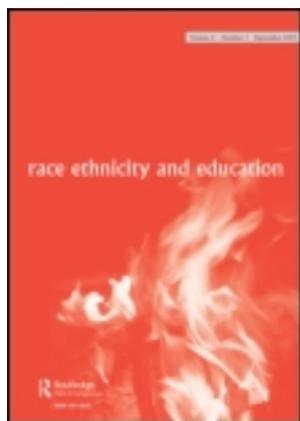


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Deveiling body stories: Muslim girls negotiate visual, spatial, and ethical hijabs

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***Deveiling* body stories: Muslim girls negotiate visual, spatial, and ethical hijabs**

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This article describes a collaborative research project that took place in two south-western US border towns and sought to understand how four *muslim* girls (age 14–17) expressed and negotiated their bodily learning experiences. Drawing on both the work of *arab–muslim* critical feminist Fatima Mernissi who utilized classical Islamic tools of research and my positionalities as *arabyyah-muslimah*, I used insider's methods to discuss how three *hijabs* (veils) – the visual, spatial, and ethical – acted as a central genderizing discourse that challenged the girls' learning opportunities. This article shows how the girls' parents enforced these three *hijabs*; how the girls questioned and *deveiled* the *hijabs* in their dress, mobility in public places, and physical behavior around boys. This inquiry is a call for critical feminist researchers and educators to recognize how these three *hijabs* form a key genderizing discourse in the lives of *muslim* girls. It also presents the importance of: (1) working *with muslim* girls as agents in their own lives; (2) critical engagement with difference between researchers/educators and *muslim* communities; and (3) practicing a critically reflexive pedagogy of *deveiling*.

Keywords: Muslim girls; veil; hijab; body; gender; discourse; agency; insider and in-between methodology; positionalities

Introduction

The reason I do wear [the headscarf] sometimes is to please my parents.... You are not supposed to make your body for men to see so they will think about bad things about you or know you by your body. [Layla]

In the *Qur'an*, it doesn't say it's not haram to date. It just says there should be no physical contact between men and woman before marriage. [Amy]

This article is part of larger project that took place in a local *Muslim* community in two south-western US border towns and extended over a 14-month period. It was a collaborative research project grounded in my commitment to understand how four *muslim*¹ girls (age 14–17) expressed and negotiated their bodily learning experiences. To approach this understanding, I draw on the

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work of *arab-muslim* feminist Fatima Mernissi (1991), to explore how these *muslim* girls negotiated a genderizing discourse, which I refer to as the *hijab* discourse (Hamzeh and Oliver 2010).

The Arabic noun *hijab* (veil) is based on the root verb *hjb* that means to cover, shelter, and establish a boundary, or border. Mernissi (1991) deconstructed the meanings of three *hijabs* or veils – visual, spatial, and ethical – in Islam’s fundamental and primary texts, the *Qur’an* and the *Hadīth*.² She showed that the *hijab* is not only the narrow and static visual representation of the headscarf some *muslim* women wear. It is also the spatial *hijab*, the border that challenges *muslim* females’ mobility in public spaces, and the ethical *hijab*, the protector that shelters them from forbiddens, *harams*, like physical/sexual encounters with males. Mernissi’s re-readings of how the *hijab* is a multidimensional embodiment of interwoven subtle values and practices helped further theorize how the *hijab* is enabled as *the* genderizing discourse in the lives of *muslim* women (Mernissi 1991). Moreover, I draw on the work of critical feminist scholars like Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) who write that discourse is a:

Complex interconnected webs of modes of being, thinking, and acting... they are always located on temporal and spatial axes; thus they are historically and culturally specific. We are always already constituted within discourse, and the discourses that operate on and in us simultaneously at the levels of desire and reason (82).

I also draw on the work of post-structural feminist like Christine Weedon (1997, 1999) who theorizes how normative discourses are deconstructable and negotiable, and thus, how those who are subjected by them are potential agents in changing their consequential discursive injustice. Similarly, the work of postcolonial feminist scholars Sherene Razack (2008) and Jasmine Zine (2004) expose neocolonialism, anti-arab racism, and Islamophobia as the web of discourses intersecting in the lives of *muslims*. These scholars’ work helped me expose the discursive complexity in the lives of *muslim* girls, and enabled me to imagine the possibilities of negotiating the *hijab* discourse among other intersecting discourses in their lives.

Specifically, to understand how four *muslim* girls, Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy,³ expressed and negotiated their bodily learning experiences, and thus, how they negotiated the *hijab* discourse, I discuss in this article three main themes: (1) enforcing; (2) questioning; and (3) *deveiling* the three *hijabs*.

Muslim girls’ studies

In the past decade, ‘Muslim Americans,’ ‘Muslim Europeans,’ and ‘Muslim immigrants,’ emerged as a collective social ethnic identity and a phenomenon highlighted in the intense and complex post-9/11 social, historical and political context (Sirin and Fine 2008). With this as the backdrop, scholars in

Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand, Canada, and the US started to pay attention to Muslim girls and particularly to those who wear the headscarf in public schools (Elnour and Bashir-Ali 2003; Hamdan 2007; Kahan 2003; Keaton 2006; Limage 2000; Meetoo and Mirza 2007; Sarroub 2001; Strandbu 2005; Walseth and Fasting 2003; Windle 2004; Zine 2006a).

After the 2004 French National Assembly decision to ban all conspicuous religious symbols in public spaces, Hamdan (2007) and Keaton (2006) claimed that many *Muslim* girls wearing headscarves faced the risk of expulsion from public school. Consequently, French *Muslim* girls found themselves forced to choose between asserting their ethnic/religious identity through wearing the headscarf and exercising their right to a free education (Hamdan 2007; Limage 2000). Both Hamdan (2007) and Keaton (2006) argued that the implications of this ban consequently increased school dropouts among French *Muslim* girls, complicated these girls' struggles in making meaning of their 'ethnic-religious' lived realities, and accentuated their difficulties in making complex choices between home and school cultures. Likewise, Basit (1997) asserted earlier that Asian-British Muslim girls receive simultaneous ambiguous messages from their families and the larger British society. They struggled to negotiate both the local *Muslim* communities' norms of being a *Muslim* female and the 'stereotypical notions held by some of the teachers, which are apparently based on assumptions regarding the lives of British Muslim girls' (425).

In Canada and the US, researchers reported that schools responded to the requests of parents and leaders in the *Muslim* communities to abide by their practices of dress and socializing in co-ed spaces (Kahan 2003). Schools excused American *Muslim* girls from certain curricular activities and spaces (Kahan 2003). For example, many *Muslim* girls were exempt from participating in some PE activities such as swimming and dancing, as well as competitive athletics, and contact sports; social studies classes teaching anything related to sex or sexuality; and certain extracurricular activities such as girl scouts (Elnour and Bashir-Ali 2003; Kahan 2003; Strandbu 2005; Walseth and Fasting 2003).

More recently, Zine (2006a), a Muslim feminist scholar, worked in the schools of Greater Toronto Area and claimed that *muslim* girls in both secular public schools and gender-segregated Islamic schools struggle to make sense of their identity, gender, and faith living both patriarchal fundamentalism within Muslim communities and secular Islamophobia within mainstream society. Zine describes Islamophobia as 'the fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translate into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination' (2006a, 239). Accordingly, *Muslim* girls navigate between their struggles to negotiate both the 'traditional norms' at home (Zine 2006a, 250) and the racializing hidden curriculum in public schools. Particularly, Zine draws attention to those *Muslim* girls who wear headscarves and are struggling with their teachers' common assumptions 'that they were

oppressed at home and that Islam did not value education for women' (2006a, 244). These assumptions get translated into the girls' experiences of 'low teacher expectations and streaming practices where [they] were encouraged to avoid academic subjects and stick to lower non-academic streams' (Zine 2006a, 244).

Though these studies have brought *muslim* girls to the center of the anti-colonial, anti-racist, and multicultural educational studies, educators need to do more in order to understand how *muslim* girls continue to experience challenges to their learning opportunities, particularly in transnational contexts. According to the work of postcolonial feminist scholars like Sarah Ahmed (2002), Sherene Razack (2008), and Heidi Safia Mirza (2009) these studies disregard that *muslims* live an array of racializing and ethnicizing discourses which they have to constantly negotiate in transnational and diasporic contexts. Specifically *muslims* have to negotiate neo-colonialism, anti-arab racism, and Islamophobia within national contexts as well as sexism and homophobia within *muslim* communities (Ahmed 2002; Kugle 2010; Zine 2004, 2006a, 2006b).

Moreover, these intersecting hegemonic discourses become more complex to navigate when many *muslim* females live what I call *hijabophobia*, a gendering discourse hidden within Islamophobia. Zine (2006a) refers to this 'gendered Islamophobia,' as 'specific forms of ethno-religious and racialized discrimination levelled at Muslim women' (240). In other words, *hijabophobia* is an underlying sexist/racist discourse within Islamophobia that is complicit in essentializing constructions of *muslim* women and mainly those who are visible with the headscarf they are wearing. Additionally, it is a discourse that is 'historically entrenched within Orientalist representations that cast colonial Muslim women as backward, oppressed victims of misogynist societies' (Zine 2006a, 240). Arguably, this double phobia, though crucial to expose, it is limiting many researchers and educators from finding critical ways to counter these constantly changing and interlocking discourses. One, focusing on the exposure of Islamophobia and *hijabophobia* traps researchers and educators in reactionary debates of 'to veil or not to veil' (Hamdan 2007, 1) that subtly keep them from going beyond framing the *muslim* girl as *the* problem living with certain racialized norms. Two, it also traps them in tokenistic anti-Islamophobic (Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Stonebanks 2010) and policy-oriented inclusionary pedagogical approaches (Zine 2004). Such debates and approaches distract educators and researchers from considering the patriarchal discourses within *muslim* communities that *muslim* girls live day in and day out. In other words, researchers and educators, especially those who are insiders in/to *muslim* contexts, need to critically consider: (1) how *muslim* girls' lived experiences are constituted by the *hijabs* that act as a genderizing discourse, and (2) how these girls could practice their agency to counter the *hijab* discourse along with the other hegemonic discourses in their lives.

The hijabs: a genderizing discourse

Central to understanding intersecting discourses, especially genderizing ones, in the lives of *muslim* girls, and thus, addressing the challenges in their learning opportunities, is the exposure of the *hijab* discourse. As such, the *hijab* discourse is not the simplified argument around dress. Rather, it is the unexposed complex pattern of normative values and practices which act as a social force that sets the conditions for the construction of material reality (Hesse-Biber 2007) of *muslim* females' body (Hamzeh 2010). Arguably then, the *hijab* discourse is the genderizing discourse that utilizes *muslim* females' bodies as sites through which their ways of thinking and acting may be hegemonized (Ahmed 1992; Badran 2009; Mernissi 1991).

To expose the *hijab* discourse, I will briefly discuss in the following how three *hijabs* – visual, spatial, and ethical – have become the genderizing discourse that inscribes itself on female *muslim* body through: (1) the visible normative values and practices of dress, and (2) a set of interrelated invisible and consequently hegemonizing norms. One, given the wider linguistic scope of the verb *hjb*, to cover, hide, shelter, protect, and establish a boundary, barrier, border, screen, curtain, or threshold; Mernissi (1991) argues that the *hijab* means more than the visual *hijab* or the static and narrow representation of the head cover/scarf *muslim* women use. Mernissi exposes how the canonical Arabic dictionary (*Lisan Al Arab*), popularized and limited the usage of the *hijab* to the physical and (hyper)visible, and thus, obscured its non-visual or more subtle and potentially fluid spatial and ethical meanings. Controlling language, Mernissi argues, led to the *hijabs* becoming fixed and unquestionable, and thus, partly enabling a genderizing discourse so central in the lives of *muslim* women.

Drawing on critical feminist epistemologies and utilizing major classical methodologies of Islamic exegesis (*tafsir*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), Linda Clarke (2003) and Fatima Mernissi (1991), like many *muslim* scholars, did their own *ijtihad*, rigorous research. Turning directly to the *Qur'an* and the *Hadīth*, they deconstructed the *hijab* and *hijab*-related meanings in both the main *Qur'anic* verses (7:46; 17:45; 19:17; 33:53; 38:32; 41:5; 41:51; 83:15; 24:31; 33:59; 6:25; 12:107; 18:57; 50:22; 33:32 and 33:33) and other reports of the *Hadīth*. To deconstruct the *hijab*, Clarke and Mernissi utilized classical Islamic tools of textual interpretation. First, by using *asbab al nuzul*,⁴ they contextualized *Qur'anic* verses; and second, by using *isnad* (reliability) and *matn* (validity) they exposed the narrators' androcentric positionalities, and thus, de-authenticated the very popular *Hadīth* reports.

In this work, Mernissi and Clarke, presented alternative interpretations to the *hijabs*, and thus, showed how the *hijabs* have enabled a genderizing discourse. They showed how, for too long, the very few *hijab Qur'anic* verses that emphasized only the visual and spatial were decontextualized and dehistoricized. More importantly, this emphasis on the physical *hijabs* was made

mainly at the expense of obscuring a fourth *hijab*, the spiritual. According to Mernissi, this is the *hijab* that *muslims* should pursue to cross because ‘a person has access to boundless spiritual horizons, which the Muslim must aspire to...[and this] *hijab* is a negative phenomenon, a disturbance, a disability [that makes a Muslim] not perceive the divine light in [her/] his soul’ (1991, 95). The fourth *hijab* is referred to in *Qur’an* as the spiritual separation from knowledge, thus, it is *the hijab* that *muslims* were called to pay more attention to, reflect on, and cross in pursuit of knowing *Allah* and the Prophet’s message more deeply. That is, though this fourth *hijab* is prominent in the *Qur’an* and it is reiterated in the *Quran* much more (in ten out of sixteen verses) than the other three *hijabs*, it was obscured by popularizing the physicality of the first two. Thus, the tactics of popularising the decontextualized *Qur’anic* interpretations of the physical *hijab*’s and obscuring the spiritual *hijab*, helped the construction and the survival of a genderizing discourse challenging *muslim* females for centuries.

Additionally, Clarke and Mernissi showed how given that positivist male scholars were the exclusive interpreters of the *hijab* and *hijab*-related verses, their androcentric stands helped in the fixing and prominence of the physical – visual and spatial – *hijabs* and consequently containing *muslim* female bodies. They also showed how in a context in which violence against women was prevalent, androcentric narrators of the *Hadīth* – who also inherited the patriarchal discourses of their pre-Islam context (Ahmed 1992) – were able to popularize misogynist, weakly authenticated, or even unauthenticated *ahadīth*. In this, *muslim* women were constructed as a *problem* to be feared, and thus, needed to be contained through their dress and mobility in public spaces. Controlling access to the interpretation of the sacred texts and popularizing the androcentric meanings of the physical *hijabs*, Mernissi and Clarke argue, led to the *hijabs* becoming more fixed and unchallenged. Along with the control of meanings in language, the *hijabs* became a genderizing discourse that constituted *muslim* female bodies for centuries and is still challenging them to this time.

Methods

To approach the purpose of this study, I drew on two insiders’ methodologies to understand how four *muslim* girls, Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy, expressed and negotiated their bodily learning experiences. First, I utilized Mernissi’s (1991) deconstruction of the *hijabs* that *deveiled* a genderizing discourse central in *muslim* female lives. As a critical feminist and an *arab-muslim*, Mernissi used insider’s methods; classical Islamic interpretive tools, to access and question the knowledge monopolized by dominant androcentric Islamic male scholars. By uncovering the three *hijabs* – visual, spatial, and ethical, Mernissi helped me explore the potential knowledge beyond the obvious *hijabs* and provided me with possibilities of *deveiling* the discursive challenges in the girls’ lives.⁵

Second, I used my insider/in-betweeners or ‘located’ positionalities (Mirza 2009), as the main researcher in this study identifying as *arabyyah-muslimah*⁶. I am multilingual. Arabic is my *home* language and Islam is my religion by birth. Most of my life, I lived in contexts in which I was constantly negotiating the *hijab* discourse at the intersections of being an athlete and physically active, public professional, middle class, and out queer. My historical/cultural/linguistic literacies of Arabic, Islam, *muslims*, and the *hijabs* positioned me as an insider (Anzaldúa 1987; Mohanty 2003). My seemingly non-observant of Islam’s pillars, non-embodiment of the visible *hijabs*, and academic status all positioned me as an outsider (Hill-Collins 1990) from the *hijab* discourse. Moreover, negotiating tensions of differences in relation to the *hijab* discourse with all participants positioned me as an in-betweeners (Anzaldúa 1987; Mohanty 2003).

To draw on my insider/in-betweeners positionalities ‘as both a hindrance and a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavey 2007, 15), I practiced ‘strong reflexivity’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavey 2007, 15). I used my insider’s literacies to stay cognizant of my own standpoint towards the *hijab* discourse, and thus, more open to negotiate its challenges within this study, i.e. the difference of reading the *hijabs* between me, the four *muslim* girls themselves, and their parents too.

Setting and participants

Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy were members of two Muslim communities located in two south-west US border cities, *Los Velos* and *El Puente*. Mainly, the activities for this study took place in the spaces of *Los Velos*’ university activity center.

The girls considered themselves believers of Allah, attended a local mosque occasionally, and considered English their first language. At the time of the study, Layla was 17, a junior in high school, and identified as Arabian-American. Layla has been wearing the headscarf in public since she was 11. Dojua was a 17-year-old senior in high school and identified as Algerian. Abby was a 16-year-old junior in high school and identified as Algerian-American. Amy was a 14-year-old freshman in high school and identified as American-Pakistani/Asian-Pakistani. Initially at a *Los Velos*’ mosque, I met and worked with two, Layla and Amy, who invited their friends, Dojua and Abby. This process of ‘convenience sampling’ (Maxwell 1996, 70) allowed me to work with four *muslim* girls with diverse profiles, to spend more time with the girls themselves, to know them better, and to capture more of their lived bodily experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

The four girls and their parents signed two separate consent forms. The university’s IRB requested to specifically extend the anonymity and confidentiality conditions and make them very clear that disclosing data may only be done with the consent of the girls.

Data collection and analysis

Given that this study is a collaborative research project; I used a variety of interactive data collection methods utilized by critical feminist researchers working with young people (Sirin and Fine 2008; Cammarota and Fine 2008). The main methods included having the girls fill out a self-mapping questionnaire (Sirin and Fine 2008); take photos (Oliver and Hamzeh 2010); write in journals (Oliver and Lalik 2000); and engage in small group conversations (Hamzeh 2010).

I collected data in two stages over a period of 14-months. In the first seven months, I met with two of the girls ten times for approximately two hours each time at the women's quarter of the local mosque. During the second seven months, I met with the four girls 17 times (9–11 hours each time) at the university or around town.

Data analysis was three-fold. First, I transcribed each audio recording after meeting with the girls. I read the transcripts while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. 'Memoing and coding' (Hesse-Biber and Leavey 2007, 332) were two ways by which I identified and grouped repeated words and concepts. Second, I compiled all textual data sources into one document and did another elaborate thematical analysis, or what Hesse-Biber and Leavey (2007) call 'focused coding' (333). Then, I compared all of the emerging descriptive categories in different data sources in ways they informed the purpose of the study (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). At this point, I began to *deveil* and (re)read, the different emergent *hijabs* stories of Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy. Third, I rewrote the thematic groups into vignettes, which accordingly created the theoretical interpretations and the claims of this study (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). More importantly this last step helped me describe how the girls' different ways of negotiating the *hijabs* created the possibilities of change throughout the study.

Interpretations

In the next section, I discuss how Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy negotiated the *hijab* discourse, by mapping my interpretations in three main themes; (1) enforcing; (2) questioning; and (3) *deveiling* the three *hijabs*.

Enforcing the three hijabs

The girls' parents' enforcement of the visual, spatial, and ethical *hijabs* dominated the girls' talk and action throughout the study. Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy were monitored to abide by their parents' interpretations of the three *hijabs*. As I illustrate in the following examples both the girls' mothers and fathers monitored and instructed the girls' ways of dressing, places they wanted to go to, and people and activities they were interested in. However, as I developed relationships with the parents, some of them and at different times

in the study, showed that their *hijabs* were more multiple and negotiable than they initially let in.

Modesty⁷ in dress: 'I am Muslim I cannot wear a swimsuit.'

Though Layla was the only one wearing a headscarf and all four girls wore contemporary teenage fashion, all four girls were consistently monitored and disciplined to dress modestly. The girls' parents enforced the practice of the visual *hijab* in public every time they were going out. At times, the parents enforced the girls' modest dress in subtle ways hinting to them what they should wear before leaving the house and other times in very direct and harsh ways telling them exactly what not to wear. Every Saturday before leaving the house with me, each mother or father inspected her/his daughter's modesty in dress. On more than one occasion, Dojua's mother would ask her to clean off her face makeup before leaving the house and Amy's mother would go to her room to check what she was wearing before leaving. On the last day of the study, we all witnessed how Abby's father harshly gestured to her before leaving the house to go and change the clothes she had chosen. Moreover, in the second half of the study, Layla's father was trying to impose a stricter visual *hijab* on her, the headscarf as well as the *jilbab*.⁸ This change in Layla's father's interpretation of the visual *hijab* jeopardized her participation in the project's activities even further.

The enforcement of the visual *hijab* was directly related to the kind of physical activity and the public space that was available in this study. At the beginning, it seemed that the parents' enforcement of the *hijabs* was identical and not negotiable with any of the parents. For example, Dojua's mother instructed me that her daughter would only be allowed to swim in the university pool under two conditions: (a) in an area far from males' sight; and (b) by not wearing a bathing suit, but something more modest like long shorts and a long sleeve shirt. Not wanting the girls to miss out on the opportunities provided by the study, and helping me to find ways to negotiate the *hijabs*, Dojua's mother suggested that I should look into having the girls access the indoor swimming pool without the presence of males.

Amy who loved swimming wrote in her journal, 'I was starting to win competitions in this city but last year mom pulled me out. She tells me because I am Muslim I cannot wear a swimsuit.' However, Amy's mother showed some flexibility on how Amy could embody the visual *hijab* at the university pool, when she said, 'Amy is 14 and can still enjoy swimming.' What her mother meant was that Amy was not at the age yet where she would be forbidden to swim in public. For now Amy could wear a light shirt and long thick surfing shorts. However, wearing a swimsuit for Layla was not negotiable since she was already wearing the headscarf and battling her father's new orders to wear the *jilbab* too. Abby had no problem with any of the conditions inscribed on the other three girls and was apparently allowed to swim with her two-piece bathing suit.

The above examples also reflect that the range of the parents' enforcement of the visual *hijab* was additionally determined by the diversity of the mothers' embodiments of the visual *hijab*. That is, the starting point from which each girl was allowed to dress modestly in public or how much she was supposed to 'cover' or could 'reveal' of her body was partially shaped by the flexibility of her own mother's embodiment of the visual *hijab*. While Dojua, Amy and Abby, did not wear a headscarf, their mothers embodied the visual *hijab* differently. Layla and Dojua's mother wore the headscarf in public. Amy's mother loosely wrapped her head and neck with a very thin white or colored scarf and only when she was around men in public. Abby's mother covered her hair only at prayer.

Veiling-off spaces: 'He hates it when I go out...or stay after hours.'

The girls' parents enforced the spatial *hijab* on several places. Additionally, the parents' veiling-off spaces were complicated by the target activity in each space and by its potential to violate the visual and ethical *hijabs* as well. Football games, public pools, and dancing parties were some of the spaces that were veiled-off from Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy. Layla and Dojua were restricted from going to football games, even school games. All four girls were prohibited from going to parties, spending the night at houses of friends who were not *Muslim*, or any place associated with boys and/or with alcohol.⁹ They were all prohibited from staying out of the house after dark, as Layla said, 'When I do go out and come back after staying out all day, he [her father] gets mad, he hates it when I go out and keep going or stay after hours.'

For fear of violating the spatial *hijab*, Layla, Dojua, and Abby were not allowed to spend the night at a friend's house. However occasionally, Amy was allowed to spend the night at her best friend's house because firstly, there were no men in the family and, secondly, her friend's mother as Amy said, 'understands the Muslim thing.' In this situation, since there were no men in the house, there was no threat that Amy would violate the spatial *hijab*. However, Layla, Dojua, and Abby were forbidden from going to houses of girlfriends who were not Muslim even for day visits. Since men and boys may be present, the girls' parents did not trust that any of the *hijabs* would not be 'taken off or crossed.' Abby expressed how her opportunities of making friends who are not *Muslim* became more and more limited due to her parents' enforcement of the spatial *hijab*. Moreover, she had limited opportunities to maintain and/or make *Muslim* friends because she lived in town with a small *Muslim* community.

Overall, these girls stayed home unless chaperoned to and from a workplace or chaperoned at an extracurricular activity after school. While Layla and Abby have a driver's license they were seldom, if ever, allowed to drive alone. Layla was allowed to drive herself to school but not to classes at the near by community college. The other times when the girls had to go to places

related to their formal schooling, an adult or male figure from the family had to escort them. Particularly, Layla and Abby often had to have their older brothers as their main and constant escorts. Amy, on the other hand, was allowed to attend the homecoming football game of her school only because her mother trusted me as another escort. Abby travelled last year with her schools' football team over the weekend to a northern city in her state. She was the team's assistant trainer at the time. Her father allowed her to travel only accompanied by her older brother. Similarly, Layla was only allowed at points to go to certain public places if her brother was escorting her.

Abby, Amy, and Dojua were allowed to swim in public pools as long as they wore the modest swimming attire their mothers prescribed. However, Layla was not allowed to put on any swim attire and all together was not allowed to be in a public pool. Her father told her, 'Public pools are dirty for Muslims to swim in.' This implied that the dipping/swimming in public water was forbidden for Layla as a *Muslim*, and at the same time, it implied that the pool area is a place that violates all of the three *hijabs*. However, when the time arrived to go to the pool, Layla's mother allowed her to join the girls as long as she kept her headscarf on while sitting at the edge of the pool and dipping her legs in the water.

Challenges to socializing with boys: 'she freaks out if I talk to him.'

The girls' parents also challenged the girls' socialization with/around boys in school spaces and during any extracurricular activity. That is, spending time with boys alone, being around boys in a gender non-segregated space, dating, and befriending boys would be considered breaking or crossing the ethical *hijab* as well as the spatial *hijab*.

At the beginning of the study, all of the girls expressed their liking for boys but, as far as I knew throughout the study, none of them were dating. On more than one occasion, Layla shared with us that being *Muslim* and liking African American boys, whom she called 'Dudes' was problematic to her parents. Her mother never allowed her to be around them even if they were her brothers' friends. She said, 'because my mother acts like psycho around Dudes...like she knows I am crazy about Blacks.' The girls backed her up expressing how befriending boys and dating conflicted with their parents' *hijabs* too.

Abby: It is just he [her father] thinks that like I am gonna go get pregnant or something if I talk to a guy I swear.

Amy: My mom does think that too.

The girls also explained that they were not allowed to have relationships with boys before marriage – which may be a concern of any parent who is not *Muslim* too – but these girls were especially prohibited from having friendships with boys who were not *Muslim*. This was revealed in the following conversations:

- Abby: If they were Muslim they think oh that is nice and since they are not Muslim they are bad or there is no point in pursuing a relationship with him.
- Layla: Exactly.
- Abby: Because we cannot even get married to them.

One day, when the girls were creating their individual scrapbooks and were filling them up with many images and photos of both males and females, Abby showed her apprehension about sharing her work with her parents. She said, 'Are our parents going to see this?' When I assured her that it would be confidential, she continued, 'OK, good because I do not want my parents to see this [pointing to a photo of a young boy].' So when I probed and tried to learn more, she revealed that she liked an older boy who was an African American football player. She hung out with him after school because as she said, 'He is nice;' however she added, 'My dad does not like him.' A moment later Abby shared that her father, a school district math consultant, would regularly drop in and check on her at school.

In the above examples of the beginning of the study, the girls' conformity to their parents' enforcement of the *hijabs* was evident. They seemed fearful of questioning the authority of the *Qur'an*, the main source that legitimated the parents' *hijabs*. Layla, who wore the headscarf since she was 11, wrote in the first pages of her journal, 'the reason I do wear it sometimes is to please my parents...I have told my mother I don't want to wear it, but she feels it is her responsibility to make me and I have to honor her.' While Layla's age and respect for her mother compelled her to wear the headscarf, she had no room to question anything about it even though she did 'not feel ready to wear a hijab [headscarf]' and did 'not feel any different when [she was] wearing it and when [she was] not.' Additionally, she wrote that her mother asked her neither 'to argue the *Qur'an*' nor to question her father's orders to wear the *jilbab*. However, as the study progressed, each of the girls started to question the *hijabs*.

Questioning the three hijabs

Gradually Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy started using the time we spent together, as well as their journaling, as open spaces for questioning and discussing their parents' enforcement of the three *hijabs*. They questioned their parents' reasoning behind reinforcing the modest dress, prohibiting them from going to football games, and forbidding dating.

Questioning the Muslim/Islamic dress: 'does the headscarf prevent men from thinking "bad things"?'

The girls questioned the visual *hijab* in their journals and while listening to their music in the privacy of my advisor's study room. Layla wrote in her

journal about her struggle with what the visual *hijab* meant to her since she wore the headscarf for the past six years:

When I was 11 it [the headscarf] really bothered me, I did not want to go out...when I was young I was like 'why are they looking at me'...I faced the changes of this age and the scarf too...I would always always be with my brother and they are just always looking and then some of them like 'can I ask you a personal question?' then they will ask me why I am wearing it then I explain like 'because of religion'. Then when they ask more like I say, 'you are supposed to be covering up. You are not supposed to make your body for men to see so they will think about bad things about you or know you by your body more than your face or your personality' and then they like 'oh that is pretty cool that is cool.'

Abby and Dojua discussed why they thought their fathers inspected their way of dressing in public. Abby said, 'He knows what all guys think about,' and Dojua followed, 'it is because all Arab guys are like that, protective.' This moment presented to me an opening to invite Layla to question what she wrote earlier, which seemed consistent with what Abby and Dojua had been discussing. I used Layla's words and said, 'But do you think that the scarf prevents men from thinking "bad things" when they look at a woman with a headscarf?' Layla expressed maybe a glimpse of critiquing the *hijabs* and answered, 'No, I really don't.' I continued to probe and said, 'Right, how come?' At this moment, Layla started to see how men may still sexualize her body when they look at her whether she is wearing the headscarf or not, as she said, 'Because they will still see it.'

Later in the conversation more of this subtle critique emerged when Layla told us how her father prohibited her from going out with one of her school friends who was not *Muslim* because of how he had 'seen the way she dresses.' Layla continued to question her father's interpretation of her friend's dress and thus his prohibition of her to maintain the friendship. She told him, 'But she is like my friend...I did not understand it. I was like "I am not going to go dress like that, she is just my friend".' As Layla was trying to make sense of her father's judgment of her friend and her way of dressing, I asked, 'How does she dress?' She answered with sheer puzzlement in her voice, 'Like a normal American girl, like tight jeans and tight shirts.' I was puzzled too and asked, 'But you wear tight jeans and tight shirts too!' Layla answered, 'Yeah, I did not understand...I was confused more confused.'

Discussing prohibitions on going to football games: 'I don't drink so what is the big deal?'

The girls questioned the spatial *hijabs* when we were all discussing Dojua's parents' decision prohibiting her from going to a football game at Abby's school – even if I escorted her. Dojua said, 'Sometimes they confuse me but

I don't think this time it is because of boys.' When I asked Dojua's mother about her decision for next Saturday's plans, she said, 'We just don't like our girls going to such events like football games.' In this example, since Dojua did not think the males' presence in football games was the only reason for her parents' disapproval, I speculated that Dojua's mother thought of alcohol as the forbidden ethical *hijab* behind her decision. When I suggested that to Dojua, she said, 'I don't drink so what is the big deal?' On another occasion, I learned that Dojua's mother never attended a football game and when I asked her to go with her to one of Dojua's school football games, she politely refused. In this example, again Dojua told us how she was struggling to make sense of the conflicts between her desires to socialize in places outside her school circle and her parents' enforcement of the spatial *hijab*.

Later on the same day, during an hour long drive in the car back from *El Puente*, the girls continued this discussion to reveal more of how they were struggling to make sense of their parents' spatial *hijabs* and how they eventually – and maybe temporarily – submitted to the restrictions on places, activities, and people they could be experiencing. Layla clarified:

My mom was OK with it when I told her. But my dad is the same way as Dojua's parents like about games, like he will not let me go though one time and he let me go with my brother, so I think he is a little more OK with it than Dojua's dad.

In this, Layla was also struggling with the spatial *hijab*. She however accepted the minor privilege her father offered her by having her brother escort her. The brother in this case was supposed to be acting as both the visual and spatial *hijab* in public places to keep the gaze of men away from Layla's body. At the same time, he acted as the ethical *hijab* to deter her from interacting with boys. Layla struggled with these meanings of the *hijabs*, which reflected her parents' mistrust in her ability to make her own decisions over her body. She said, 'I usually do not question it because I see why he makes rules. I hate them but I understand from his point of view he is overprotective.' On another occasion, Layla's mother did not permit her to go to a school football game even if escorted by her brother, as she said, 'My dad is OK with it, it is my mom "god why do you want to go, you are not going to even watch the game" that's what she thinks.'

Struggling with the forbiddens: 'I heard in Islam it is not haram (forbidden) to date?'

The girls had several discussions about the ethical *hijab* that forbade them from dating and socializing with boys. The girls were struggling with how dating applied to them as Muslim girls and to what extent, and whom would they date or not date and why.

- Amy: Well you know I heard in Islam it is not *haram* (forbidden) to date, like you guys are all happy.... No it is like like if you are in college or something and like you are serious about getting married to a person it is OK to date them.
- Abby: But you cannot date a guy who is not Muslim though.
- Amy: I am not saying a Muslim.
- Layla: Hey, but that is not fair Muslim men can date non-Muslim women and my mom says it is 'because the man is the head of the household'.
- Abby: No, it is because it used to be that because the children will grow up not Muslim that is if a woman is married to a non-Muslim guy the child will grow up non-Muslim something like that.
- Researcher: Does it make the guy you like less of a good guy and less loving and less respecting to you if he is not Muslim?
No I think they would be more respectful. [Dojua]
- Layla: If it is a guy who likes me and wants to talk to me a lot he tries to look into the religion [Islam].

Two weeks later I asked Amy in her journal about dating, and I wrote, 'Explain to me how it is not *haram* to date in Islam? Or what would Muslim dating look like for you?' Amy wrote back:

In the *Qur'an*, it doesn't say it's not *haram* to date. It just says there should be no physical contact between men and woman before marriage. I think Islamic dating would be around the age of 18, when you are older and more mature, so you wouldn't just date a guy, because of his looks. It would be dating with a lot more respect.

In a later conversation, the group questioning the ethical *hijab* and dating continued,

- Amy: Some people only think of sex but like you can date without sex...it is like you can have a relationship with respect...people are different like you should be like older like you know older mature and not like 12 years old.
- Researcher: So do you think you all are old enough to date?
- Amy: I don't think I am [she is 14].
- Abby: 90% of the times you go out with some guy you have no idea about them.
- Amy: Unless you are really like he is one of your really good friends...I think dating is to get to know each other.
- Dojua: When someone were in love they would do whatever it takes just to be with that person, and religion or parents are not going to stop it, right? It is the love, both of them are in love and like like truly like there are no doubts about any of the love or anything and they like being with each and like no one can stop them not even religion or their parents.

As the girls continued to question the ethical *hijab*, Layla and Abby explained that their fathers prohibited them from befriending boys because as Abby

explained, ‘My father tells me that he knows what all guys think about.’ Dojua clarified, ‘It is because all Arab guys are like that, protective.’ Abby shouted to explain further why her father thinks why boys were not to be trusted, ‘he just says “once I was a boy, I know what they think about.” He thinks all guys all they think about is getting in your pants.’

Though the parents’ *hijabs* conflicted with the girls’ expressed desires to dress as they pleased, go anywhere they chose, and enjoy boys’ friendships and/or dating, Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy kept their questioning alive and began experimenting with ways to uncover all of the three *hijabs*.

Deveiling the three hijabs

As I moved through the study, the girls shared and illustrated their strategies of how they *deveiled* the three *hijabs*. In the safe spaces and activities made available in this study, the girls smartly confronted and argued their parents’ interpretations of the *hijabs*, and resisted their consequential restrictions on the ways they dressed, places they visited, relationships they made, and activities they participated in.

Redesigning the modest dress: ‘I would have fought him. It is just you were there.’

The girls resisted their parents’ visual *hijab* by using the activities and spaces in the study, and outsmarting them in their arguments. Every week when I picked Layla up, she dressed in her modest clothes – the long headscarf covering her upper body and the loose long over-jacket or the baggy clothes. As soon as we were a few miles away from her house, heading towards campus or *El Puente*, and while still in the car, Layla took off the headscarf and let her long hair loose or she took off the over-jacket to stay with her teenage fashion outfit and the headscarf. At times, she put some make-up on, took off the headscarf, and kept her baggy clothes on. Other times, she kept the headscarf but wore teenage fashion outfits where more of her skin was revealed. Sometimes, Layla wore a half cut shirt showing her belly especially if she was at the pool or playing basketball at the University’s activity center. Before leaving her house, Layla discretely tucked the extra clothes in her handbag, or she was already wearing the alternative outfit under the modest attire with which she left her house. Similarly, Dojua left the house without makeup but started to put it on as soon as we drove off. Both Layla and Dojua seemed aware of when and how to dress with modesty without violating their parents’ interpretations of the *hijabs*.

One the last day in the study, Abby shared how she usually crossed her father’s visual *hijab* when he did not approve of her dress choice before going out. She said, ‘I would have fought him. It is just you were there and like he would have gotten all like butt hurt and everything.’ Abby decided this time

not to confront her father on his *hijab* restrictions but she usually would either argue her way out or simply dress the way she liked.

The first time the girls went to the university pool, Layla had her headscarf on and a short-sleeved shirt and baggy sweat pants. Dojua wore a swimsuit with a very short tight skirt-like bottoms and a matching bra-top. Amy wore a sleeveless shirt with thin straps – showing her upper chest – and long and thin surfing shorts. None of the clothing combination that Dojua and Amy put on was in compliance with their parents' visual *hijab* or with the modest swimming attire their mothers prescribed earlier. In the above examples, it was evident that the girls knew when and how to dress the way they wanted and how to confront their parents' interpretations of the *hijabs* if necessary.

Swimming in public pools: 'throwing the rules out the window.'

The girls' swimming and choosing to spend more than one Saturday at the university pool illustrated their ways of crossing all of the three *hijabs*. The first day we were at the university pool, initially the girls decided to use the indoor pool. Nobody was there except one female lifeguard; that is, there were no males present – this was consistent to Dojua's mother's suggestion earlier. Thus at that moment what the girls were wearing did not violate the visual nor the spatial dimension of the *hijab*. I sat on the side benches with Layla and she was happy to finally see the girls having a chance to swim. A few minutes after the girls were in the water giggling and obviously having a good time, Dojua teasingly called Layla, 'come and jump in.' Layla screamed answering her immediately, '**I am going in** (shouting)' Quickly, she took off her bracelets and her colored contacts. I looked around and there were still no men in the area, and Layla said, 'I will go in as I am and if a man comes in please let me know then I will put on my headscarf.' Then suddenly she pulled off her headscarf and ran off jumping in the shallow end of the pool. For more than 20 minutes, the girls' giggles and sound of splashing filled the air. When the girls finally decided to move to the outdoor pool and Layla walked to the locker room to change her soaking wet clothes, I saw a male lifeguard coming on duty at the indoor pool. The timing of this was fortunate for the girls because the spatial *hijab* would have been violated by the shift change between the female and male lifeguards.

A few minutes later, Layla walked out of the locker room to the outdoor pool with a big towel wrapped around her and her black scarf loosely wrapped around her head while carrying her dripping clothes. Layla approached the girls and they started giggling. Dojua, Abby and Amy were already on the lounges sunbathing. Amy stood up to help Layla squeeze dry her clothes and said 'You look like Muslim women from Dubai.' They all laughed again. The girls already knew that there were different embodiments of the visual *hijab* in different *Muslim* countries and contexts and now they were experiencing a few of their own.

With her big fashionable sunglasses, Layla lounged back on a sunbathing chair and covered the rest of her legs with a towel and pulled her black scarf around her head loosely while shading her face too. For the next two hours, I sat chatting with Layla while Dojua and Amy joined them between a few dips in the pool. Any time at a public swimming pool, there were two ways in which Layla had to be veiled-off by the spatial and the visual *hijabs*. Firstly, Layla was forbidden to see the nudity of men and this meant not being in a swimming pool with them. Secondly, she had to wear her headscarf to prevent any man gazing at her body. However, Layla continued to wear long pants and a shirt, she still went into the water to swim with floaters.

By swimming at the university pool and improvising their swimming outfits, the girls continued to challenge not only the visual *hijab* but also all of the three *hijabs*. They later expressed in their journals that they had no regrets about their fun or their strategies of uncovering the *hijabs*. Layla wrote, ‘Last Saturday when I jumped in the pool fully clothed, [it] was something I will never regret. When I did that I felt like I threw the rule book out the window!’ Similarly, Dojua wrote, ‘Last week was pretty cool the best part was that Layla jumped in the pool when I told her. 😊 That was fun.’

Bending the harams: befriending boys and ‘black dudes.’

Each of the girls had one or more strategy for crossing or uncovering the ethical *hijab*. For example, Layla shared her liking of African American boys by including in her scrapbook the photos of her favourite actors and hip hop performers. She checked out the African American boys on the basketball courts, the gym, and on campus. Driving out of the activity center when Layla saw a young African American student, she asked me to slow down at the intersection, ‘Yeah take your time why don’t you. He is very cute.’ Later in the study, Layla surprised me by inviting some of her African American friends to the activity center for a basketball game. In this, Layla took the chances opening in the study’s activities and independently decided to do what she would likely enjoy. That day for an hour Abby and Layla played with whom Layla called ‘her Dudes’ while Amy and Dojua were swimming. Layla was wearing sweat pants and half a shirt showing a big part of her stomach. I sat for a while watching them, and it was clear that the guys liked Layla and that she was popular. When it was time to leave, they hugged Layla and thanked her for playing with them. I wrote in my field notes, ‘Layla is crossing the *hijabs* again and throwing more rules out the window.’

Close to the end of the study, when the girls were still working on the scrapbooks in my advisor’s study room, privately Abby shared with me her strategies of befriending boys.

- Abby: It is cause ummm my dad got mad cause he saw us talking and he is like 'I don't want you to be friends with him I don't want you to talk to him' so I was like 'oh ya ok' I just lie to him oh well oh.
- Researcher: So you lie to him?
- Abby: Yeah, cause then he gets all like noseey. He doesn't understand he just doesn't he is just like that.
- Researcher: How do you feel about your father restricting you?
- Abby: I am fine for now because he does not know. I don't have to tell him.
- Researcher: Doesn't it make you uncomfortable to lie?
- Abby: Ummmmmmmm, well like after school I can really stay till a certain time and then ah if he sees like that I am sitting with the guy and talking to him he is like (with a deep mocking voice) 'what were you doing and blablabla' I am like 'I was just talking'.
- Researcher: But why don't you explain to him?
- Abby: Ha, I just lie I am like OK 'well we are talking about class' or something. Right now if they don't know it is easier than explaining to them. I don't like talking to them.

Abby continued to show how she strategized to uncover the ethical *hijab*. She said, 'I don't want my dad to know [or see her scrap book with her boyfriend in it]. He like would say "what is this that I hear about you liking guys". Abby confronted her father with bigger forbiddens in order to stop him from coercing her not befriend boys. She explained, 'I say "what you want me to see girls"?' (The girls laugh) 'I told him "what do you want me to date girls" seriously "what the hell do you want me to do to turn gay or something"?' (The girls laugh). Then she added, 'He got over it. Well he never tells me about guys any more.' Abby continued, 'Our parents think they are smart.' And Layla added, 'They think they are smarter than us, yeah they are not.' The girls figured out their parents' reasoning about not befriend boys and outsmarted them with their strategies of uncovering the *hijabs*.

Amy on the other hand, had less to share about how they strategized to uncover the *hijabs*. Her mother gave her more leeway and allowed her to befriend boys as long as she met them and communicated with their mothers too. Yet, when it was time for the homecoming football game, the first for Amy since she just became a freshman, she asked me to escort her so her mom would allow her to go. Her mother was pleased that I could go with her because evenings were not suitable times for her to leave the house and take Amy herself. At the football game, Amy introduced me to some of her friends. Later, Amy left me on the benches while she went walking around alone with one boy who seemed to like her. I asked Amy to stay within sight and not to do anything her mom would not approve of. Based on what Amy shared with me in this occasion, Amy's mother did not know anything about this male friend. On the way home, I discussed with Amy the importance of keeping her mother's trust and friendship by sharing with her what she experienced that day. Amy assured me that she is open with her mother and that she is a very understanding mother. Again, in this short excursion, Amy figured she could

uncover and negotiate the spatial *hijab* in my company, away from her mother – at least once or until she shares it with her mother in the way and time she chooses.

Discussion

The combination of my positionalities as *arabyyah-muslimah*, maintaining strong reflexivity (Hamzeh 2010), and the use of a range of interactive methods (Fine 2007), all helped to better understand how Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy expressed and negotiated their bodily experiences. Particularly, I learned: (1) how the three *hijabs* or veils – the visual, spatial, and ethical – were consistently enforced by the girls' parents, and thus, how the *hijab* discourse was central in their lives; and (2) how these girls questioned and *deveiled* the three *hijabs* in their dress, mobility in public places, and physical behavior around boys. That is, I learned that Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy not only negotiated the challenges of the *hijab* discourse day in and day out, but more importantly they clearly called for teachers and researchers to rethink their approaches by working with them as agents in finding alternative ways of learning their bodies.

The centrality of the hijab discourse

The *hijab* discourse was apparently central in the lives of Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy. The *hijab* discourse was reflected in the parents' daily monitoring and enforcement of the visual, spatial, and ethical *hijabs* in the lives of their daughters. The *hijab* discourse represented the parents' major values and practices that they wanted the girls to abide by in relation to their dress, mobility in public, and physical behavior around boys. Additionally, certain messages about the three *hijabs* confused the girls as it constructed them as gendered and sexualized 'objects' needing protection and discipline. These messages along with the systemic monitoring and enforcement of the three *hijabs* all acted in making the *hijabs* a genderizing discourse (Weedon 1997) central in the daily lives of Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy.

Almost daily, both the girls' mothers and fathers scrutinized and tried to enforce the girls' modesty in dressing, veiled-off several spaces and activities from the girls, and challenged their befriending boys particularly and socializing with girls who were not *Muslim*. Especially at the beginning of the study, the girls' participation in the study's activities was jeopardized by the parents' degree of enforcing the *hijabs* and fears of crossing over any of the three *hijabs*. Moreover, the girls' respect for their parents and legitimizing authority of the *Qur'an*, kept them at least temporarily conforming to their parents' *hijabs*.

Though the parents' range of interpreting of the three *hijabs*, and thus, monitoring and enforcement them was diverse and negotiable, they constantly challenged the opportunities of the girls' participation in any public activity –

including school as well as extracurricular activities. That is, the girls' participations in public activities were conditional to how much an activity or a place had the potential to make the girls violate any of the three *hijabs*. Especially at the beginning of the study, the three *hijabs* were overwhelmingly challenging to these girls' opportunities of learning in activities such as swimming, making friends whether with boys or girls, having fun. Ultimately, these three *hijabs* were strongly challenging to the girls' opportunities to learn their bodies and make their own wise decisions about/for them.

As the study progressed, while the girls were seemingly still conforming to their parents' *hijabs*, they were beginning to resist them as well in order to have more chances to participate in public activities. They began to cross the *hijabs* by taking advantage of any minor privilege their parents allowed them. With the weekly access to an independent time though with an adult escort, the girls began to discuss and question the *hijabs* that were obviously occupying their minds daily and dominating their lives. The safe spaces that became available in the study such as private journaling, small group discussions, and emails with me, presented the girls with opportunities to vent about the challenges of the *hijabs* and ask each other and me questions about the *hijabs'* meanings and relevance to the context in which they live. Moreover, they questioned their fathers' reasoning and gender positions on the *hijabs*. Accordingly, the girls seemed to be struggling with the contradictions between their fathers' sexualizing stands on the *hijabs* and their own desires to participate in any learning opportunities presented to them in their daily lives. At this point in the study, the girls began to bring out their own doubts about the inscribed meanings of the *hijabs*, as well as expose the *hijabs'* contradictions with their desires to learn and their strive to experience gender equity.

The spaces and activities provided in this study, the solidarity built among the girls, and the trusting relationship they maintained with me, helped the girls to begin making up their own interpretations of these *hijabs* especially those that prohibited them from swimming and befriending boys. Along this process of doubting and questioning the girls began to open the possibility of *deveiling* the *hijabs* altogether and exploring ways to practice their agencies (Weedon 1999). That is, when young girls are given an opportunity to question the racializing and genderizing discourses in their lives, they begin to negotiate and challenge forms of sexism and racism in their locations and simply select what they like of the learning opportunities they are presented (Oliver and Hamzeh 2010).

The possibilities of deveiling: alternative ways of learning and practicing agency

In this study, Layla, Dojua, Abby and Amy recognized and explored the opportunities within the activities and the spaces of this study and strategized to *deveil* and negotiate the *hijab* discourse. The girls' *deveiling* of the *hijab*

discourse was apparent in their awareness of when, where, and how to conform with, argue, and/or cross their parents' interpretations of the *hijabs*. They took the opportunities in the study to *deveil* the *hijabs* in two specific ways. One, though sometimes they showed conformity to the parents' *hijabs*, they chose other more appropriate times to confront them and argued their own alternative interpretations of the *hijabs*. Two, anytime they were in a safe learning space, they independently questioned, uncovered, reinterpreted, crossed, embodied and performed the three *hijabs* in multiple and fluid ways. Particularly, by swimming at the university pool – a main activity in the study – the girls *deveiled* all of the three *hijabs*. With no regrets and with enjoyment, the girls creatively redesigned their swimming outfits, threw 'the rules out the window' by lounging around where boys or men were present, and argued their parents' *hijabs* and bent them to befriend boys.

Through their continuous *deveiling*, the girls challenged the *hijab* discourse itself and as a result interrupted its normative consequences. As such, the girls uncovered alternative ways of learning their bodies by practicing their agency or *deveiling* their parents' *hijabs* altogether. In this process of *deveiling* the girls questioned, dissented, demanded, and experienced 'what could be' (Fine 2007, 613) and finally – even for short moments – changed inequities in their lives (Oliver and Hamzeh 2010; Zine, Taylor, and Davis 2007).

In the *deveiling* possibilities of this study, the girls troubled the *hijabs*' reiteration as the norm, and thus, even momentarily were able to interrupt the normativity of a genderizing discourse central in their lives. They showed that the *hijabs* are 'dramatic and contingent construction of meaning[s]' (Butler 1990, 190) which are not impossible to *deveil*. In this, not only did they expose the *hijab* in its three embodiments – visual, spatial, and ethical – by negotiating its multiple and fluid discursive possibilities but they also pursued a deeper knowledge about themselves by crossing the fourth *hijab*. As such, the girls *deveiled* the multiple and fluid performativity of the *hijabs* and the possibilities of the slippages within the *hijab* discourse itself. Arguably, the *hijabs*' performativity worked in the lives of these girls as an opening to challenge and topple the *hijab* discourse with its consequential injustices (Butler 1990).

To those interested in working *with muslim* girls and their parents in creating anti-colonial research, anti-oppressive, and critical multicultural educational opportunities, this inquiry is a call to acknowledge the centrality of the *hijab* discourse. It is a call to recognize the *hijabs* as another normative discourse challenging *muslim* girls beside the array of colonizing, racializing, and genderizing discourses targeting *muslim* girls' bodies in the transnational and diasporic contexts (Asher 2003; Fine 2004; Haw 2009; Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry 2009; Hamzeh 2010; Oliver and Lalik 2000; Razack 2008; Sirin and Fine 2008; Zine 2006a) – whether *muslim* girls are in state public schools or in Islamic private schools (Zine 2007).

This inquiry is a call for the need to use insider's methodologies, as 'unthinkable' methodologies (Lather 2007) and spaces of creativity, in the

collaboration with *muslim* girls who are constantly negotiating their multiple and fluid embodiments of the *hijabs* (Ahmed 2002; Weedon 1999).

Furthermore, this inquiry is a call for solidarities across difference (Subedi and Daza 2008). It is a call for reflexive engagement with the difficult tensions of difference (Asher 2003, 2005, 2007; Commarota and Fine 2008), those differences that may emerge between all participants who are negotiating the *hijab* as a discourse – not as a headscarf. It is a call for working *with muslim* girls as theorizers of possibilities (Hamzeh 2010) and as the main agents of change in their own lives. It is a call for creating a ‘legacy of inquiry’ (Weis and Fine 2004, 98–99), a process of change that enables the disruption of normative discourse (Mirza 2009) and opens possibilities for social justice and equity (Hamzeh 2010). It is a call for opening spaces of struggle and uprising and cultivating moments of meaning and shifts of consciousness (Mohanty 2003). It is a call for an alternative anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro 2002), a ‘contingent, strategic, strong and vigilant’ (Mirza 2006, 153) pedagogy, a critically reflexive pedagogy (Asher 2007), and an insight of love (hooks 1994). This inquiry is an urgent call for what I herein name, the research and pedagogy of *deveiling*, in response to Abby’s words:

I don’t get it. I know my parents try to shield us from things which they think we need protection from but in reality this is why I personally rebel because I DON’T NEED this. Just because I’m not Christian and just because I hang out with them doesn’t mean that I do what they do. I can watch after myself and do what’s right but they don’t let me be independent. The more they try to cling on the faith the more I want to go away from them.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, I alternate between using *Muslim* and *muslim* as analytical and political categories useful in ‘counter-hegemonic struggles’ but also helpful in acknowledging ‘the fluidity of cultural expressions, especially of those in the diasporic communities’ (Khan 2002, xxii).
2. *Hadīth* or *ahadīth* are ‘reports of incidents in which the Prophet Muhammad said or did something that was observed by his followers and passed on orally until later written down’ (Kugle 2010, 73). The *Hadīth*, Islam’s primary text after the *Qur’an*, have become the reference that serves to establish the exemplary pattern (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet’s life that guides and teaches the believers in their behavior and daily life (Clarke 2003; Kugle 2010).
3. The participants’ names in this paper were pseudonyms that the girls selected themselves.
4. *asbab al nuzul* is interpretative tool used to uncover the context of the revelation or the occasion upon which a certain *Qur’anic* verse was revealed.
5. Drawing on Mernissi’s deconstruction of the *hijabs* not only opened the possibilities to go beyond the popular fixed representations of the visual *hijab*, but also exposed the multiplicities of the three *hijabs*. Further, with insider’s methodologies Mernissi crossed the fourth *hijab* and asserted that the veiled muslim is blinded from deeper knowledge as he/she ‘does not know how to explore his[her] extraordinary capacities for multiple perceptions’ (Mernissi 1991, 95). That is,

Mernissi showed the potentials of *deveiling* the invisible *hijabs* in understanding the complexity the lives of *muslims*.

6. *arab-muslim* female.
7. Modesty is the virtue by which a *Muslim* maintains her/his decency, moderation, humility, and respect in dress and in behavior (Mernissi 1991).
8. The *jilbab* is the loose long shapeless jacket worn over regular clothes in public.
9. To *Muslims* alcohol is a negotiable forbidden, *haram*. Some *Muslims* believe that they are forbidden to approach alcohol i.e. not allowed to trade, consume, handle, or be in close proximity to it and others believe they are not allowed to be drunk only when they are praying or even fasting the month of Ramadan.

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