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“Wearing A Headscarf in a Secular Society:

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to challenge the traditional approaches to headscarf practice in social science literature. A considerable number of studies on the issue are obsessed with the politicization of the practice and they a-priori reduce the headscarf into a political symbol, at the cost of obscuring potential multiple meanings of the headscarf adoption. As an alternative approach, our argument contends for a neglected sociological side of the headscarf debate: *headscarf as re-presentation and re-producer of the Muslim self*. This work specifically concerns about the headscarf phenomenon in American liberal & secular environment in order to observe non-political meanings of the headscarf. The difference that American society makes has twofold dynamics: First, contrary to some secular Western societies where there is an official ban, the practice does not convey a political meaning; rather, it represents private choices of individuals. Second, unlike some Muslim populated countries where the practice becomes a social norm, wearing headscarf provides a powerful source for identity (re)construction in United States. The evidence for our argument comes from our field researches in three university campuses (Mount Holyoke College, University of Connecticut, and Yale University) and our semi-structured interviews with sixteen Muslim women living in the United States. Our research shows how headscarf practice provides a powerful source of inspiration and a

rich repertoire for multiple identity constructions of American Muslim women, including primarily religious, feminine, moral and communal identities.

This work aims to investigate meanings of wearing headscarf performance in the perspective of those who adopt this practice. The practice of wearing headscarf is also termed as “hijab” in authentic Islamic literature.¹ In fact, *hijab* is a broader phenomenon that is applied to both men and women as a religious obligation, which refers to one’s practice of choosing modesty in dress and concealing private parts that might cause temptations for others. *Hijab* is usually translated as practice of “veiling” in the social science literature but for many times the word, “veiling”, is employed in a very negative and pejorative way.²

Although there is a remarkable number of works on the headscarf issue, these studies focus on politicization of the headscarf practice and power struggles between nation-state and headscarf protest movements (Lyon and Spini 2004, Terray 2004, Liederman 2000, Timmerman 2000, Delaney 1994, Moruzzi 1994, Mernissi 1992, Zuhur 1992, Olson 1985). These accounts of headscarf practice, however, a-priori reduce the headscarf into a political symbol, and therefore, obscure potential multiple meanings of the practice.

In regard to social policy agenda, oversimplification that obsesses only political meanings of the headscarf practice leads a more dangerous fallacy. For instance, in the official discourse in Turkey and France, headscarf ban is justified by some statements that seem reasonable at the first glimpse: those who wear headscarf are indirectly making propaganda of their religion and therefore psychologically forcing others to be veiled. If this is the case, someone would think, although the word ‘propaganda’ is defined too broadly, the headscarf ban is fair enough. However, by employing a symbolic interactionist approach, someone would argue that unveiling also can provide a

¹ In this work, we employed “practice of hijab” and “headscarf practice” as interchangeable concepts for the sake of simplicity. Therefore, *hijab* refers to the headscarf practice.

² Pejorative employment of the term, “veiling”, has been criticized by one of our interviewees in an eloquent expression that has worth to quote: “People believe covering one’s hair makes them oppressed. I think, the word ‘veil’ is in a sense an assumption in itself because a veil is used to conceal or hide something. By this definition, clothes should be called veils as well because they conceal body. Veil seems almost derogatory because it is so often associated with an obstruction or inability to see through something...But, if it is an act that one chooses to do out of one’s own free will, how can it be oppression? It is rarely said that nuns are oppressed, so the question returned would be ‘why is it assumed that Muslim women who wear *hijab* are?’”

psychological pressure to others as much as veiling does: Dressing codes cannot be thought as free from our social discourse and contextual meanings.³ Therefore, there is a vital need for a sociological analysis of the headscarf issue.⁴

Given the problem presented above, our argument contends for a neglected sociological side of the headscarf debate: *headscarf as re-presentation and re-producer of Muslim self in a given context*. Erving Goffman's conceptualizations of "performance" (1959) and "stigma" (1963) are relevant in our analysis. Since, as Goffman (1969: 5) points out, "meaning is very much bound to context," the claim raised here is that the practice of headscarf gains multiple meanings for its adopters and reinforces multiple identity (re)constructions including religious, gender, and moral identities.

This work specifically concerns about the headscarf phenomenon in United State's liberal social environment in order to observe non-political meanings of the headscarf. The difference that American society makes has twofold dynamics: First, contrary to some secular Western societies where there is an official ban, the practice does not convey a political meaning; rather, it represents private choices of individuals. Second, unlike some Muslim populated countries where the practice becomes a social norm, wearing headscarf provides a powerful source for identity (re)construction in United States.⁵

³ For the relationship between dressing codes and social representation see Moghaddam 2002, Shirazi 2001, Entwistle 2000, and Finkelstein 1991.

⁴ A number of sociological analyses of the headscarf exist in the literature. For identity politics dimension see Marshall and Read 2003, Read and Bartkowski 2000; for cultural dimension see Breau and Marchese 2000, Haddad and Smith 1996, Mernissi 1985; for gender dimension see Haddad and Esposito 1998, Ahmed 1992; for discourses of modernity and veiling see Gole 1996, 2003; for identity construction and headscarf see, Bartels 2005, Schmidt 2004, Killian 2003; for headscarf issue in the context of religious liberties see Moore 1998.

⁵ We frequently refer to "identity" as "re"-constructed and "re"-formulated rather than simply constructed and formulated because of our belief that identities should not be treated as 'category of analysis', rather they should be considered as 'category of practices'. David Campbell argues that 'identity' cannot be

Headscarf as Stigmatized Symbol and Identity Re-producer

Goffman defines “stigma” in his seminal work, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), as the following:

(When a stranger) is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others...He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma (pp.2-3).

According to Goffman, stigma constitutes a special discrepancy between “virtual” and “actual” social identity (1963: 3). Although there are a remarkable number of Goffman-inspired works in the literature (Marvasti 2005; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004; Fothergill 2003; Sanders 2000; Cahill and Eggleston 1995; Snow and Anderson 1987), there is no study to date on the headscarf practice in relation to stigma management.

We would argue that wearing headscarf generates a genuine stigma in Goffmanian sense for Muslim women in America. Our research shows that Muslim women who practice *hijab* believe that a particular discrepancy between virtual and actual identity exists in the eyes of people around them. The discrepancy leads these women to assert themselves in defensive position: “I cannot imagine myself without headscarf...I am more than headscarf, of course, I am not just a headscarf; but, my headscarf is a part of me.” Therefore, as explicitly stressed in the interviewee’s statement, there is a close relationship between stigma management and identity construction (see Sanders, 2000).

allowed to be fixed or final; because identities are always under ‘re-construction’ or ‘de-construction’ (1996: 164-66). For an excellent analysis of opposing views on identity in sociology literature, see Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; for divergent views on collective identities, see Gurbuz 2004.

This work shows that stigma management strategies empower identity reconstruction in two ways: reinforcement of personal identity and reproduction of collective identity. First, the adopters of the headscarf practice internalize their value symbol as part of their personal identities and attach a positive powerful meaning to it. The attachment of positive meaning to the headscarf seems very interrelated with the negative attitudes and ‘stigma’ in American society that labels the practice as a symbol of oppression. For example, almost all of the respondents reported that they see headscarf as a “symbol of liberation”. This common stance is not a coincidence; instead, this type of meaning of the practice is intentionally reproduced by adopters to overcome hardships that their “spoiled identity” suffers from (cf. Goffman, 1963).

Second, the headscarf adoption is generally viewed by many Muslims and non-Muslims as a symbolic expression of Muslim-ness as one collective group. In other words, people have a tendency to see the headscarf adopters as representative of Islam. This tendency produces either much positive feedback or much negative reaction toward the adopters. Moreover, social expectations either from Muslims or non-Muslims have a remarkable influence on the women with headscarves. In my research, a considerable number of individuals expressed that they feel that they represent Islam when they wear headscarf.

Method

Since we are from Turkey, a country in which the headscarf issue still remains as controversial, our personal interest in Islamic value symbols led us to question meaning of the headscarf practice. One of the authors of this paper is among the poor thousands in Turkey who suffered from the headscarf ban in a university setting and also some other domains called as “public sphere” in Turkey, and my later discussion with her

as a pilot interview in this project (after she came to United States to pursue an M.A. degree at Hartford Seminary) stimulated my interest.⁶

The data presented in this work is derived from our personal observations in three fields, Mount Holyoke College, University of Connecticut and Yale University campuses, and lengthy semi-structured interviews with sixteen Muslim women who are adopters of the headscarf practice. Choosing in-depth interview technique seems very useful in order to assess “subjective” meaning of the headscarf for Muslim women. This technique has been employed by a number of studies to assess the self-identification accounts of Muslim women (see Bartels, 2005; Schmidt, 2004; Killian, 2003; Read and Bartkowski, 2000). The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to one hour and were tape recorded.

Stigma and Performances of Headscarf Adopters

Since “meaning is very much bound to context” (Goffman, 1969: 5), one should consider general attitudes of common American people toward the headscarf practice in order to understand how stigma is constructed. Goffman (1963: 3) points out “social construction” of stigma by stating that “an attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself.” He maintains:

Stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatized and the normal, as a pervasive two role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connections and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealized norms that are likely to play upon the encounter. (1963, pp.137-38).

⁶ See Kain, 2005.

Therefore, we can conclude that stigma is bound by social roles and expectations and it derives its meaning from particular social contexts. Codes of dress can reveal social norms and define boundaries that alert people to make them realize what ‘deviance’ is. In his thought-provoking work, *The Fashioned Self*, Finkelstein (1991) argues that reading and classifying people by reference to their body, dress, and overall appearance is one of the significant legacies of modernity, which is still relevant today. In contemporary American society, caring of the self is overemphasized in terms of one’s physical attractiveness and body (Entwistle, 2000; Featherstone, 1991). Foucault (1980: 56-57) succinctly describes modern consumer society’s constructed norms and values in this regard:

Mastery and awareness of one’s own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, the glorification of the body beautiful...we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of repression but that of control by stimulation. ‘Get undressed- but be slim, good-looking and tanned!’

Hence, in such a consumer society, one cannot find hard to understand why the practice of headscarf is seen as a sign of oppression. Specifically, religious dress codes have been condemned as being an instrument for the social control of the body (see Arthur, 1999). This mode of understanding leads people to see headscarf adopters as un-modernized, unenlightened, not open-minded, radically religious, and non-free. In short, the socio-contextual factors of American society enable stigma process working for headscarf adopter by reducing her in our minds “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963: 3). The story of a college student articulates how the stigma works:

My parents never objected to my wearing the *hijab*. They thought that I needed to do what seemed right to me. However, I was still a teenager and there was a lot of pressure coming from classmates in high school. I was discriminated against, people pointed their fingers at me. I felt like people discriminated against me, because I made them feel uncomfortable by wearing the *hijab*. I was strong for two years and then I just decided to unveil. That was very difficult as well. The only excuse I have is that I was very young, and I wasn't strong enough to deal with self-esteem issues, adults and my own classmates attacking me verbally among other things. As always, I got a lot of support from my parents who once again reminded me that I was free to make my own decisions, and that nobody else mattered as long as I was doing the right thing. Then, I decided to wear *hijab* again.

Here, as we see in the story above, the stigma spoils the girl's identity. Torn in between, the girl feels that she performs a social role rather than an individual act. This feeling is understandable for the headscarf adopters because religious obligation specifies the situations for Muslim women to practice *hijab*; that is, one should wear the headscarf when she is before men who are not close relatives to the woman. Hence, the headscarf practice defined by Islam is meaningful in a particular social context because it addresses to a social relation. In this sense, the headscarf can be considered as a 'social performance'. As Goffman (1959: 22) defines, the term performance refers to "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers." Therefore, stigma process has particularly a remarkable relevance with the performances of the headscarf adopters.

Impact on Personal Identity

By internalizing and personalizing the headscarf practice, people actively become having "Muslim" identity not because of their parents' appreciation of Islam but their

enthusiastically embraced that identity. This process can be seen as a transformation from ascribed status of Muslim identity to an achieved status of Muslimness (cf. Bartels, 2005). One interviewee described her own experience as following:

I wore the hijab beginning 10th grade. As a kid, it was always something my mother did that I looked up to. I had always intended to start, but pressure from my father actually initiated wearing it full time. After a few months, I grew into it. I have changed my opinion, sometimes drastically, about it. Anxiety about my identity, Muslim and foreigner, in a possibly hostile country to both facets of my identity made me stop wearing it in the beginning at college. Personal lack of strength intertwined with a changing mindset made it continue. Over the years, I have changed views from it being cultural context specific, to “obligation” only in terms of male chauvinistic views, to “no, it’s liberating” (this is not chronological)...Now, I try to wear it every Friday, to acknowledge that I do believe in some of its ideals: to remind myself and others of my pride in my Muslim identity.

As we see in the account above, as adopter struggles with the stigma, the meaning of the headscarf practice changes in her mind. Then, headscarf becomes a “liberating” symbol. The interviewees expressed the different dimensions of the practice; some insisted upon its religious meanings, some pointed out gender component, and some others mentioned moral aspects. In their diverse accounts, however, almost all of them referred to the one similar point: liberating and empowering force of the practice.

Hijab as a Performance of Religious Identity

Headscarf is first and foremost a religious symbol for its adopters. Almost all interviewees, in one way or another, stated that they wear *hijab* because of their desire to actively appreciate their religious identities. As one interviewee put it,

I am covering myself for protection and as a duty to God. I am not, however, hiding myself from the world...Through *hijab*, I find I have grown for the better as a Muslim and as I am a full-time Muslim, I think it appropriate for the rest of my practices as a Muslim to be full-time as well.

As a performance of religious identity, the practice of headscarf reinforces the religiosity. One respondent's answer clearly shows her strength in her belief:

I do not simply think that the veil is a religious obligation; instead I am absolutely certain that it is. The evidence for this is in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* and all of the traditional Islamic literature. As a Muslim woman who considers herself to be "practicing" the religion, these sources are what bring me to this belief...Hijab doesn't just mean a head covering for women, it is a modest dress code for all Muslims. My view has been influenced by one line in the Quran that instructs the believing women to cover their hair and guard their modesty.

The performer of religious identity usually takes an educational accounting (see Marvasti, 2005) by explaining reasoning of the *hijab* to others. This further reinforces one's own religious identity:

I think wearing *hijab* has definitely worked for the better for me. I became more assured of myself. Through having to defend my reasons for wearing it, I have acquired more knowledge on Islam.

Another interviewee's account indicates this process of identity reproduction as well:

Wearing *hijab* has definitely increased by spirituality because people see me in it and they see me foremost as Muslim. Often times the way people identify you is the way you identify yourself, so it definitely strengthens my identity of being a Muslim woman.

***Hijab* as a Performance of Gender Identity**

Adopters of the *hijab* practice see headscarf as a "shield" and "protection" from American secular lifestyle. This leads a new definition of feminine identity as one respondent put it straightforwardly:

Wearing *hijab* has made me a stronger woman; I feel that I have a stronger sense of self, since people listen to me rather than my body...Many people critique *hijab* as a force to oppress women and curtail a woman's freedom. However, I severely question these critiques, in order to be liberated must a woman be judged

for external beauty rather than internal beauty and intellect? My life is more focused on matters that are important to me, rather than finding the nicest hair style that will attract attention, or even dress in order to deter unwanted gazes and comments.

Another respondent stated in a similar boldness:

It is easy to forget the ‘oppression’ that women are confronted with daily via mass media who display images of the ‘ideal woman.’ The unrealistic goal of obtaining the ideal body to flaunt steals our time that we could dedicate to helping others, learning, educating, or any number of things. When we are free from the constraints of the society we are truly liberated, and I feel anything but oppressed when I walk outside on a warm sunny day with pastel chiffon *hijab* covering something that I, my religion, and most importantly God considers to be a treasure.

Here, we see that the concepts of freedom, self-respect, important values, and liberation are redefined in terms of new identity. The practice of *hijab* is intertwined with the true liberation. Being a slave of God is emphasized in a liberating manner: obey God in order to be free from social pressures. As one young lady asserted:

Many people think that the *hijab* is an indication of the oppression of women. I argue that this is not necessarily the case: for those who wear it by choice, the veil liberates. By veiling, one shields her body from the eyes of those who pass judgments based on attraction according to the guidelines of the media and society. No one can judge her body relative to how it fits into the warped standards of this society.

Moreover, the emphasis on liberation goes together with a new characterization of femininity. One college student asserted that her attractiveness of personality should be more important than her sexual attractiveness:

I don’t need to worry about men checking me out, or talking to me for sexual reasons...I find it more impressive to have a male attracted to my personality, sense of modesty, values, internal beauty, and obviously so much more than only he can see and enjoy.

She added that she avoids going to some certain places such as entertainment night clubs because her adoption of the headscarf becomes a constant reminder of her identity. For her, the headscarf symbolizes not oppression but rather “a shield against the danger of getting dirty looks from perverted guys, verbal and sexual harassment, provocative fashions and, most of all, being viewed as a piece of meat.”

This view of the headscarf as a shield is shared by another college student. She says that her wearing of headscarf is not only a “reminder” for her but also help others: “they become understand the limits to approach me”. Here, Goffman’s (1959: 1) excellent analysis deserves to be quoted:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him already possessed...Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.

Therefore, headscarf as “shield” and “protection” works as a reminder for both self and other. It regulates self performances as well as responses to the self in a social context. However, this self attempt of shaping the desired response from others does not always bring success for the adopters of the headscarf who are stigmatized. The headscarf adopters usually are getting either much positive reactions or much negative. As one interviewee described it:

From strangers, the reaction is usually mixed. Some are outright rude or presumptuous, glaring at me in the subway, making comments, or teasing. Others have sincere curiosity and are extremely friendly. At times they are too friendly.

Having extreme reactions in either way, the headscarf adopter becomes more assured of her connection with other headscarf performers. In fact, this point is

particularly related with the collective identity reproduction, which I will talk about in the forthcoming sections.

***Hijab* as a Performance of Moral Identity**

A Muslim girl reported that her adoption of headscarf was a “liberating” experience.

I thought that I would only wear the *hijab* for a day, but somehow it grew on me so much that I practiced it for a long time. I recognize that many people who don't know much about Islam or who have been misinformed about the religion think that women who wear the *hijab* are oppressed. However, that was not my experience. Instead, I felt more liberated because I did not have to dwell so much on my appearance, an issue I had been struggling with for a long time. With the *hijab*, I was no longer constantly checking my hair in every mirror, or car window that I passed. I had also started wearing looser clothing which made me feel more comfortable and gave me the freedom from constantly noticing my body, comparing my body to that of others, obsessing over its imperfections or using it to attract people's attention.

Although the girl's story seems similar to gender emphasized accounts as presented above, it reveals another dimension of the practice. Unlike the other respondents, the girl's gender-based explanation does not include religious concerns such as liberation by obeying God or having a shield for protection from sins; rather, she takes the practice as a symbolic of modesty:

I don't think the veil is a religious obligation, but rather is a symbolic of modesty, not only what you wear, but also in your thoughts and actions. I do respect people who wear the veil, however, at this point, I don't think that it is the most important focus for me spiritually; there is a lot more that I must accomplish which I consider to be important. Needless to say I think the entire objective here is for us to be modest and I do consider that very important.

As we see in this example, headscarf adoption sometimes is a performance of a moral identity, in which modesty becomes more important per se than a religious duty.

Impact on Collective Identity

People's definitions of the headscarf adopters' roles have a significant impact on the performers' identities. The headscarf adopters often encounter a much positive encouragement or a negative curse from their social environment. Therefore, they are expected to behave in certain ways in either case because they are seen as representatives of a group rather than simple individuals. As Sander (2000: 131-32) points out, 'collective identity' refers to a category in which social actors are regarded as representatives of particular groups when people "attempt to understand them and orient their behavior toward them."

Report of a Muslim girl, who does not wear *hijab* except during prayer times, articulates this aforementioned attitude. She believes that she should act in accordance with a *hijab* adopter's role.

I wonder if I would have had very different experiences had I worn the veil. Possibly, wearing it and still doing some of the things I do like dating guys or going to a concert would have seemed very hypocritical to me, so it has probably saved me from guilt and people's retribution. I guess wearing the veil sometimes make people assume that you'll behave in such and such way and I am not sure if I could have managed the constant struggle between what I want to do and what I am expected to do is the correct thing to do.

The social expectation has twofold dynamics. First dynamic is sophisticatedly explained in previous sections of the work, that is outsiders' (i.e. non-Muslims) negative expectations because of their oversimplification, which produces stigma for all headscarf adopters as being one group who are oppressed by their consent, non-free, radically religious and un-modernized.

Second dynamic is related with a very common Muslim expectation that the headscarf adopter represents their religion. Muslims deep respect to the headscarf practice sometimes leads them to expect seeing headscarf adopters in certain ways. This expectation that comes with a truly encouragement might influence the headscarf adopters either positive or negative way. One interviewee stated her appreciation of the situation:

I feel that wearing the veil has enabled me to express my identity as a Muslim woman more openly. Additionally, it has made me conscious that since it identifies me as a Muslim woman, I have to make sure that my actions and behavior are in accordance with Islam. Wearing the *hijab* makes me a representative of Islam, and therefore, I am required to project it in a positive light so that others will not see Islam with negativity. Similarly, I have become more conscious of behaving in a way that conforms with the *hijab* when interacting with other people, so that they get the correct message of Islam.

In a similar vein, another respondent said that her social interactions with others have improved by her practice:

Wearing *hijab* gives me a great freedom of not being afraid to express myself and that has worked well with my interactions with others. My outgoing nature- which I believe has been influenced partly by my observing *hijab* – has resulted in my knowing many awesome individuals.

To be seen as a representative of Islam by fellow Muslims, however, is not always welcomed. Another woman suffered from these attitudes:

Many people assume that a woman who wears a veil is better than other Muslim women and that she is much more religious than a woman who doesn't wear one. That's she is very strict in her beliefs and is not flexible. I think that this is all wrong. When Muslims say these things they are making Muslims the "other" and the ostracized just as much as a non-Muslim who puts barriers between "us" and "them". That is discrimination and misconception from within which is by far worse. A Muslim woman who wears a veil is not better than another Muslim woman who doesn't because she may be lacking in an area that the unveiled sister is strong in. They can learn from each other. There is only one Judge, God. He is the only one that sees the

level of belief and sincerity in a person's heart. For me as a veiled woman to say I am more religious than my sister who does not, is inconceivable and reprehensible because how could I dare to put myself at a level at which only my Creator has. All of the patronizing myths aside, I am a flexible person – and that comes from Islam as well, the middle path – because an extreme in any direction is not what God loves.

Conclusion: Forging Multiple Identities

In this work, we presented multiple meanings of the headscarf practice. As a stigmatized practice in American secular life, the headscarf adoption influences the owners' identity significantly. The headscarf practice is a social performance that might create divergent meanings in accordance with the individual and her social context. Since the performer defines her social relations with others by the headscarf, the meaning depends on the recipients and the context; and therefore, it is very much open to change. Also, the meaning is always re-constructed, because, as Goffman (1959: 9) asserted, when an “individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others,” the others “will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual.”

Thus, the performance of the *hijab* has both an impact on personal identity and collective identity of the adopter. In terms of personal identity, the practice is “liberating” whether it is seen foremost as a religious performance, or as a gender performance, or as a moral performance. Although we should acknowledge that the lines between these performances (i.e. religious, gender, moral) are blurry, the important point here is that the headscarf adopters re-produces a new type of personal identity by their re-definition of “liberating” acts.

In terms of collective identity, the practice reinforces the collective identity of the adopters in any case. If the social attitude toward them is negative because of the

collective group they allegedly represent, this stigma forces the adopters to explain others their views of the headscarf. They either give a more religious account or a more gender-based account. In each case, since they struggle with the situation they encounter; their collective stigmatized identity becomes more solid. As Goffman (1963: 114) puts, “the individual may find that his very efforts can politicize his own life.” On the other hand, if the social attitude is much positive toward them, they feel that they get this positive feedback because of their collective identity. Therefore, the social expectations from Muslim fellows make them to imagine that they are representing Islam. This predisposition reinforces their collective identity as well.

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