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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Peer Culture as Campus Policy:
American Muslim Women Students’ Identity Navigation”

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This paper is essentially the concluding chapter of a book manuscript in progress. In this chapter, I draw out conclusions from my ethnographic research on American Muslim undergraduate women. I focus on the relevance of the politics of religious identity to the construction of campus culture spaces. My research renders central the role of college student peer culture. It is in the spaces of the student union or the local bar or nightclub that diverse identities are most amenable to homogenization. Youth culture, the supposed great equalizer, which is supposed to be a common core for youth of all colors, is that which offers youth the status of normalcy. In effect, peer culture is the *core* of campus communities, compared to the peripheries of, say, Muslim-student culture. This *core*, ironically, is prominent off-campus as it is on-campus, especially in such metropolitan universities as Georgetown and George Washington Universities. As Bradley Levinson argues in *Policy as Practice*, campus peer culture functions as the default policy that defines what normal students are and what they *should* do. Disengagement or distance from this *core* of peer culture offers marginality and otherness. This *core* is also the space where connections are born (often through drinking together, dating, and other shared interests), as normal behaviors are performed collectively. (Muslim and other) students who avoid such spaces or are not involved in them lose the opportunity for such connections. They must then rely on the connections that occur in marginal, minority spaces. I argue that campus peer culture vis-à-vis Muslims and Middle Easterners is based on a foundation of Orientalist perceptions. This culture is not controlled by faculty or administrators, and only a sea-change in American culture at large can result in any changes in campus culture. I argue that the construction of a *healthy* climate must allow for the development of *whole* identities so that traditionally marginalized individuals may construct marginal identities along with mainstream identities.