# Muslim Women's Experiences of Higher Education in Britain

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### Abstract

I explore British South Asian Muslim women's experiences of higher education and how it impacts identity construction and negotiation. Through semi-structured interviews with thirty-five undergraduate and post-graduate Muslim female university students, I reflect on their perceived and actual experiences. By stressing how representations of them influence their participation and experiences, I analyze how individual subjectivities are mediated and negotiated while reflecting common experiences. I also consider their accounts of the social and personal benefits they felt that they gained during their studies, as well as to the more disturbing and racialized aspects of their experiences. They differentiated between three overlapping forms of beneficial experience: academic, social, and personal. While instances of anti-Muslim racism were rare or subtle, certain university structures and expectations of what being a mainstream student means often contributed to a noted sense of "othering." I conclude by highlighting how their accounts of their university experiences directly challenge those stereotypes that misrepresent educated Muslim women as "religious and cultural rebels."

## Introduction

> I think everyone should go to Uni, for the experience of it, for the social, if not for the academic. (Amber, 24, PGCE, BA history and Urdu, Pakistani.)

Very little is known about British Muslim female undergraduate students and graduates, their motivations to study, experiences of university life, and the influence their experiences have had on their relationships to their family as well as religious and cultural identities. By focusing on this group, I

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seek to shed light on a relatively recent and, as such, under-researched indicator of social change.

One key objective of such research is to draw in voices that disrupt hegemomic conceptualizations of "Muslim women" as a category of analysis and discourse. By studying their experiences with higher education and its impact on their attitudes toward their religious and cultural identities, I argue that Muslim women and their families increasingly view higher education as a personal and social commodity and a means for upward social mobility. The value that Muslim women place on these experiences challenges the stereotyped representations of South Asian Muslim women's identities and their families. It also questions the legitimacy of deterministic and racist binarized discursive formations.

Growing Islamophobia in the West, the tense political situation in the Middle East and western foreign policy interventions there, 9/11 and the resulting war in Afghanistan and the "war on terror," Guantanamo, the second war against Iraq, and, most recently, the London bombings on 7 July 2005 have all played a role in constructing various Muslim discourses. Tyrer's detailed analysis of stereotyped and uncritical pathologizing discourses around the imagined threat of extremism and Islamic fundamentalism on university campuses notes that fears concerning the influence of certain radical groups are often exaggerated and configured around racialized referents that construct Muslim political identities as hostile toward others.[1] Although many of these types of discourses are directed toward Muslim men, such recent and highly publicized controversies as a London university's decision to ban the *niqab* (face veil) because of the London 2005 bombings clearly defined certain images of Muslim women within such boundaries.

Research on British Muslim female university students and graduates is limited; however, they have been included in several analyses of South Asian Muslim women and labor markets.[2] A few studies have included Muslim female college students in studies on black women[3] or British South Asian women's identities.[4] Pickerden,[5] while describing a project exploring lifelong learning issues and widening participation strategies directed toward mature Muslim female students, ironically offers little information about their qualitative experiences of the project. Archer's critical study on the constructions of young Asian Muslim men and women and the choices they make after turning sixteen problematizes discourses suggesting that Muslim women have limited choices due to their cultural or religious backgrounds. She suggests that the issue of choice is situated within the production and reproduction of inequalities and is both emotive and inextricably linked to gendered and racialized Muslim identities.[6]

Although there is now a wealth of research on Muslim women in rela-
tion to identities, arranged marriages, and careers, much of it is limited to
studies on Muslim schoolgirls. In comparison, there is a dearth of literature
on Muslim women in higher education, their motivations, identities, and
experiences at the university level. The relatively low participation rates of
Muslim women in higher education may be partially responsible for the
absence of such research.

Among studies that have focused on Muslim women's higher education
experiences, an earlier publication by Ahmad[7] focused on their motivations
and experiences behind university study, while Housee's discussion on
South Asian women's university experiences after 9/11 highlighted areas of
commonalities and differences among seven South Asian female students,
three of whom were Muslim.[8] Christine Asmar's survey of Muslim student
experiences in Australian universities represents how Muslims, as a student
group, display a strong commitment toward academic achievement and,
especially in the case of women, toward their faith.[9]

Significantly, though, this body of work, which is based on a broader
study done by Proud and Inge, noted how some Muslim students, espe-
cially hijab-wearing Muslim women, felt excluded and alienated from the
campus drinking culture and experienced some discriminatory attitudes.[10]
Some of Asmar et al.'s findings resonate strongly with the research
described here and make for an interesting contrast. Newer ongoing research
on young British Muslims and social capital is beginning to address links
between their appropriation of Islam and the value of higher education.[11]

For the most part, though, the experiences of Muslim women and their
identities in higher education remain subsumed within broader studies on
issues centered around inclusion, exclusion, and widening access for non-
traditional entrants based on social class and (to a lesser extent) ethnicity.[12]
For instance, Tett's work on the gendered experiences of higher education
shows that university experiences are often interpreted as positive and trans-
formative, especially if school experiences were interpreted differently.[13]

Although these studies do not explicitly deal with the issues and expe-
riences of Muslim women attending a university, they do provide a useful
context within which to discuss their experiences of higher education and
identities. Of particular interest are how debates on widening participation are
framed by exploring accounts of working-class and other non-traditional
students' identities and experiences of feeling "othered" or of not fitting in
with the campus culture. For some, and without attempting to over-privilege
the place of religion in their lives, this can translate into more specific issues
related to living away from home, drinking, relationships, and the lack or

availability of provisions on campus to meet the needs of a diverse student body.[14] In addition, it can refer to their various perceptions of racial and religious discrimination.

From the late 1990s, South Asian Muslim women's participation in higher education has been framed in at least three main ways. The first one focuses on statistical realities, noting that women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, while showing a small increase in their higher education participation rates, remain among the least successful across minority groups.[15] Despite doing better than men on the national-level school exams, their success is not yet evident upon university entry.[16] Here, the emphasis is on exploring why such disparities may exist. While earlier analyses posited that Muslim women's lack of participation in higher education and the labor market were due to "cultural factors" (viz., Islam), more recent research indicates that these disparities are more likely due to a combination of racism and discrimination, social deprivation and poverty, timing of migration and localized dynamics, and similar factors. There is also evidence of social change.[17]

The second model frames Muslim women's presence on university campuses within the contexts of Muslim student extremism on campus[18] and discourses of Muslim male criminality. Claire Alexander's work is particularly instructive here, for it reveals how social policies continue to objectify and pathologize young Muslim men.[19] Discourses of extremism have also been used to frame Muslim students based on the frenzied media debates around Islamic schools, particularly in the context of the July 2001 riots in northern England,[20] and of school uniforms for Muslim schoolgirls.

The third and most relevant model is the critique of South Asian family structures, cultures, and religions as oppressive and excessively patriarchal. These factors are thought to act as significant barriers to women's participation in higher education or employment by invoking discourses of "degradation and despair."[21] One manifestation is portrayals of female Muslim university students as "rebels" and "tear-aways." This can best be exemplified by reference to media articles on such women, where representations of their experiences are sensationalized and fetishized, thereby replicating stereotyped notions of a "culture clash" and "double lives."[22]

Drawing on quotes from female Muslim students, these articles seek to show that once the secular freedoms of university life "liberate" them from their oppressive families and religion, they enjoy these freedoms to excess by drinking, sleeping around, taking drugs, going to raves, wearing what they want, and so on. These realities or caricatures are then contrasted with generalized references and quotes from Muslim women who have "escaped" from strict "cultural traditions," "growing up under lockdown" with strict "moral

directives" and "pressures to safeguard familial honour," all of which feed into popular racist stereotypes about Muslims' alleged backwardness and incoherent identities.[23]

How representative are such accounts? Do realities live up to expectations? What academic, social, and personal benefits of higher education do Muslim women feel they gain? Are there any negative aspects? Do they feel that their needs as students are being met? What influence, if any, does a university have on their identities? Fixing our gaze on a particular subsection of Muslim women, as well as remembering how highly contested and loaded a term *Muslim woman* is, reinforces parents' fears and anxieties about the influences to which their daughters might be exposed. This type of pathological framing also suggests a perceived and distinct lack of women's own agency to create alternative subjectivities and spaces within which to articulate their identities. This imagery encourages us to question the influences that university or campus cultures have on their identities. It also links into criticisms of modern vs. traditional binaries[24] and interrogates the influence of stereotypes on their participation and subsequent experiences of higher education.

Earlier research has documented Muslim women's high motivation to get a higher education for several reasons and how they drew on the support of their parents, other family members, peer groups, and Muslim and non-Muslim role models.[25] These findings have been backed up by more recent research on their experiences of higher education,[26] although these aspirations have not always been acknowledged or supported by schools, colleges, and teachers. I draw on detailed semi-structured interviews with thirty-five undergraduate and post-graduate British South Asian Muslim university-educated women and their experiences while working on their degrees. I describe their accounts of what social and personal benefits they felt they had gained while studying, highlight some of the more disturbing and racialized aspects of their experiences, and consider how university experiences are linked to their thoughts about their religious and cultural identities.

## Muslim Women's Experiences

Any analysis of Muslim women's university experiences that is sensitive to how, as Avtar Brah advocates, "structure, culture and agency are conceptualised as inextricably linked mutually inscribing formations,"[27] needs to consider how individual subjectivities are mediated and negotiated as well as reflect commonalities of experience. When considering their experiences of higher education then, how representations of Muslim women influence their participation and experiences of university life must also be analyzed.

Therefore, I have consciously avoided classifying experiences as either *positive* or *negative*. This reflected the ways in which women spoke of their experiences as highly subjective and contradictory, as contingent upon a variety of competing factors. Instead, I differentiate here between three forms of experience: academic (the practical knowledge-based aspects to degree study), social (the friendships formed), and personal (increased confidence and communication skills). Although many of these experiences were mediated as benefits and overlap, I have drawn these distinctions because they most closely match the experiences reported by the research participants.

For instance, positive learning experiences were juxtaposed against subtle manifestations of racist discourses from lecturers, biased course material, or other awkward feelings of not fitting in with the mainstream, bar-oriented student culture. Joining certain faith-based (e.g., Islamic societies [ISOCs]) or ethnically-based (e.g., the Pakistan or Bangladesh societies) student societies also produced mixed feelings and responses, depending on the nature of individual ISOCs. But at the same time, the women spoke of the lasting friendships they had formed across and within diverse ethnic and religious groups and the value they placed on their experiences in these student societies.

When they spoke of not enjoying their time at a particular university, further probing revealed dissatisfaction with its location or reputation, the quality of its lecturers, or regret at the choice of subject studied. However, they also identified positive aspects to their overall study: a range of such practical benefits as preparing themselves for future careers and employment, an increased knowledge base in a subject area of their choice, the value of independent learning, and a broadening of horizons.

Among the personal benefits frequently cited were greater confidence, self-awareness, and self-esteem. The social aspects of university life – integrating and socializing with a diverse group of students, making friends, and learning to live independently (to varying extents) – were further examples of their positive experiences. Many valued the "independent" or "personal time" spent on campus, whether they lived on campus or at home, for it enabled them to form friendships across racial, ethnic, religious, and gendered boundaries. These friendships, which were distinct from those of their family or existing social circles, presented some women with new chances to develop friendships and relationships with Muslim and non-Muslim men.

## Academic Experiences: "Getting the Knowledge"

Naheed, a Master's student, was one of the many women who spoke of her university experiences as "really great." She described how her writing skills

had developed since the time of her first degree and how she had learned to
read around the subject area:

> Reading around the subject, I've learnt a lot, comparing writing skills as
> well – I was having a look at one of my essays from my first degree, and
> the style of writing. I think I've developed as well. (Naheed, 24, MA inter-
> national politics student, p/t, Bangladeshi.)

Halima cited the practical value of her B.Ed. and how it had encouraged
her to think about specializing and studying further:

> The course was brilliant … it wasn't boring, it wasn't the same thing
> every year, it was different things and it sort of really helped to develop
> myself and to become a more effective teacher with more awareness. …
> I could now go abroad and teach … the degree has given me the base to
> go further with this idea to do children's psychology and maybe go into
> the NHS. (Halima, 23, B.Ed, recent graduate, Bangladeshi.)

Khaleda, a recent history graduate, was eager to stress how much she
enjoyed learning in-depth about an area for which she had a passion and of
being taught by a "bunch of very good lecturers … bringing in new life,"
even if she was less happy about her university's location and the commute:

> I mean you go to university, you study more, you develop your knowl-
> edge, and you widen your horizons … It's getting the knowledge, finding
> it, and like developing your own mind. I mean there are so many things
> you do at university. I mean you do your own independent research,
> whereas as at school you were taught to how you had to do this essay. At
> university, you are taught to be independent and to think. (Khaleda, 24,
> BA history, recent graduate, Bangladeshi.)

Amber, a graduate from a working-class background, encapsulates the
complexity and ambiguous nature of her experiences. In what could have
been a potentially negative learning experience – she felt that her course-
work was based on pro-colonialist assumptions and biases – she asserted her
developing academic skills to prepare intellectual arguments defending her
readings and interpretations of texts. As she says here: "If you don't get the
negative, you can't fight against it":

> At [X] a lot of lecturers teach you in a certain way, that the British were real-
> ly good and things like that. I must have been really naïve, because I didn't
> notice it too much actually (!). Perhaps because of the history that I did, I'm
> not sure, but I just used to just listen to what they had to say, read the books,
> and read books I chose to. My project in my final year was, "Were the
> Muslims Responsible for the 1875 Mutiny/Rebellion?" And I read a lot of
> books by Asian writers of the time (1947), about what they thought. So this

whole essay that I did was really pro-Muslim, and how the British did this and that. I found it really positive actually. I think academically it was positive for me. Perhaps for other people they noticed that the lecturers teach in a certain way and give certain impressions out, but if you don't get that you don't know any different. If you don't get the negative you can't fight against it. Everything I got out of it was positive; I've learnt so much. I've touched upon a lot of things. I think I'll have to read up on it a lot more; my Urdu lessons were excellent actually, because we had English teachers teaching us Urdu which was really like, "shame"(!) embarrassing, but they were really very good. And it was really nice to see white people [get] into someone else's culture, even if it was probably negative if I thought about it. But it was great, it was like, "Oh wow man, you can speak Urdu, you can probably speak Punjabi as well," and they were really in with things. I liked it. (Amber, 24, PGCE, BA history and Urdu, Pakistani.)

Her statement linked the academic benefits she gained (e.g., a greater knowledge base, an increased interest in the subject, an ability to critically appraise published material and academics, and the confidence that this engenders) with her personal experiences and gains. Both fed into each other and contributed to her overall positive sense of achievement and identity. Although Amber was a naturally positive and enthusiastic person with a strong personality, she mediated this potential "othering" aspect of her study experiences as part of the learning process.

She was not the only student to feel that there was a degree of colonial bias in her degree course and reading lists. Sadia and Arifa, also studying arts- and history-based courses, concurred. Yet they, like Amber, also talked about how they learned to engage with the course material and began to feel confident enough to challenge certain assumptions and offer alternative perspectives to those of the lecturers or the published works. Although intellectually she generally enjoyed her course in social anthropology and took an option in South Asian literature, Arifa was uncomfortable with what she perceived as the hegemonic authority that some lecturers exerted over the subject matter – a "white male bias" in relation to the curriculum that she felt neglected South Asian writers:

> Intellectually I really enjoy it, although there is a white male bias even though they pretend otherwise, I still notice it and I get angry about some things we are studying.
> [Interviewer:] Such as?
> South Asian literature – we did a lot of literature written about colonialism by Forster. We did Ruth Praver Jhabvala. We could have done lots of South Asian writers, but we concentrated on colonial writers. Kipling, we did.

There's a space for them, but I want to get away from colonialism. That's all we ever talk about, neo-colonialism, post-colonialism, colonialism. I think there is something else out there. (Arifa, 26, BA social anthropology student, Pakistani.)

This was clearly a source of frustration and disappointment for her, as she felt that she had "fought" to enter university but did not feel intellectually challenged or that her lecturers had opened any new avenues of learning for her:

I'm at university. I feel lecturers are supposed to guide me. If they guide me in a particular direction and I feel in my waters that there is another answer, I don't know where to get it from. I feel that I've fought for my place in university and had great hopes. But when I got here, I just thought: "Wow, its just same old fodder that they've been teaching me since I was at school, and that's white male history." … We could have done stuff on partition. We could have looked at contemporary views on colonialism. We did some South Asian writers, but they were old writers. I wanted to do contemporary writers. (Arifa, 26, BA social anthropology student, Pakistani.)

While these are examples of how course material could contribute to students' perceptions of being excluded or "othered," or that they had wasted their time, other examples rooted in key social relationships pointed out how Muslim women's university experiences were racialized and gendered (see below). In general though, most women, even when highlighting areas of tension, focused on the positive aspects of learning at the degree level.

## Personal Development: Communication and Confidence

The women enthusiastically described the various ways in which they felt their degree study had equipped them with specific skills and furthered their personal development. Among the key qualities that they felt they had gained were learning how to communicate more effectively (both in written and verbal contexts and to a diverse group of people), how to work with people, about other cultures and lifestyles, and self-discipline and self-motivation. They also talked about how they felt they had developed in terms of personal maturity, gained independence ("standing on my own two feet"), and learned how to take personal responsibility for their actions. The following quotes were indicative:

I would advise people to go to university not just because they get a degree at the end of it, but because it just teaches you about life. You learn so much from your peers. You learn so much about standing on your own

two feet that I really feel it is a social learning experience. (Sabia, 27, BSc biology, PGCE, school teacher, Indian.)

I think it definitely matured me coz I had to be independent even though I was living at home. I became more independent. Knowledge, definitely – three years of studying – you do pick up a lot of things. It just developed your mind. It made you think in different ways. It made you more aware because we had a lot of foreign students there, so it was not just educationally, but socially as well. (Khaleda, 24, BA history, recent graduate, Bangladeshi.)

These positive interpretations of learning experiences are mediated through personal understandings of gender, social class, and what it means to be an Asian or Muslim woman. Talk of personal change as a result of university experiences are necessarily related to and influenced by the fluctuating nature of identity positioning at both the psychic and structural levels. These positive changes also legitimated the students' ownership of their right to a place at the university. It is helpful to consider again Amber's statement that "If you don't get the negative, you can't fight against it." Rehana, an undergraduate student of Pakistani origin and the first woman in her family to attend a university, spoke of how her mother, in particular, but also other family members and friends began noticing changes in her personality as she became more confident in asserting her opinions:

Once my Mum said: "You're not the same girl that was sent to Uni." When I came back from [studying] at Uni, I was more outspoken about my views and stuck to my guns. At home I used to step back from my brothers and sisters. But when I came [home] from Uni, I stuck to my guns. But that's coz I think it made me more confident, and that confidence my parents saw as change. Whereas before I used to be a painfully shy person – I can still be — but going to Uni made me more confident. Even though I didn't notice them, my parents, my friends, my cousins started to notice – I acted the same, but my views were more outspoken. (Rehana, 21, BA English and history student, Pakistani.)

Rehana's growing confidence, reflected in her movement from being someone who was self-described as "painfully shy" and the reactions of those around her to her new assertiveness, shows how higher education exerted a profound effect on her negotiations about her identity. As a young mother of a three-year-old, Sara experienced several personal difficulties and constraints during her university career. However, she believes that her higher education contributed to her growing self-confidence in her abilities:

> I gained self-esteem. You know, it actually made me realise that I can actually achieve something now. […] I've never done very well at college because I had a lot of personal problems and I've always thought, you know, I'm not good at it, it's just not me, doing something like studying and things like this. So, you know, it definitely helps me to actually realise that everyone is capable of doing it if they give the effort and time. So yes, I've gained self-esteem and it's made me realise that I can do a lot of things that I actually thought I couldn't. (Sara, 22, BSc social policy and management student, Bangladeshi.)

The responses described above show how women felt that their university experience had allowed them to undergo a personal "reinvention" and a transformative process. This did not mean to say that they abandoned existing identifications (see below), but rather that they were offered an avenue for personal development and the realization of untapped potential.[28]

## Social Benefits: Friends from Other Places

Although Shabnum lived at home while studying, she was very positive about both her academic and social experiences at the university. Here, she contrasts the diverse range of people she met there with her prior experiences at a sixth-form college, where there was a large concentration of female Bangladeshi students:

> Social life at University was extremely, well, it was really great for me. I've learnt a lot through my degree. When I was doing my A levels, I was doing it in a 6th form full of girls, no mixing. And the people that I was doing it with, mostly it was people from my own culture, which I already had. But when I went to Uni, I mixed with people from all over the world. Like friends came from different countries and they go into the Student Union, mixing there, going out for lunch. It was really nice. I learnt a lot not only academically, but also through the people I mixed with. (Shabnum, 24, policy and research officer, Bangladeshi.)

She went on to stress the value of integrating and mixing with students from diverse backgrounds and learning about cultural differences, which she felt was important for future roles and relationships.

There was also a sense of social responsibility along with wanting to challenge stereotypes and work across cultural and religious differences between fellow students and lecturers (see "Sadia" below). This attitude also demonstrates that South Asian Muslim women's awareness of their identities and sense of responsibility were not simply restricted to family obligations and domestic spheres, but extended into social interactions at the university, one's place of work, and other areas. In this sense, their feeling of social

responsibility offers a real alternative to the stereotyped notions of Asian Muslim women. Other women also spoke of the diverse students they met and with whom they formed friendships:

> I learned to respect people more in the sense that I was exposed more to other people, their cultures and backgrounds. It was a good way of learning about people, not just from what I read in books, but actually meeting people on an every-day basis, looking at their different experiences, and trying to appreciate that every one is different, basically. (Sadia, 26, MPhil student, South Asian area studies, Bengali literature and gender, Bangladeshi.)

Sadia's comment is also significant in the context of her experience of feeling discriminated against and "othered" (see below). Here we can see how her ascribing of "difference" is apparently based on qualitatively different terms to the ways in which she herself experienced "being othered." Like many women in this study, Sadia appreciated and valued the opportunity to meet and socialize with people from different backgrounds and learn about difference in a positive way. Furthermore, the desire to engage with non-Muslims is another example of how Muslim women are challenging stereotypes that portray them as self-segregating. In contrast, however, some aspects of the university experience for some students contributed to dominant discourses of "not belonging" (see below).

Attending a university with students from diverse backgrounds, including a number of other Muslims, also enabled them to share an alternative space to that provided by the student union (SU) bar at lunchtime or in the evening. For students who did not have ready access to such a network or group of friends, their choices were limited to going to the SU and choosing either to participate in activities there or to seek refuge in other spaces within the university, such as the refectory, canteen, or library.

Involvement in student societies, such as the ISOCs or the PakSoc, was another means by which women could feel connected to other students from similar religious or cultural backgrounds. However, these societies were experienced differently by women in my sample and, in addition, could act to regulate those who "belonged" and those who did not.

## Living on Campus: Girls away from Home … Freedom?

For many female students, attending a university presents them with their first experience of leaving home and coping as an adult: juggling finances, feeding and caring for oneself, and being responsible for one's own free time away from the parental gaze and one's own independent study. My sample contained a mixture of women who both lived at home and on campus while

attending a university. Many of the latter group spent their first years, as most students do, in student halls and the following years in other accommodations (e.g., houses, flats, or privately rented properties with friends).

Another key question that this research sought to address is whether their experiences at a university contributed to or acted in any way to "dis-locate" them from any religious and cultural influences with which they might have been raised. Did living away from home encourage them to experiment with pushing religious and cultural boundaries? What was the nature of these boundaries? Did they feel like they were leading double lives?

Contrary to some media reports,[29] many women in my sample did not appear to lead the much-hyped double-life of alcohol, sex, and clubbing. While accepting this may well have been a product of my own sampling – volunteers responding to my flyers out of a desire to challenge stereotypes or from women wishing to present a "sanitized" version of themselves[30] – other emerging studies in this field appear to support the general findings of my research.[31] For several women I spoke to, who were well aware that living away from home would leave room for suspicion and gossip in some quarters of their local Muslim communities, the opportunity to live on campus was, nevertheless, a significant consideration. As the extracts below show, their reasons for and experiences of living away from home did not necessarily indicate their intention to abandon or sever cultural or religious links and practices. For example, Shamim spoke of how her experience encouraged her to regulate her behavior and strengthened her self-confidence and her faith:

> I lived with all females, obviously, but I kept myself pretty much to myself. I wasn't, I was quite, you know, I practised my faith. I didn't go clubbing, boozing, or pub crawling, or any of those things. And I didn't really have my family checking up on me every 5 seconds, saying where are you going? I didn't have that, and because of that again, I think I sort of practised my faith more than maybe some other people. (Shamim, 28, BSc pharmacy, MRPharmec, pharmacist, Pakistani.)

The absence of a "watchful eye" over her actions, she felt, contributed to her own sense of religiosity and practice. Currently working as a hospital pharmacist, she highlighted her desire to experience life away from home and talked of how her experiences contributed to her personal development (of which others also spoke, see above) and maturity.

Similarly Amber, who convinced her parents to allow her to live in halls with slight exaggerations about needing to study late in the library, drew a comparison between the skills she felt she had gained with one of her sisters who did not study at a university and lived at home:

> Yeah, that changed me. I moved out. I know it sounds funny, but you can
> get quite cushy at home. It makes a difference. Like I said, I learnt to live
> with other people, made my best friends there. I'm different from my sis-
> ters in that sense, especially my middle sister, because she hasn't gone to
> Uni. She's quite naive about certain things and she hasn't ever lived out.
> She wouldn't be able to cope. But I think I have learnt from it. (Amber,
> 24, PGCE, BA history and Urdu, Pakistani.)

Both examples also highlight how living at home, far from being the site
of oppression as stereotypes suggest, was perceived as the "cushy" option.
Studying in an environment that promotes individual thinking and living
away from familial and community influences did not encourage those
women who participated in this research to exhibit the extremes of loose
behavior suggested by some media accounts.[32] As Naheed notes:

> I think in popular perceptions you can either be one way or another, but
> you don't have to. From what I gathered, a lot of people think that if you
> go to this university, you're gonna be really Anglicised, or whatever. She's
> gonna run away, or she's gonna put on a hijab. But there is another way.
> There are a lot of people like me, so I can't understand the idea that you
> have to be one or the other. You can be a practising Muslim, and people
> will [still] huff and puff and whatever. It's for you to decide and be happy.
> (Naheed, 24, MA international politics student, p/t, Bangladeshi.)

A few women cited parental concerns around daughters "going wild" at
university, but stated that they were often able to reassure their parents. Even
so, within a general spirit of encouragement, parents still instilled a sense of
foreboding in their daughters regarding the possible adverse effects that expo-
sure to western secular education may have. The women I interviewed were
well aware of their parents' anxieties around *how* they could change, as well
as of the possible "Anglicising" effects of university life. As Aswa points out:

> Nowadays, if a girl wants to be educated and go on to university and col-
> lege, there is a fear that she may become too Westernised. But that really
> depends on what type of background you're coming from. If your parents
> are very liberal, yeah, then that shouldn't be a problem. Your parents will
> be all too willing for you to go forward, get an education, and be success-
> ful in whatever you do.

While sensationalized media stories of Muslim women and their behav-
ior can be viewed as another example of how discursive and hegemonic rep-
resentations define and constrain Muslim women's agency, Aswa's words
highlights a real parental concern perpetuated by irresponsible, unbalanced
journalism.[33] As highlighted elsewhere,[34] the impact of pioneering role mod-

els did much to ease negotiations on entry into a university for some women and their families. Realizing that the extreme examples featured in the press or circulated via gossip networks were perhaps exaggerated, as well as being able to compare these with examples of well-adjusted educated Muslim women, significantly allayed parental fears.

Overall though, women were eager to stress the multiple benefits they had gained as a result of degree-level study. Apart from practical benefits, one of the significant aspects was the positive influence that this experience had on helping them think through and articulate their religious and cultural identities and notions of agency. In this sense, their testimonies are a powerful challenge to stereotyped representations of Muslim Asian women as caught between cultures or having fixed identities.

Therefore, based on the experiences reported during the interviews, this research does not support the conclusions drawn from other studies that high levels of education are associated with renouncing such traditional values and practices as arranged marriages.[35] Rather, it signifies the wish to experience student life and gain a degree of independence during term-time, at least, away from the parental gaze. Many of the women I spoke with described Ramadan, Eid, and similar occasions as being times when faith could be shared in a supportive environment provided by the university. In this context, *freedom* does not necessarily equate with abandoning traditional cultural values and practices or religious requirements. In fact, for these women it actually signified that here was an opportunity to explore and practice their beliefs in ways that matched the milieu in which they were now located – the elite, racialized, and gendered domain of higher education.

Recognizing this, some universities have become increasingly aware of the diverse needs of students from various religious backgrounds and are trying to better accommodate their needs.[36] Leaving home, then, is significant for some daughters (and sons) and their parents; it is just *one of the ways* in which parents manifest their trust in their daughter's sense of responsibility and `*izzat*[37] (honor) while away from home.

## Staying at Home

For some women, the comforts of home, cooked food, clean clothes, and fewer financial worries were significant factors in their decisions to not live on campus.[38] However, other women saw this choice as a strategic compromise designed to appease parental concerns about studying at a university and the potential influences of its secular environment on their cultural and religious obligations and attitudes:

> I wanted to move out when I was living at home. I was travelling three hours every single day. I couldn't argue with my parents. They put their foot down and said: "You have to go to a university in London." I didn't have a choice about leaving, as my brother did. He could go anywhere in the country. Obviously my parents would prefer him to study in London, but he was allowed to go outside of London, whereas that was not an option for me. If I wanted to study, I had to do it in London. (Sabia, 27, BSc biology, PGCE, school teacher, Indian.)

Sabia was quite frustrated at the relative freedom given to her brother. But she eventually got her way, although only for her final term and after convincing her parents that it was necessary given the amount of time it took her to get there. The women's negotiating skills when faced with such tensions played a key role, especially for those who were university "pioneers" in their families. Some women in my sample (e.g., Amber) used imaginative means to convince their parents to acquiesce to their wishes. But it is important when saying this to also note, as I have done above, that the desire to leave home did not necessarily indicate a desire to lead a double-life that was bar-influenced or secular. It could reflect, instead, a natural process of maturity as one grew into adulthood and individuality. As Tasleema states below, she wanted to "differentiate my life from that of my family home."

Other women offered more nuanced responses. *Freedom* thus became a contested notion that held a qualitatively different significance to its "everyday" meanings that are often used in racist pathologies of Muslim women. They also appreciated and valued not having to worry about financial concerns and fending for oneself before they felt emotionally ready. Shabnum, who preferred to live at home, says that she shared this view with her parents. She rationalized her desire to remain at home due to her close relationship with her parents and the knowledge that marriage (an expected consequence) would naturally result in her leaving home anyway. She said:

> I wouldn't have liked to move on my own for definite! … I'm too close to my family and I know women in our culture: once you get married, that's it really. You don't see much of your family, and I know as a Bengali woman I would have had to get married before the age of 25 for definite, if not before the age of 27. And so I wanted to spend as much time as possible with my parents, really. And in a way I wanted to give them back what I had, because I know once I get married I won't be able to do that. I will, but not to the extent as I would have been able to do then. So that's why I wanted to stay with my parents really. (Shabnum, 24, policy and research officer, Bangladeshi.)

In this extract, Shabnum hints at the "sell-by date,"[39] with respect to the marrying ages about which so many women talked. The expectation that marriage was an early inevitability that would restrict the amount of time she could spend with her parents was an interesting perspective on the expected nature of marriage. A small number of other women also mentioned it.

For others, the financial benefits of living at home were tinged with a sense of an unrequited experience that living on campus led to expectations that were never fulfilled. As Tasleema, another home graduate, said:

> I guess I wanted some freedom to find myself more than anything else. To differentiate my life from that of my family and see where my beliefs and my attitudes began and where they ended. (Tasleema, 23, BSc psychology, MSc, forensic psychology, mental health officer, Bangladeshi.)

The discussion of living on campus or at home was a pragmatic choice for many women. Although living on campus undoubtedly contributed to a qualitatively different set of shared experiences and ways that women thought about themselves, some of these experiences unsettled their assumptions and expectations of what they would find at a university. This caused some to question whether they could ever fit in.

## "Being One of Them" and "Fitting In"

There were relatively few negative accounts of university life. Most complaints centered on heavy workloads and course expenses, with young mothers in particular being challenged by combining course work with childcare and domestic responsibilities.

A few students and former graduates spoke of racist, sexist, or Islamophobic comments while at the university. There are broadly two main ways in which they were made to feel excluded: academic experiences and student social activities. For example, Halima, 23, who had recently completed a B.Ed from a new university and described much of her course as "brilliant," felt her experience marred by one (in her opinion) prejudiced lecturer:

> The lecturer was so rude. It was like she didn't think we knew answers. She used to pick on us when we used to go to lectures – as if we couldn't speak English, as if we wouldn't know the answers. And the way she would pick on us, it was like, even if you knew the answers you couldn't tell her because it's like – you know when someone starts to pick on you, you forget answers, you're gob-smacked. … Everybody used to talk about that, and it was also like that for prayers – we used to start at 1.30 pm, and other lecturers knew that we used to go for prayers so we'd be there at the lecturer theatre for 1.35 pm. But she would give us a dirty look

when we used to come in. Other people would walk in half an hour late and she never used to say anything [to them]. But because she could see us as Asian persons, we used to dress in a certain way so we used to stand out in the crowd … it was really obvious that she was doing it [staring]. It wasn't normal. (Halima, 23, B.Ed, recent graduate, Bangladeshi.)

Despite having enjoyed her time at the university, Shamim also felt subjected to Islamophobic sentiments from one of her tutors and noted how other students made little effort to learn about her cultural background and faith:

I've had loads and loads, but my pre-reg tutor who was where I did my years training. He used to make lots of comments about Saddam Hussein. He said: "Oh I'd better not say anything because you are Muslim." I said: "No, you are quite entitled to put him down because I don't like him at all." And he used to always refer to Yasser Arafat and all these other Arab personalities and think, you know, and say: "Oh sorry," you know, and think that he knew more than me, rather than trying to discover what I actually felt about anything. He just had this assumed knowledge that this is how I would feel, and he stereotyped me into that kind of way of thinking. (Shamim, 28, BSc pharmacy, MRPharmec, pharmacist, Pakistani.)

Other examples focused on how the construction of academic discourses ("using long words") within a seminar session reinforced middle-class hegemonic authority over students from working-class backgrounds. Sadia spoke of perceptions of racism from some of her tutors, but also of her surprise at confronting racist stereotypes from lecturers whom she held in high esteem. In the extract that follows, she speaks of her growing realization that regardless of her academic achievements, she still felt she was subjected to an "othering" process:

… As the years progressed and I got involved in University life, I realised that even the lecturers themselves, so-called educated people, they have their own pre-conceived ideas to us. And, as you try and progress, I felt that I was, however subtly or however directly, I wanted to challenge their ideas. I felt that it was up to me – it was *my responsibility to break down stereotypes*. I would not directly approach them and say this, this, and this; I would do it by doing my best at university myself and hope that my educational achievements would speak for themselves. […]

When probed further, she mentioned a conversation she had had with her supervisor. That this particular university had an international reputation of expertise in area studies added to her initial surprise about the more general stereotypes she encountered from other lecturers. It also contributed to her overall perception of a university as a place where racism and sexism went unchallenged:

When speaking to my supervisor, actually, we were discussing something. He was asking me about my background, about being Bengali, and during the course of the conversation he made the statement: *"You people"* [her emphasis], and I was a bit taken aback by that and thought that this must be stemming from somewhere. This must be stemming from a stereotypical image that he has, because you do not use the phrase *"you people"* so easily. To me it implies that he has the impression already about us, and I was surprised, because I thought that as he was a lecturer at X, these ideas would have been dismantled ages ago. But, of course, they are still there. I think slowly I am beginning to realise that it is not all ideally fixed as it should be – that is the best way I can describe it. (Sadia, 26, MPhil student, South Asian area studies, Bengali literature and gender, Bangladeshi.)

In terms of social relationships, ignorance about the women's religion and cultures, a sense of not "being one of them," and notions of what was "normal" for students infiltrated into these women's otherwise positive university experiences. Some felt uncomfortable with the highly secularized student environment, particularly the social scene that emphasized clubbing and drinking, described by some as the "English" or "secular" way of life.

Many women responded to this tension by forming their own groups of close friends who were religiously and culturally similar. For several women I spoke with, this invariably meant finding friends who shared their cultural backgrounds and religion. This is despite their feeling a sense of social responsibility to form friendships across racial, cultural, and religious differences. In addition, this indicates that other students, those who can be said to represent the majority of university entrants, may not have thought of their friendships in similar ways. Amber's friendships with other Muslim students developed after she felt excluded by "English" students:

Well if you're not going to drink they'll probably go: "Oh why can't you have a drink? That's really sad, go on have a drink, take some drugs." But if you're not about that, it's better to hang around with people that you're more comfortable with, that do the same things as you.
*[Interviewer:] So did you find that there was an element of students who you just didn't find anything in common with because their student life was centred around things that didn't concern you?*
Oh yeah, student life, you can just imagine a "typical" student life; a lot of English people are like that. … I mean that's what people are like, and fair enough, I'm not knocking it. Do what you want, but how can you sit round in a room with a whole bunch of people, and they're all drinking alcohol, and that's what they're gonna do? ... You're gonna be bored out of your mind. Its just practical common-sense things. It's not a conscious decision I made; it just ended up that way. The Muslim thing really hap-

pened because of the Islamic Society and things like that. It just ended up like that. (Amber, 24, PGCE, BA history and Urdu, Pakistani).

Another form of group-belonging operated within such student societies as the ISOCs or the PakSocs. Of the women I interviewed, their experiences with these societies were varied and not entirely positive, especially for those who regarded themselves as occupying the middle ground and practicing Muslims but did not wear the hijab. Again, the issue of fitting in was significant. Women felt isolated if they did not buy into the group's ethos, whether this was overtly connected with political Islam, as with some ISOCs,[40] or with the secularized and materialistic version of Pakistani culture promoted by wealthy foreign students who dominated some PakSocs. Thus, "belonging" is both complex as well as constructed and perceived differentially in Muslim and non-Muslim social spaces.

## Conclusion

For many Muslim women in this study, regardless of whether they lived at home or on campus, their university experiences were viewed positively, and, contrary to Bhopal's assertions, were not perceived as "dis-locating" them from their religion and culture.[41] Rather, many of my respondents, especially those with parents who expressed concern over the westernizing influences of higher education, felt that their experiences had helped them to rationalize their thoughts on their religion and culture in a positive sense.

The women spoke of the numerous personal benefits they had gained, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and improved marriage prospects, not to mention the practical benefits a degree brought when preparing to enter the job market. For those who entered higher education through circuitous and alternative non-traditional routes, especially those who entered as mothers, these personal benefits enjoyed a special level of significance.

Opportunities to make friends from diverse backgrounds were cited as another positive aspect of the university experience. What marks these relationships as significant were the ways in which several women spoke of having a sense of social responsibility when it comes to breaking down stereotypes of Asian Muslim women. However, they also spoke of how they sometimes felt "othered" by fellow students for not joining in drinking and clubbing activities or by the white middle-class students' lack of any effort to learn about them. The Islamophobic or racist attitudes and comments were also noted as a cause for concern. Some of the women studying arts-related courses with an Islamic or a South Asian content were disappointed at the colonial bias of reading lists.

In many ways, these experiences contributed to their efforts to develop closer friendships with other Muslim women with whom a sense of shared solidarity could be enjoyed. Given the great personal investment placed by Muslim women and their families upon higher education and its related benefits, higher education institutions must make a greater effort to ensure that they are seen as welcoming places by students from diverse backgrounds.

## Endnotes

1.   D. Tyrer, "The Others," in *Institutional Racism in Higher Education*, eds. I. Law, D. Phillips, and L. Turney (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2004).
2.   See, for example, H. Afshar, "Gender Roles and the "Moral Economy of Kin" among Pakistani Women in West Yorkshire," *New Community*, no. 15 (1989a): 211-25 and "Education: Hopes, Expectations, and Achievements of Muslim Women in West Yorkshire," *Gender and Education*, no. 1 (1989b): 261-72; A. Brah and S. Shaw, *Working Choices: South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market, Research Paper No. 91* (London: Department of Employment, 1992); A. Brah, ""Race" and "Culture" in the Gendering of Labour Markets: South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market," *New Community*, no. 29 (1993): 441-58; J. West and S. Pilgrim, "South Asian Women in Employment: The Impact of Migration, Ethnic Origin, and the Local Economy," *New Community*, no. 21 (1995): 357-78; T. Modood, R. Berthoud, J. Lakey, J. Nazroo, P. Smith, S. Virdee, and S. Beishon, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997); A. Dale, N. Shaheen, E. Fieldhouse, and V. Kalra, "Labour Market Prospects for Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women," *Work, Employment and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002a): 5-26; F. Ahmad, T. Modood, and S. Lissenburgh, *South Asian Women and Employment in Britain: The Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 2003).
3.   H. S. Mirza, "Black Women in Higher Education: Defining a Space/Finding a Place," in *Feminist Academics: Creative Agents for Change*, eds. L. Morley and V. Walsh (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995).
4.   F. Shain, *The Schooling and Identity of Asian Girls* (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books 2003); T. Abbas, "The Impact of Religio-cultural Norms and Values on the Education of Young South Asian Women," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24, no. 4 (2003): 411-28.
5.   A. Pickerden, "Muslim Women in Higher Education: New Sites of Lifelong Learning," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 21, no. 1 (2002): 37-43.
6.   L. Archer, "Change, Culture, and Tradition: British Muslim Pupils Talk about Muslim Girls' Post-16 'Choices'," *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 5, no. 4 (2002): 359-76.
7.   F. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women and Academic Achievement," *Gender and Education* 13, no. 2 (2001): 137-52.

8.  S. Housee, "Unveiling South Asian Female Identities post September 11: Asian Female Students' Sense of Identity and Experiences of Higher Education," in *Institutional Racism in Higher Education*, eds. I. Law, D. Phillips, and L. Turney, chapter 7 (London: Trentham Press, 2004), 59-70.

9.  C. Asmar, "Internationalising Students: Reassessing Diasporic and Local Student Difference," *Studies in Higher Education* 30, no. 3 (2005): 291-309.

10. C. Asmar, E. Proude, and L. Inge, "'Unwelcome Sisters'"? An Analysis of Findings from a Study of How Muslim Women (and Muslim Men) Experience University," *Australian Journal of Education* 48, no. 1 (2004): 47-63.

11. T. Modood, "Ethnicity, Muslims, and Higher Education Entry in Britain," *Teaching in Higher Education* 11, no. 2 (2006): 247-50.

12. D. Reay, J. Davies, M. David, and S. J. Ball, "Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, 'Race,' and the Higher Education Choice Process," *Sociology* 35, no. 4 (2001): 855-74; S. Ball, D. Reay, and M. David, "'Ethnic Choosing'": Minority Ethnic Students, Social Class, and Higher Education Choice," *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 5, no. 4 (2002): 333-57; L. Archer, M. Hutchings, and A. Ross, *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion* (London: Routledge Falmer: 2003); B. Read, L. Archer, and C. Leathwood, "Challenging Cultures? Student Conceptions of "Belonging" and "Isolation" at a Post-1992 University," *Studies in Higher Education* 28, no. 3 (2003): 261-77. There are some problematic aspects to the term *non-traditional students* that extend beyond my study's context. To imply that students, especially those from racialized minorities, are *non-traditional* can inadvertently create a pathologized reading of students who are not from white, middle-class backgrounds. This, in turn, deflects attention away from structural issues of access to higher education and refocuses it onto the marginalized group as lacking in the appropriate social profile. I am grateful to D. Tyrer for drawing this to my attention.

13. L. Tett, "'I'm Working Class and Proud of It' – Gendered Experiences of Non-Traditional Participants in Higher Education," *Gender and Education* 12, no. 2 (2000): 183-94.

14. D. Tyrer and F. Ahmad, "Those Muslim Women Are at it Again!" *Q-News*, no. 364 (November 2005).

15. M. Shiner and T. Modood, "Help or Hindrance? Higher Education and the Route to Ethnic Equality," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23, no. 2 (2002): 209-32; Modood, "Ethnicity, Muslims, and Higher Education."

16. Modood, "Ethnicity, Muslims, and Higher Education."

17. Brah and Shaw, *Working Choices*; Dale, Shaheen, Fieldhouse, and Kalra, "Labour Market Prospects"; A. Dale, N. Shaheen, E. Fieldhouse, and V. Kalra, "Routes into Education and Employment for Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women in the UK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 6 (2002b): 942-68; Ahmad, et al, *South Asian Women and Employment*; Modood, "Ethnicity, Muslims and Higher Education."

18. See the heavily criticized A. Glees and C. Pope, *When Students Turn to Terror: Terrorist and Extremist Activity on British Campuses* (London: Social Affairs

Unit, 2005). For coverage in the British press, see P. Baty, "Glees Report on Terror Riles V-Cs," *Times Higher Education Supplement* (14 October 2005); A. Fazackerley, "Police Anger at '"Handbag War,'" *Times Higher Education Supplement* (27 January 2006).

19. C. Alexander, *The Asian Gang* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); C. Alexander, "Imagining the Politics of BrAsian Youth," in *Postcolonial People, South Asians in Britain*, eds. N. Ali, V. Kalra, and S. Sayyid (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), 258-71.

20. An excellent report on the disturbances in northern England in the summer of 2001 can be found in C. Allen, *Fair Justice: The Bradford Disturbances, the Sentencing, and the Impact* (London: Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, 2003). A summary of these debates can be found in *Muslims on Education: A Position Paper* (Surrey: AMSS UK, 2004).

21. For an example of such perspectives, see K. Bhopal, *Gender, "Race," and Patriarchy: A Study of South Asian Women* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1997) and K. Bhopal, "South Asian Women within Households: Dowries, Degradation, and Despair," *Women's Studies International Forum*, no. 20 (1997a): 483-92.

22. An example of this media discourse can be found in S. Malik, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," *Q-News*, no. 36 (2005); and C. Coleman, "Amazing Double Life a Growing Trend among Muslim Girls," *The Daily Mail* (April 2005).

23. For a critique of the above, see Tyrer and Ahmad, "Those Muslim Women."

24. See F. Ahmad, "Still "in Progress?" – Methodological Dilemmas, Tensions, and Contradictions in Theorizing South Asian Muslim Women," in *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, eds. N. Puwar and P. Ranghuram (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

25. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions."

26. F. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women, Higher Education and Identities" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 2006); D. Tyrer and F. Ahmad, *Muslim Women and Higher Education: Identities, Experiences and Prospects, A Summary Report* (European Social Fund and Liverpool: John Moores University, 2006); *Moving on up? Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black Caribbean Women and Work: Early Findings* (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006).

27. A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 129.

28. Archer, et al., *Higher Education and Social Class*.

29. For example, see Malik, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" and Coleman, "Amazing Double Life."

30. Having said this, I have no reason to question my respondents' sincerity, as they were all volunteers and assured confidentiality. In fact, some had revealed personal details that, at first, would seem to question prevailing notions of "Muslim women" (one was an unmarried mother). But even here, based on my data the sensationalized accounts found in the recent Muslim and non-Muslim media are hard to sustain.

31. Based on personal correspondence with D. Tyrer, European Social Fund project director, "Muslim Women and Widening Access to Higher Education" (Liverpool: John Moores University, 2005).

32. Interestingly, such extreme representations of female Muslim university students "having gone off the rails" have captured the media's imagination (cf. Malik, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" and Coleman, "Amazing Double Life") However, my study and others (e.g., the European Social Fund-supported study based at Liverpool's John Moores University) indicate that such a situation being the norm was particularly limited, if not absent. See D. Tyrer, *Race, Ethnicity, and Muslim Women Students' Identities* (Liverpool: John Moores University, 2006). (working paper.)

33. Tyrer and Ahmad, "Those Muslim Women."

34. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions"; Ahmad et al, *South Asian Women and Employment*.

35. For instance, see Bhopal, *Gender, "Race," and Patriarchy* and "South Asian Women." See also her "How Gender and Ethnicity Intersect: The Significance of Education, Employment, and Marital Status," *Sociological Research Online* 3, no. 3 (1998): 1-16.

36. S. Gilliat-Ray, *Higher Education and Student Religious Identity* (Britain: The Department of Sociology, the University of Exeter and the Interfaith Network for the UK, 1999).

37. To briefly discuss the concepts of `izzat and *gender* at this juncture will not do justice to their centrality and the multiple meanings they can hold when considering the present sample group. Instead, these are discussed in more detail in F. Ahmad, "The Scandal of 'Arranged Marriages' and the Pathologisation of BrAsian Families," in *Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*, eds. N. Ali, V. Kalra, and S. Sayyid (London: Hurst Publications, 2005); F. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women."

38. It is worth noting that since student fees were introduced in Britain in 1998, several white students have also opted to remain at home for longer.

39. Such self-imposed humorous terms adopted by female Muslim students are further discussed in Ahmad et al., *South Asian Women and Employment*; F. Ahmad, "The Scandal of 'Arranged Marriages,'"; and F. Ahmad, "Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women."

40. Some ISOCs in the late 1990s were dominated by the Hizb-ut Tahrir Party (HT). This non-violent political organization came under government scrutiny after the July 7 bombings in London for its alleged advocacy of Muslim non-engagement with non-Muslim society.

41. Bhopal, *Gender, "Race," and Patriarchy* and "How Gender and Ethnicity Intersect."