boundaries. They see veiling as a sign of: 1) the courage of the wearers in facing anti-Islamic racism and sexism in the society at large and 2) a symbol of their sisterhood. Thus, although veiling increases the likelihood that they will be targets of anti-Islamic hostility, they choose to veil as an advantageous strategy for improving their social positions in a racial, ethnic and gender-stratified society.

These findings support two theoretical understandings of friendship and culture among minority women. First, they underscore the importance of focusing on women-women relations in the analysis of minority women's sisterhood and sororities. The motivation for the membership in these associations could be the result of young women's conflicts with other women in relation to their resistance to their social position based on their gender, race and ethnicity. By collectively transforming the negative meaning of veiling to a positive one, my respondents see themselves as displaying integrity, strength and independence especially to co-racial and ethnic women who are reluctant to publicize their religious and ethnic origins and who try instead, to conform to the dominant "American" and male-favored clothing styles and friendship circle. This chapter shows that this sisterhood circle may largely come from these young educated women's pseudo-feminist response to overwhelming hegemonic masculinity. Judith Stacey (1990) describes that a postmodern feminist woman still joins Evangelical Christianity because she believes that her membership to the fundamentalist religious group will make her second-marriage work better. Similarly, my respondents enthusiastically pursue membership in this sisterhood community in exchange of the pledge of veiling and present themselves in the male-gaze partially because it increases their chance for upward mobility in their future marital lives. This chapter underlines that the sisterhood also becomes a "shelter" for these minority women where they can feel safe and confident about their ethnic and religious heritages as well as avoid isolation. This way, these women rationalize their veiling as a symbol of courage, independence and unity of Muslim women on one hand; on the other, their motivation for veiling and sisterhood deeply emanates from their subordinated position in this racial and gender based stratified society.

Second, the findings confirm that minority women's sisterhood cannot be dissociated from the multiple social disadvantages stemming from their race, ethnicity and gender. Based on studies of black sisterhood, Giddings (1995), Collins (2000), and Collier-Thomas and Franklin (2001) point out that unlike their white counterparts, the sisterhood of minority women is rooted in "a sense of racial obligation" (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001: 125). It is driven by resistance to hegemonic culture and its racism rather than just by sexism since like their male counterparts, Black women face many social obstacles. At the same time, however, my interviewees, unlike Black sorority women, do not necessarily aim at engaging in direct opposition to racial oppression.

Moreover, the sisterhood of these women is based less on race than on religion and ethnicity. Therefore, my findings indicate that especially in the case of heavily marginalized women, friendship and sisterhood are used as strategies to maximize the social resources available to them. Instead of rebellion against the dominant groups as their primary goal, friendship in the sisterhood aims at constructing narrow yet dense and exclusive companionship among those whom (as they perceive it) have had same social experience and, thus, can enjoy a shared identity as a strategy to confront existing racism, sexism and ethnocentrism.

Chapter 7

Wearing “Our Sword”: Political Resistance in a post- 9/11 Society

At the time after 9/11 happened, the campus was dominated by joking and all that stuff like, “Oh, you look like a terrorist, you dyke.” It was like blaming us. So, it was very sad.... But for me, I think that the experience made me feel even stronger about our decision to wear the hijab outside... if I had to take my hijab off at that time, I would have become extremely weak and broken downYou know, taking off a hijab was like giving up our sword (Aisha, Eastern State University).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and their consequent political tensions profoundly affected the lives of many Muslim women residing in the United States. Among them, those who wore the hijab became an easy target for scapegoating as the veil was seen as a visible marker of Islamic faith. Along with the dramatic increase in hate crimes targeting Muslim individuals and institutions, the media reported a dramatic increase in attacks specifically targeting women, including attempts to tear off hijabs as well as public taunting and the use of ethnic slurs.⁸ This swift rise in violence centering on a cultural practice represented a continuing racism, sexism and ethnocentrism against ethnic minority women. Yet despite the threats to their safety and dignity, many Muslim women continue to wear the veil and deliberately enter public places so as to display it. Why would they put themselves at such great risk? What does parading their Muslim identity under hostile circumstances mean for these women?

Focusing on this striking challenge in the lives of Muslim women, this chapter explores the forms of collective activism that some veiled women engage in. By describing the process through which sisterhood members expand the meaning of veiling to include a political dimension, using it as the major tool of collective resistance, this chapter reviews “being different” and “marginalized” as a driving force for group mobility, solidarity and strength in what have been called “identity movements” (Melucci 1995 and 1996; Alcoff 2000 and 2005). Melucci (1996) describes the women’s movement as based on “the themes of identity and difference as an assertion of the priority of the right to *be* before the right to *do* and as a claim for a life-space in which to withdraw from the structures of social control” (emphasis added; p.136).

Following the mode of Goffman’s study on stigma (1964) and the work of assimilation theorists such as Milton Gordon (1964) and Robert E. Park (1923), difference has typically been conceptualized as a point of weakness and frailty for ethnic

⁸ For examples, see U.S. Department of Justice. (2002). *Annual Hate Crime Report 2001*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice. For a list of hate crimes by state, see Tolerance. Org (2002) “Violence against Arab and Muslim Americans.” http://www.tolerance.org/news/article_hate.jsp?id=412. Also, see Pat Burson (Sep 23, 2001) “America’s Ordeal / Fear Grips Muslim Community” in *Newsday*: Laila Saada (Nov 30, 2003) “Piece of Cloth” in *Newsday*: Shomial Ahmad (Aug 12, 2006) “Seeking Peace, Fair Portrayals” in *Newsday*. Lavina Melwani (Aug 17, 2005) “The New Yorkers” in *Newsday*.

minority groups (Alba and Nee 2005). Thus, Goffman (1964) defines “stigma” as “an illuminating excursion into the situation of persons who are unable to conform to standards that society calls normal” (p.12). Disqualified from full social acceptance, stigmatized individuals constantly strive to adjust to precarious social identities. Their image of themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others reflect back to them.

In their historical studies of Asian American women, however, Lau Chin (2000) and Nagata (2000) suggest that “difference” should be considered from the perspective of resiliency. The findings of their study agree with those of other scholars of Asian American feminism and “identity movements.” As the above statement by Aisha, “taking off a hijab was like giving up our sword,” metaphorically underlines, my respondents are not at all resigned to stigmatization. Instead, they accept their pride in being Muslim, transforming the veiling into a symbol of might and dignity as well as of loyalty to other Muslim “sisters.” Describing their perspectives on political action is therefore especially important. It provides a means for predicting forthcoming issues, coping strategies, and boundary formation among future generations of South Asians.

(South) Asian American Women’s Activism

Many scholars of women’s movements have suggested that Asian women have chosen different strategies and take different views from both white and black women’s groups. Going against mainstream white women’s leaders, who typically situate gender as the central agenda, many Asian women activists view gender as issues as constituting only one part of social relations (Shah 1994: Purkayastha, Raman and Bhide 1997: Espiritu 1997: Khandelwal 2003). They are deeply committed to women’s struggles for empowerment as are other white feminist groups. Yet, they perceive women’s issues as inextricably linked to their community as a whole, and to other forms of social discrimination connected to their racial status, suggesting that in their experience sexism and racism are not parallel but intersect and interact with each other.

Although Asian women’s activism shares some points of coincidence with that of black women, they diverge in approach. In contrast to black feminists, who focus primarily on racial oppression and associated economic exploitation, present-day Asian leaders stress women’s issues in terms of cultural imperialism and discrimination resulting in what they call “bicultural feminism” (Shah 1994). Shah advocates the importance of “bicultural feminism” in Asian American activism noting that “the plea for bicultural feminism is... a call for an agenda that subverts the black/white paradigms, articulates cultural discrimination and how it illuminates and connects to other processes of oppression, and politicizes the process of cultural reconciliation for feminism and liberation” (p.155). Bicultural feminism argues for the importance of understanding the struggles of women who live both physically and psychologically in two (or sometimes more) different cultural worlds – one based on their ethnic traditions and the other on the mainstream American system – because of their immigrant history and racial and socioeconomic status (Tan 1997). For instance, Sheba George (2005) shows that female nurses from Kerala, India, who immigrate before their husbands grapple with the reconstruction of gender and class relations in their married as well as their professional lives in the United States. Also, Abraham’s study (1995) and Chiang, Cho, Kim, Lui and

Zia's comments (1997) on the social struggles of South Asian women against marital violence describe women's angst and trepidation at taking a "private problem" outside their own community because by doing so they feel they are betraying or opposing the members of their own ethnic group.

Stressing the unique characteristics of the struggle that South Asian women face, Shah (1997) underlines the following three agendas for Asian, especially South Asian women's activism: 1) the connection of gender issues to immigration matters, cultural practice and community representation; 2) the challenge to transcend the boundaries of more distinct identities such as national origin and religion within the Asian community; and 3) the linkages between local and global feminism. The narratives presented in this study reveal some of the ways in which an identity movement spearheaded by a young generation of South Asian Muslim women have interpreted, internalized and embodied an ideology of "bicultural feminism" during the post-9/11 era.

In this chapter, I first discuss what my respondents say about their experiences in the aftermath of 9/11. Then, I examine the coping strategies that the two sisterhood groups developed as a means of political and cultural resistance. Along with a discussion of identity reconstruction, the last part of this chapter will focus on the ways in which a sense of "difference" and "marginalization" as "American Muslims" promoted particular forms of political strategies, goals and group boundary formation.

Views From Under The Veil

Three narratives describe the kinds of threats that many young Muslim women experienced after the destruction of the World Trade Center:

After 9/11, there were a lot of things that happened around us. The news said that some people tried to take off Muslim women's scarves and run them over with their cars. On campus, some guys tried to threaten us in the same way. They chased after my friend and me, and tried to take off our scarves from their car. It happened more than once. (Habiba, Eastern State University)

When my friend and I were walking on campus after 9/11, some guys yelled at us, like "take off your scarf!," and a couple of them followed right behind us. The other people looked at us and were all pretty much just giggling (Sara, Metro University)

One of the brothers told me that he and his roommate overheard, while in a laundry room in their dorm, that some guys were talking to each other like, "This Saturday night, Sunday night or some other party night, we're gonna go out, rip those girls' scarves off, rip their clothes off, and rape them."... It was a scary time.... We really got scared. So, we just stayed in our room and locked ourselves in. (Zayda, Eastern State University)

These narratives confirm that racialized Muslim hatred has become deeply sexualized. As many as 35 out of the 40 women I interviewed mentioned that after 9/11 they or their friends have, on more than one occasion, felt anxiety and fear about wearing

the hijab in public. In contrast, only a few men said that they have been directly attacked by strangers. The women's stories indicate the ways in which they were stigmatized by veiling, and the fact that the hijab has become an object justifying widespread racialized anti-Islamic hostilities against Muslim women. Although some of my respondents said that they received a significant amount of local support and even favor, including escort services from young Muslim men as well as from non-Muslim volunteers, many said that they had been traumatized by the experience of physical and verbal violence as well as of psychological intimidation.

In addition to the threatening and often violent nature of these assaults, such hostility significantly undermined the foundations of my respondents' sense of American identity. For example, Rohi at Metro University and Fahima at Eastern State University:

Rohi: A couple weeks after 9/11, I was driving my car in my neighborhood and stopped at a red light. The driver in the next lane glared at me, opened his car window and suddenly yelled at me in a harsh voice, "What's wrong with you?! Go back to your country!" ... I was really shocked and couldn't go out of my house for a while.

Fahima: I hate it when people always say, "Go back to your country!" to me, especially after 9/11. What do they mean by that? I was born here. I don't have any place to go back to.

On both campuses, women I interviewed mentioned the phrase "Go back to your country!" as a common element of the verbal attacks they experienced. While many said that they had been the recipients of insulting remarks even before the events of 9/11, there was a sudden increase in hostility that stigmatized them as "foreign enemies." Amira from Eastern State University remarked:

After 9/11, I tended to be a little bilious when I was walking outside, always thinking, like, "Oh, somebody is looking at me and giving me a look again." It's funny because before 9/11 people saw me and gave me a look, like "Oh, you are covered up. You have oppressed yourself, right?" or "Look at you! You look so pathetic. I'm sorry....We feel so bad for you...." But after 9/11, the attitude changed all of a sudden to antagonism. Now, people give me a look ... like, "We hate you!" and it hits my eyes.... It is sad...really sad.

While Amira felt that some people viewed her as an oppressed and therefore subservient woman before 9/11, she is convinced that afterwards the veil made her an object of hate. In Amira's eyes, as in the case of many other hijabees, her social burdens have increased as a result of altered public image of veiled women as foreign enemies. Although individual experiences were obviously varied, women at both universities generally that wearing the hijab has significantly increased their chances of being scapegoated with all the damaging results for their social lives and sense of self that such a situation entails.

Action As A Living Billboard

The sexual nature of racism in the aftermath of 9/11 motivated gendered responses. My interviews with the leaders of the two local sisters' groups suggest that they have developed two major agendas in response to the ongoing wave of social intimidation: 1) to fight an anti-Islamic environment that they contend violates the human rights of Muslim women, and 2) to promote solidarity in order to protect the members' individual and united interests. The leaders of both the groups that I studied see the stigmatization of Muslim women as primarily stemming from a basic ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam itself. The sister's representatives, Aisha at Eastern State University and Faiza at Metro University express that view in this way:

Aisha: One thing that has really been bothering me about our association is the increasing insular nature of it after 9/11. Some people have this idea in their heads that we're like a cult because of the media and just the way we look and pray... and we're going to brainwash them. I think we really do need to reach out to non-Muslims a lot more now.

Faiza: Some people yelled at us like, "Why are you wearing that? Take it off!" I usually find people who are more educated don't talk like that. I'm not trying to classify or anything, but I'm just saying that, in general, it's usually people who have a fear because of some type of ignorance or lack of understanding of the religion itself view us as different and weird and talk to us like that.

These narratives underline the two core strategies. First, both groups actively publicize "similarities" between themselves and mainstream groups on each campus through an increased "public" presence. Second, since they think that a change in perception can only come from the alteration of negative images not only of Muslim women but of the entire Muslim community, feel that they need to work for their "brothers" as well as for other Muslim sisters' groups. These unique strategies against anti-Islamism clearly reflect their struggle as minority women in racial and gender-stratified local as well as global society. Acknowledging the significant power inequality between them and the dominant group – largely, non-Muslim white men – they chose to take a soft approach by "educating" them as the most effective strategy to bring them to social justice instead of directly confronting them. Maryam, the secretary of sisterhood at Eastern State University presented these views on their website in 2003:

It involves the attitude of simply allowing people to understand the true message of Islam by first getting them to respect us as good, moral citizens and helping to get rid of their internalized biases created from the media along with the ongoing actions against fringe Muslims around the world. We have to set examples through our actions and trying not to seclude ourselves from non-Muslims. This is at the core of this attitude as well... We can achieve this goal by highlighting "similarities" between them and us so that they will be more likely to listen to us.

In addition to the two central pillars of their activism, Maryam's statement shows that the choice of strategies is the consequence of a strong sense of membership in an "imagined" global Muslim sisterhood community that transcends the existence of national, ethnic and even gender lines. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), an "imagined community" is a community which is not (and cannot be) based on quotidian face-to-face interaction between its members but reflects a strong mental image of a communion that has been especially encouraged by massive circulation of books and media in the era of "print-capitalism." Chandra Mohanty (1991) also conceptualizes a rather different "imagined community" as "bounded not only by color, race, gender, or class but crucially by a shared struggle against all pervasive and systematic forms of domination" (Espiritu 1997:119). Reflecting their sense of membership in this "imagined" Muslim community and seeing the social violence against them as a challenge to their religious faith, Maryam and other leaders work to project a positive image of Islam.

Thus, Aisha's group organized frequent workshops and lectures targeting non-Muslims, where they spoke about the shared historical roots of Islam and Christianity and the resulting veneration of Jesus by Muslims. At these events, they described the egalitarian nature of Islam, discussed arranged marriage and tried to justify their dress code, comparing their own practices to those of Christian women who have also veiled. The committee members also tried, when possible, to have these events co-sponsored by Christian and Jewish student clubs as well as other political activist groups on campus both in order to demonstrate ecumenicism and draw a more diverse audience. The sisters' group at Metro University, where Asians and Hispanics comprise a large part of the student body, also arranged events but there, they emphasized Muslim's experiences as an ethnic and religious minority. By explaining the history of American Muslims and the challenges that they have faced since 9/11, the group attempted to emphasize their similarity to other local groups.

(Figure 7-1 here)

The activism of Muslim women at the two campuses went beyond "educating." To demonstrate their likeness to other students, they participated as a group in campus recreational events, such as day trips to theme-parks, festivals and sports tournaments. In addition, the group leaders at Eastern State arranged to hold their monthly gatherings at a fast-food restaurant in the neighborhood in order to increase their visibility and show the social side of their organization more effectively. Malika, Eastern State secretary, describes this strategy:

We need to show that Muslim women also have fun and have social lives in order to change their image toward us... like we have to show that Muslim women can go out and chill, go bowling, play basketball, go shopping, and stuff like that. We have to show what Muslim women are really like. Yes, we wear the headscarf, cover our body, and don't date or drink but we still have fun like everybody else.

Similarly, Lulua from the public relations committee at Eastern State University also works to increase the members' public presence. At a meeting, she mentions the importance of recruiting members for a trip to a theme park that has been organized by the university's student association:

I really want the sisters to go on the trip this time. I definitely think we should organize and participate in more of that kind of fun stuff. That way, non-Muslims can see that we are not what they think we are.

The strategy to appear in public spaces is an explicitly gendered strategy since men do not signify their Muslim faith by their physical presence. In the face of anti-Islamic sentiment that the women see as a challenge to the entire Muslim community, they have developed a unique strategy of resistance that is only possible for women – namely, veiling in public. Instead of engaging in rebellious forms of protests and confrontation, they aim at publicizing Islam and its positive features. Thus, they use their bodies, tactically taking advantage of the stigmatic symbol and visibility of veiling to increase awareness of their presence and to gain positive and more serious attention from others. In this way, they turn themselves into something akin to an animated social billboard. Women are also held higher in the eyes of their male counterparts for taking this approach. Many men that I interviewed commented that they appreciated their courage to veil and represent their religious pride during the 9/11 backlash. To support these sisters, both brothers' groups also organized escorting services for these veiled sisters to protect them from assaults by strangers during this time period.

Although one might see this “soft” approach of being billboards as a consequence of the spiritual nature of these “religious” women's organizations, I would also argue that their unique strategies reflect on their struggle with the extreme hostility and limited political options associated with their gender and race. Their veiling is a strategy to make the most of the political power that veil provides within the confines of overwhelming racism, sexism and anti-Islamism during this time period.

(Figure 7-2 here)

Solidarity as Resistance

I believe that we must now learn more about ourselves. We should realize that despite all the classification that goes on inside the MSA [Muslim Student Association] sisters, that we are all classified by everyone as Muslim. Every single one of us, no matter our spiritual degree, ethnic origin or political affiliations, are all under this word, “Muslim” and everything that is attached to it. It is obvious that we must unite to meet this challenge.

Aisha, the sisters' representative, at Eastern State University posted the above statement on her group's website in May 2003. In the statement, she argues for the need for unity among members in order to fight anti-Islamic violence directed against women. Acknowledging the diverse backgrounds and even divisions among the members, she stressed their shared social classification as “Muslim.” Despite the fact that this

homogeneous labeling results from outsider ignorance of inner group differences, the sisters (in response) internalize this imposition of an undifferentiated social identity as a driving force for building unity.

By promulgating the veil as a unifying thread, Aisha and the other leaders at Metro University not only reaffirmed unity of the group, they increased its political appeal to outsiders. Such efforts were graphically illustrated by events that took place at two anti-war rallies, one on campus in 2003 and the other in New York City in 2004, where all the participants from the Metro University group wore solid black hijabs. While they did not usually veil alike, they purposely did so at these demonstrations. By making their appearance uniform, they caught the public eye, reinforcing the impression of the veil as a powerful symbol of collective morale, loyalty, and political voice and demonstrating a shared identity.

Recognizing solidarity as a form of resistance, group leaders, along with other regional and national Islamic associations, strongly encouraged their members to continue wearing the hijab and to recruit new followers. The group at Eastern State University, for example, held a special weekly meeting to discuss the philosophical meaning of the veil as well as its practical benefits for Muslim women, inviting a local group of older Muslim women (who veiled) to their campus. Information about these events was delivered to all members through an email list service every week in addition to being posted on the group's website. In 2002 the group's website and bi-monthly newsletters also started including autobiographical accounts of women's experiences when they began to wear the hijab, as well as poems and essays which described the beauty of veiling. In 2003 they also established weekend online sisters' discussion meetings for those who lived at a distance from campus.

The group at Metro University pursued similar tactics. In 2003 the organization launched a book club focused on works that described the advantages of veiling, and during the first half of 2005 the group leaders also invited their alumnae and women from a local mosque to a weekly lecture series on Muslim women's lives. There was never any reference to women and the differences in their ethnic cultures at these meetings. Instead, topics focused only on their common religion and on the lives of Muslim women. In this way, the group erased national, ethnic and generational boundaries, and advanced the notion of a sisterhood based solely on religious faith and veiling.

Unlike the Eastern State University group, where the majority of members are full-time students living in campus dorms, the sisterhood at Metro University consists of commuters. For this reason, Metro University leaders were limited in their ability to organize activities. To overcome the difficulty, they fostered veiling by working to strengthen the ties of each individual to the group. For instance, the group leaders encouraged members to use the prayer rooms on campus during breaks and lunch time in order to increase opportunities to interact with each other. The group also created a library section in the prayer room that included a number of books on Muslim women and veiling. They also made a section of the library available for storing its members' textbooks so that they could study and socialize as well as pray together. In addition, a message board at the entrance of the room informed members about upcoming sisters' events and relevant news items. Making their prayer room a place to "hang out," the women at Metro University worked to promote the development of intimate ties and a mutual support system.

The examples presented above show that, although each sisterhood group has a unique approach, both view veiling as key to increase solidarity, and thus, legitimate themselves in the eyes of the general population. In this way, wearing the hijab submerges individuality forcing others to see them monochromatically as “Muslim women.” Seeing this unified identity as a driving force to transcend their internal ethnic, national-origin and political lines, the sisters work to maximize what has been a limited political voice in the period since 9/11.

(Figure 7-3 here)

Being “Muslim” and “American”

Further examination of the two sisterhood groups indicates that the strategy of reshaping stigmatized symbol to legitimate a Muslim identity is also reinforced by the members’ strong attachment to their identity as “Americans.” As much of the literature on migration points out, many young Asian Americans see themselves stuck between two different cultural worlds, perceiving themselves as marginalized in both their immigrant parents’ community and the larger society of their age peers, at a time when they are starting to develop an independent identity (Tuan, 1999: Bacon 1999: Kibria 2006: Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: Min, 2002: Lee and Zhou, 2004). Yet, the literature also notes that Asian adolescents are now better equipped than ever before to resolve the distinct demands of “two very different cultures” (Lu 1997: 20: Leonard 1997: Sandhu 2004). For instance, Margaret Cho (1997) describes herself and other fellow American-born Asians as follows: “We can create our own identity. One that satisfies our parents that we take pride in our roots, cherish our rich ethnic heritage and have the possibility of becoming doctors and lawyers. But also an identity that says it’s OK to love America” (p.79). Current coming of age Asian Americans do not necessarily see the fact that they are seen as neither a “real” Asian nor a “real” American as a disadvantage. Instead, many use that ambiguity by either choosing or discounting one or combining both, depending on the audience, in order to realize their social objectives. In the case of the women I worked with, this multi-cultural identity is frequently deployed in contacts with non-Muslims as the following narratives indicate:

Adiba: You know, “American Muslim” shouldn’t be an oxymoron. It isn’t... history tells us that categorizing people is not only inaccurate but judgmental.... I know some of my friends say things like, “Islam and American cannot be one.” But I *am* a Muslim American and I feel blessed.

Ilham: After I started wearing hijab after 9/11, they [non-Muslim friends] wouldn’t even talk to me and would just give me looks. But I was like, you know, I am who I am. And I was always different from them but at the same time, I feel that I could still relate to them because I was born and raised in this country.

Quite a large number of my respondents in both groups expressed a strong attachment to and appreciation of both mainstream American and Muslim identities especially when discussing relations with non-Muslims. My interviews show that, in the context of the ongoing anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States, many of them think of themselves as bridging what they see as two distinct cultures. For instance, Afia at Eastern State University and Sabat and Rana at Metro University described their desire to bridge a cultural gap:

Afia: I'm taking a teacher's certificate program right now because I want to become a teacher in a public school. There are already many Muslim female teachers at Islamic schools, but there are very few in public schools. You know, if I become a teacher, since I am wearing hijab, everyone, including non-Muslims, can easily tell that I'm Muslim and can ask about Muslim women or anything about Islam when they have a question and I can answer that.

Sabat: I've been studying to become a film director. I want to make a documentary film after graduating and want to show the real lives of Muslim women to others in this country.

Rana: I think I want to go to law school after graduating because I want to become a lawyer, especially for immigration and family law. I know that there were many Muslims who were deported to their countries after 9/11. Also, there are a lot of Muslim immigrant women who suffer from domestic violence from their husbands. I really think that we need more lawyers from our community so that we can protect and help those people.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999) says that in the context of rising global capitalism, today's transnational Chinese business elite has adopted a new practice that she calls "Flexible Citizenship." Caught between Western discriminatory racism and China's opportunistic claims to racial loyalty, given a surging Asian capitalism, "they sought a flexible position among the myriad possibilities (and problems) found in the global economy" (123). Similarly, embracing their social, cultural and legal advantages as middle-class, college educated American citizens, and having the flexibility to access both the Muslim immigrant and the local mainstreams, many of my respondents see themselves as being privileged. They hope, as future professionals, to make a direct contribution to improving the public image of Muslims as well as the lives of Muslim women. I saw this tendency more clearly among the group at Metro University, where a majority of the members grew up in a lower or middle-class multi-ethnic or predominantly Muslim immigrant community. Of the 20 interviewees from each group, 14 from Metro University and 8 from Eastern State University said that they want to become professionals in the public service sector (lawyer, teacher, journalist and government community worker) with the aim of increasing public acceptance of Muslims and Islam itself.

Yet, even the members of the Eastern State University group, who did not expressly describe their aims as connected to aiding the Muslim community, did take that mission

to heart in other ways. For instance, Tahira from Eastern State University describes her efforts at the workplace:

I work at my father's 7-11. So, I deal with people all day long. People are always amazed to see me working because they see a woman in hijab and they think I am oppressed and some think I'm uneducated, too. Some people come to me and literally talk to me in a way as if I don't understand anything they're saying. When I talk back to them in fluent English, they are taken back and change their attitude. Yes, I'm Pakistani and wear hijab but I'm American also and I grew up here.... People judge us before they even get to know us, but at least I can do something about it by showing them that I *am* an educated American woman also.

Tahira sees herself carrying out her mission by taking advantage of her language skills. As on excursions with her fellow group members, she works to produce the "billboard" effect in her high-traffic workplace area. Exhibiting her "Americanness" to the general public, she feels that she contributes to altering the prevalent image of Muslim women. Zayda, who is from Eastern State University, also describes herself as both being American and wearing the hijab for activist purposes:

I started to wear hijab just a few weeks before Bush attacked Afghanistan. At that time, many articles were about Muslim women in hijab and bad things about Islam. I was so frustrated by that. Then, I thought that if I wore hijab, I could show people that we were not oppressed. "Look at me! I can laugh, be happy, and I can do everything that you guys can do and more...." So, I thought that this was like a contribution that I could make to my religion... and I could really put my soul into it.

Following her group's strategy, Zayda believes wearing the hijab helps her contribute to altering the political climate in the United States. She clearly sees herself as being in a key position to reduce the gap between two seemingly separate cultural worlds. By embracing the opportunity to veil, she has turned herself into a symbol of her loyalty to Islam and Muslim "sisters" all over the world, and yet, at the same time she is a "normal" American who "can laugh, be happy... do everything that you guys can do and more." The narratives of these women underline their unique social position and sense of self as both American and Muslim in a hostile political environment. As such, they do not perceive their activism as limited to the local area but as directed to a larger, global community.

Discussion

This chapter described the political strategies of the two groups of South Asian Muslim women. Their narratives show the ways in which members embody the idea of a bicultural feminism through an identity movement, using a stigmatized image (veiling) as a tool for activism. Taking advantage of the visibility of the hijab, they attempt to publicize positive images of Islam and at the same time to increase group solidarity.

The narratives also suggest that the activist strategies of the groups emerge from a multicultural identity. As American-born Muslim women, with a strong sense of mission, they aim at bettering the lives of “unseen” or “imagined” Muslim sisters in the United States as well as other nations. In their lives, ethnic identity is simultaneously a form of resistance and a claim for participation in the national community. This resiliency displayed by these groups reinforces the notion that difference and deviance can be translated into a symbol of strength. It has certainly been a driving force in encouraging Asian women to cope with social adversity stemming from cultural sexism and imperialism.

This study also suggests that umbrella identities motivating an “identity movement” are situational, and are shaped by historical and cultural dynamics. It also indicates that the future orientation of political activism involving South Asian women, especially Muslims, are more likely to follow the lines of their religious identity, than that of previous generations. Many studies of Asian American movements in the late twentieth century have noted that the rise in anti-Asian violence has often spurred pan-ethnic solidarity among diverse Asian groups (Espiritu 1993: Chang 2001: Lien 2001: Wei 1993, 2004). Also, many South Asian feminist leaders have worked to reduce ethnic and religious differences among members, emphasizing instead, their shared social experiences and histories of immigration and colonization (Aguilar-San Juan 1994: Shah 1994: Leonard 2003: Takhar 2003). However, contrary to these trends, my findings suggest that the Muslim sisterhoods see 9/11 as having made them unique in terms of social experiences and issues, making their consequent political strategies significantly different from other groups of Asians. Instead, the emergent generation of South Asian Muslim women may expand their membership to other Muslim women’s groups in national as well as global contexts (although it might not be based on a face-to-face meeting but a perception of shared identity) through the increasing media attention to the political tension between the United States and Middle Eastern nations as well as other Islamic nations in the post-9/11 global age.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This dissertation investigated the identity construction among second-generation South Asian Muslim women in New York by examining the meanings of practicing their ethno-religious tradition of veiling in various social contexts during post-9/11. The study based on both essentialist and constructionist perspectives of identity signifies the complex and multilayered process of assimilation and identity construction considerably influenced by immigrant descendents' race, gender, class and ethnic position in the host society within different historical contexts. The major theories of migration assume that the process of assimilation is relatively linear moving from holding strong ethnic identity and practice to conformity to the mainstream culture, while immigrant groups attempt to hide stigma symbols related to their non-whiteness in public. Contrarily, the narratives of the veiled women in this study suggest that the process of assimilation is more complex, moving back and forth, taking multiple directions, and thus, should be analyzed through multifaceted perspectives.

The women in this study flexibly transform the meanings of veiling depending on the social contexts that they engage in and attempt to maximize social, political and cultural capital by making the most of the limited resources given to them under the ethnic patriarchy, anti-Islamic sentiment and hegemonic masculinity. They conform to the male-dominated ideology of Islamic femininity and family traditions in certain contexts, while in others affirm their belief in Western ideologies and feminism. Furthermore, in certain situations they combine both as a strategy to deal with their marginality and subjugation. For instance, in the context of the transnational arranged market where the autonomy of these women is extremely limited, they conform to the male-dominated meanings of veiling on one hand; while on the other, they take advantage of the image of being a "good" Muslim woman, maximizing the number of marriage proposals coming from promising American-born, co-ethnic men simply by veiling. Through this, they perceive that they are able to achieve upper socioeconomic mobility and gain somewhat of a Western egalitarian relationship with their future husbands while at the same time realizing their religious faith and pleasing their traditionalist immigrant parents.

In the context of their relations to their immigrant mothers and other Muslim women, many respondents in this study veil as their expression of distinguished identity from secular co-ethnic women who they perceive simply conform to the mainstream culture. The study shows that this seemingly apparent and rebellious expression of their ethno-religious identity against the pressure of assimilation is however largely supported by their sense of independent womanhood stemming from their frequent association with Western feminism as native-born young women.

The dynamic visual and verbal interaction among these hijab wearers also illustrates how they develop a unique "group look" by consuming this religious tradition as a fashion item and drawing social boundaries of inclusion based on their familiarity of capitalism. Also, in the context of political activism these women use the supposed stigma symbol of veiling as an animated social billboard to protest against gendered anti-Islamic discrimination. Their narratives underlines that this unique and bold strategy among them, in fact, comes from their strong belief in Western democracy and freedom

of expression. Their motivation also comes from their self-understanding bridging two seemingly conflicting cultural and political worlds – namely, Islamic fundamentalism and Western secularism –, taking advantage of their dual membership to both social arenas even if it is limited by their gender and race.

Lisa Lowe (1996) states that “the making of Asian American [youth] culture includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented; Asian American culture also includes the practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representation that deny or subordinate Asian or Asian American cultures as others” (p.65). The study shows that veiling does not simply indicate the practitioners’ rejection to assimilation or total attachment to their ethnic traditions. Rather, it denotes that these women internalize seemingly conflicting trends of Islamization and Americanization in their everyday life and construct a new pan-ethnic second-generation womanhood. This suggests that assimilation should neither be seen as a linear process nor as the double-sided life of immigrant groups. It is not a process where they flip their performance between two socio-cultural worlds by seeing the public space as the front stage where they show their ability to conform to the dominant group and the home as the back stage on which they can comfortably maintain their ethnic tradition. Rather, the lives of immigrant descendents and their identity construction are cluttered; mixing together multiple contradicting cultural norms in their rationalization of social acts inside and outside their home.

This process of “cluttered assimilation” indicates the construction of a new class identity among American-raised, college educated young women in a multicultural and global society. It theorizes that despite the fact that each immigrant community maintains its transnational ties with its home countries through technological advances in travel and communication, Western-raised women distant themselves when significant economic and cultural gaps exist between both countries. Along with their positive valuation of American culture and socioeconomic assimilation, these women assert their incompatibility with youth in their parents’ home countries. Simultaneously, they develop close bonds with other American-raised groups, identifying with commonalities at both physical and cognitive levels stretching across national and ethnic boundaries.

This dissertation also shows the ways in which women’s rationalization and choice of social actions are considerably formed by their social position based on their gender, race, class and ethnicity. The narratives by these women indicate that they actively make a decision to choose, discard and reform the existing norms of veiling and boundaries through internalizing American and feminist ideologies on one hand; on the other, their motivation and forms of veiling are considerably shaped by the limited options given to them in the context of their potential socioeconomic mobility and political power due to overwhelming ethnic patriarchy, racism and the cultural and gendered hegemony.

For instance, the study highlights one of the motivations for veiling as being the accentuated gender inequality in the meanings of being an American Muslim adolescent and the increasing struggle that women face as a result of the globalization of their marriage market and ethnic patriarchy. It shows that some women choose to veil because it helps them gain societal esteem from their male counterparts, subsequently allowing them to maintain their social status. In the context of family relations for some of the women, veiling becomes a negotiating tool to gain trust from their fathers and thus increase their

independence and autonomy, as well as to supply a “driving force” to improve existing patriarchic traditions within their families.

In the context of political activism after 9/11, these women use the severely stigmatized image of veiling as a major tool to embody the idea of “bicultural feminism” in their identity movement. They use veiling as a political banner to show their similarity to the local mainstream groups. These women’s narratives suggest that their choice of this “soft” approach is based on their full acknowledgement of their political subjection compared to that of the local mainstream group due to their race and gender positions. Knowing that direct confrontation with members of the dominant group would give them little political benefit, these women chose to “educate” them and alter their attitudes toward fellow Muslims. Through taking advantage of the visibility of their dress code, the study also demonstrates the ways in which they increase their own sisterhood solidarity. Ongoing racism and anti-Islamism created a hostile social environment that led the members to see their sisterhood circle as the most reliable social space where they could feel a sense of belonging and security. Thus, although veiling situates them in the seat of anti-Islamic hostility in public, these women faithfully start and continue veiling as a highly valuable strategy to increase their autonomy and social position in a racial, ethnic, religious and gender-stratified society. Also, the transformation of the meanings of veiling from a male-dominated theological idea to a highly secularized, fashion statement among hijabee communities largely comes from these women’s desire to reduce the sense of subordination and powerlessness under the gaze of their male counterparts as well as gendered racism and ethnocentrism in a larger society.

Situating young women as a producer, consumer and advertiser of their youth culture, this study describes ethnic minority women’s unique ways of responding to their social disadvantages. Contrary to the classic views of “stigma,” this demonstration of resiliency and flexibility among these women’s groups underlines the fact that difference and deviance can be translated into a symbol of strength as well as a driving force for young ethnic minority women to cope with the social adversity that stems from cultural sexism, racism, patriarchy and imperialism. Yet, their cultural practice is not a simple representation of their resistance to their parents, male counterparts and larger secular society but rather a cultivated means for their coexistence with conflicting values and practices expected by them. These women powerfully express their views through their physical presentation of veiling; however, their choice of social action is considerably shaped by their limited social, economic and cultural capital based on their gender, race, class and ethnicity.

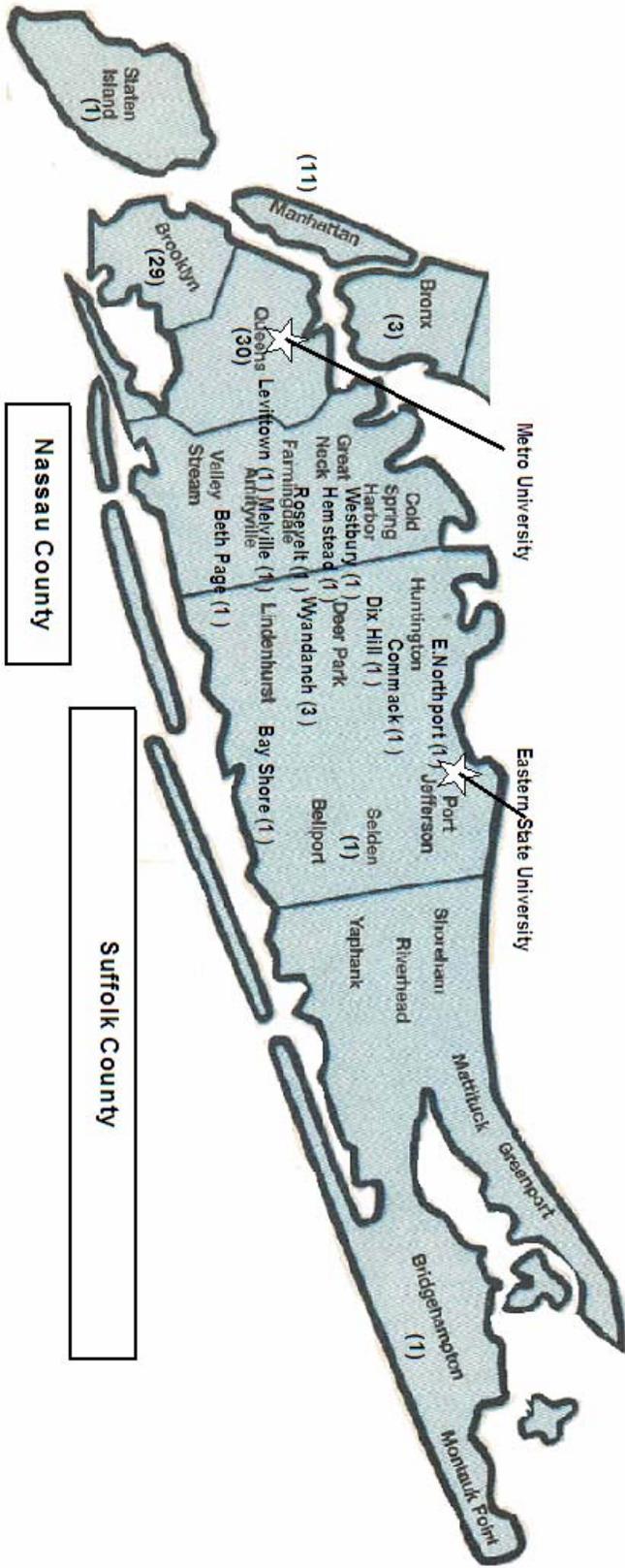


Figure 1-1. The Number of Mosques in the Long Island and New York City Areas



Figure1-2. Eastern State University MSA Prayers' Room



Figure 1-3. Author and Eastern State University Sisters' Group Members



Figure 5-1. Sisters shopping for hijab during the annual MSA conference

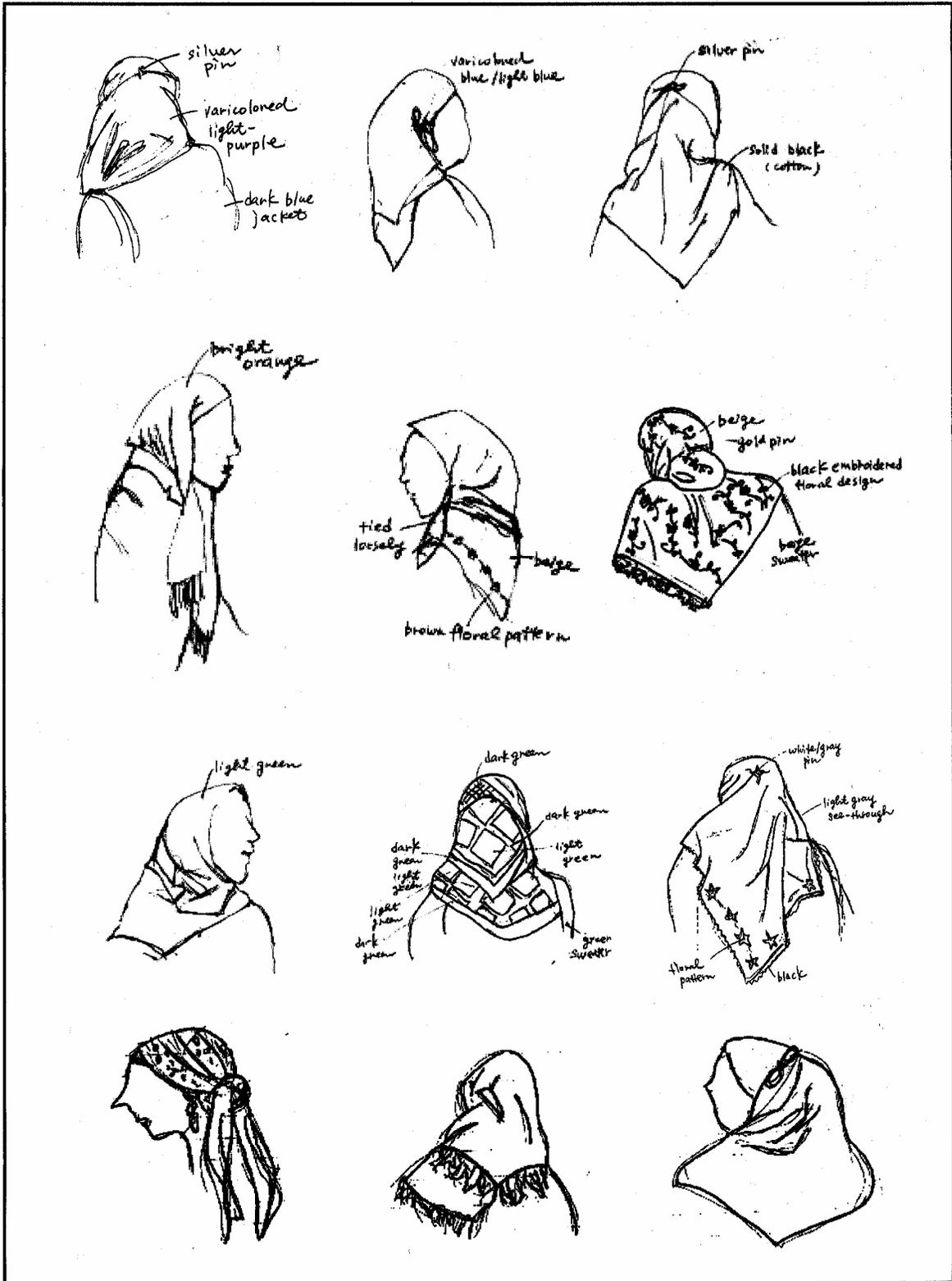


Figure 5-2. Varieties of dressing styles among the MSA students (extracts from the author's field notes)

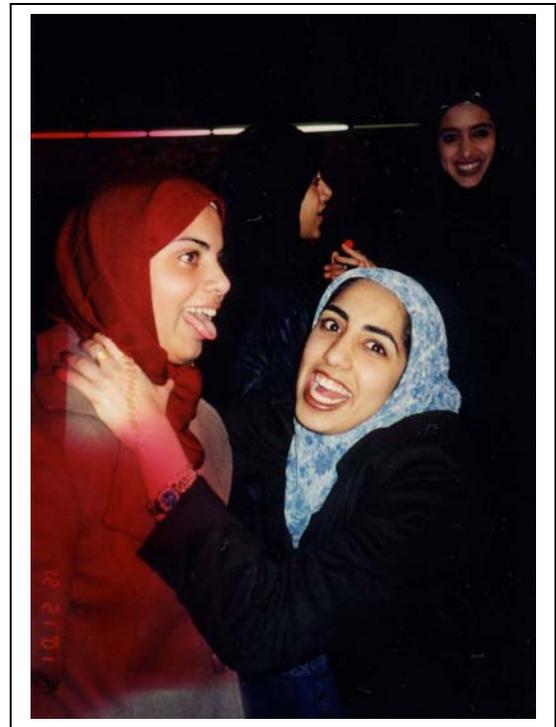


Figure 6-1 Sisters' group at Eastern State University



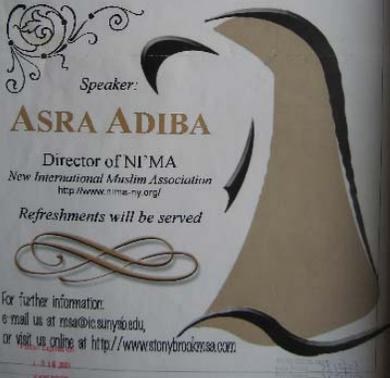
Figure6-2. Hijab for prayer-goers at Eastern State University

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What Women Weave

The Role of Women in Islamic Society

FRIDAY, MARCH 14TH
SAC BALLROOM B 3:00 PM



Speaker:
ASRA ADIBA
Director of NI'MA
New International Muslim Association
<http://www.nima-ny.org/>
Refreshments will be served

For further information:
e-mail us at resaid@ic.sunysb.edu,
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ISLAM

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anything about **the Islamic
religion, Muslim women,
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it comes from?**

Bring ur questions, comments, thoughts and finally
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Thursday, March 6th
Room 249 – Student Union
6:00 - 8:30 pm

Refreshments will be served

Also...mark the date:
Another Session: **Thursday, April 10**
All to be held in the: Student Union, Room 249

THE OTHER HALF: Marriage in Islam



MONDAY, APRIL 14TH ♦ 4:30 PM
SB UNION ♦ ROOM 249

Talk and Q & A Session by
Sister Asra Adiba
Director of the New International Muslim Association (NIMA)
Westchester, New York

Hosted by the Stony Brook Muslim Students Association

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Jews & Muslims in Dialogue

Everything you always wanted to know but were
afraid to ask




Wednesday, April 2
12:30 PM
Interfaith Center Union 249

A friendly & open
forum to ask all your
questions about these
two faiths that are so
closely related...

Panel discussion led by
Rabbi Joseph Topek
and Sister Sanaa Nadim
of the Interfaith Center

Figure 7-1. Flyers and brochures for the campus events organized by sisters' groups at Eastern State University and Metro University



Figure 7-2. Eastern State University sisters' gathering at a local restaurant



Figure 7-3. Sisters' group at an anti-war rally on Eastern State University campus (above) and in Washington D.C. (below)

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