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Understanding acculturation among second-generation South Asian Muslims in the United States

Syed Ali

This article addresses an understudied area in studies of immigration—why patterns of acculturation of second-generation immigrants vary. To address this question, I draw on ethnographic research conducted among second-generation South Asian Muslims in New York City. Sociologists generally assume that acculturation is an inevitable process, and that it proceeds from less to more. I argue that acculturation is a more complex process that varies over time and situation for individuals, and can even go from more to less acculturation. Building on Judith Harris's group socialisation theory and Murray Milner Jr.'s theory of status relations, I propose that acculturation is a dynamic status process, and that we can better understand variations in patterns of acculturation of individuals by looking at their peers—the kinds of intimate associations that individuals make, and the kinds of peer group norms to which individuals conform.

I
Introduction

Shameela, Hannah and Amjad are siblings in New York city. All three are middle-class, university-educated, second-generation Indian Muslims raised in the United States (US). Shameela, in her early twenties, was a typical high school student who listened to rap music and wore baggy jeans that swept the ground as she walked. By her senior year, she started associating mostly with other second-generation, devout Muslim women

Syed Ali is Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology-Anthropology, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York. Email: syed.f.ali@gmail.com

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and, although she was always religious, became even more devout and donned the *jilbab* (full-length body cloak). Hannah, in her early thirties, is not nearly as devout as Shameela, but does follow the religion for the most part, praying occasionally and fasting during Ramadan, though she occasionally drinks alcohol. She is 'Americanised' with her non-immigrant American peers, but brackets off her religious behaviour and identity from them. Amjad, in his late thirties, is agnostic, and married a white American woman. He has few South Asian or Muslim friends.

All three belong to the same economic class, ethnic, religious and family background, but show extremely different patterns of acculturation. Their example brings up two related questions: how do we explain variation in acculturation between individuals of similar backgrounds, and how do we explain variations in acculturation at different points in an individual's lifetime?

Immigration theories take for granted that acculturation proceeds from less to more, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly (see Gans 1997). While this is usually the case, I argue that acculturation can also proceed from more to less, that is, like Shameela, people may 'de-acculturate', or divest themselves from what they perceive as 'mainstream' culture and behaviour, similar to hippies living in communes, Moonies, and counter-cultural movements generally.[1] It can also vary synchronically, depending on the different groups of people with whom one associates.[2] There is a further assumption that acculturation varies largely between ethnic groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). But as the example above indicates, there can be substantial variations in acculturation within an ethnic or religious group, indeed, even within a family.

Acculturation, then, is a complex process in its own right that warrants a more nuanced theoretical treatment. To theorise acculturation, I draw on Harris's (1998) group socialisation theory and Milner's (1994, 2004)

[1] What these groups share is that their intimate associations are exclusive; their ties to the world of people 'out there' are minimised. Moonies lose ties with family and friends; hippies living in communes become primarily concerned with others in the commune. They conform to the norms of behaviour appropriate for each group, even if they conflict with general societal norms.

[2] This is a point that Robert C. Smith made at a panel discussion at the 2008 Eastern Sociological Society Meetings, when discussing how second-generation Mexicans that he studied could act *cholo* (lower-class, 'ghetto' behaviour) in some contexts, and 'white' in others, like at work.

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theory of status relations. I argue that it is conformity to peer group norms and differential intimate associations that largely explain why individuals show different patterns of acculturation.

Methods

My understanding of acculturation comes from the ethnographic research that I conducted in New York City among educationally, occupationally and residentially assimilated, middle-class, adult second-generation South Asian Sunni Muslims from August 1998 through June 1999, and September through December 2002. There is a tendency in the study of second-generation immigrants and religion in the US, and of Muslims in particular, to examine religion through the church (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Kim 2004; Warner and Wittner 1998), or through religious organisations (Kurien 2005; Peek 2005). One major shortcoming with using congregations as research sites is the assumption that the church grounds the community. Leonard (2003: 106), in her review of the state of research on Muslims in the US writes that there is 'little data on "unmosqued" American Muslims,' who may comprise the majority of Muslims in the US (Leonard 2003: 43). A recent representative sample survey of over 1,000 Muslims in the US by the Pew Research Center found that the religiosity of Muslims varied greatly; among all US Muslims, 34 per cent never go to a mosque, 18 per cent go just a few times a year, especially for Eid prayers, 8 per cent go once or twice a month, while 40 per cent go weekly or more (2007: 24). Only studying the church, then, would leave out the majority of people who rarely or never go to the mosque, thus giving an incomplete picture of Muslim life in America.

To address this, I used snowball sampling to locate informants outside of the mosque—since people like Amjad rarely go to the mosque, and people like Hannah do not go often. I conducted twenty-three informal interviews (thirteen women and ten men), which explored how individuals manoeuvre through the cultural terrain of being Muslim, being South Asian and being/becoming American. I examined how these individuals do or do not maintain their religious and ethnic identities, and the varying manners in which they acculturate. I paid particular attention to patterns of peer group formation, i.e., with whom these people 'hung out', and what kinds of norms these peer groups had. The people I interacted with in New York City were relatively uniform with regard to variables that

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are usually used to explain acculturation and assimilation—class, education, occupation, ethnicity and religion.

To further assess the degree to which individuals acculturate, I engaged in participant observation with those of varying religious inclinations at a wide variety of events such as going to parties, nightclubs and bars with the less religiously inclined; engaging with the more religiously inclined at mosques and other religious venues; and attending more family-oriented venues with people having a wide range of religiosity patterns such as weddings and Eid celebrations.

I also draw upon open-ended e-mail interviews that I conducted in 1999 with a non-random, snowball sample of twenty-two second-generation immigrant Sunni Muslim women nationally who have taken to wearing the *hijab* (headscarf) or *jilbab* (see Ali 2005).[3] The young women ranged in age from thirteen to twenty-nine years, and were mostly South Asian, but also included those of other ethnic backgrounds.[4] These national interviews supplemented the data from the participant observation and informal interviews conducted in New York City, providing a small comparative national sample (again, albeit non-representative) to New York City. These e-mail interviews provided a particularly rich source of data as these women had more time to reflect on issues of religious identity and acculturation than people would normally have in face-to-face interviews. This study is further informed by my having grown up as a second-generation South Asian Muslim in New York City.

[3] My sister in New York City and my cousin in Chicago helped me contact twelve individuals, who then helped me contact the other ten. My sister and cousin wear the *jilbab*. Of those who responded, nine were living in Chicago, one was in Philadelphia, one was in Houston and two were in New York City. Nine did not specify where they lived, though it is likely that most or all lived in either New York City or Chicago. All were born or raised in the US. Only three (all South Asian, including my sister) specified that they wore the *jilbab*. Some of the questions I asked included: Why did you start? Was it your decision, or did your parents (or other relatives, e.g., brother) make you? Did you get any resistance from family or friends? Did you get support for your decision from family or friends? Will this be a permanent decision? Do you have doubts at times? How do you resolve these doubts?

[4] Of the women I interviewed, sixteen were South Asian (eleven Indians, five Pakistanis) and six were Arab (four Palestinians, one Syrian, one Lebanese). They were mostly young: eight were in high school, ten were in university, two were in graduate programmes, one was a housewife with a master's degree and one was working as research technologist at a university.

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II
Theoretical approaches to acculturation

Acculturation has a long history of study in sociology and anthropology (see Shibutani and Kwan 1965: 470–91; Teske Jr. and Nelson 1974). Milton Gordon (1961: 279) in his classic formulation defines acculturation (which he also calls behavioural assimilation) as 'the absorption of the cultural behavior patterns [by the immigrant] of the "host" society.' For Gordon, acculturation is a first step towards other forms of assimilation.[5] Gordon's formulation of acculturation laid the groundwork for how immigration scholars look at acculturation—largely as an initial, though not necessarily inevitable, step toward assimilation (for example, Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001).

Among current strands of immigration theories, segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997) is most directly concerned with explaining variations in acculturation (see also Gibson 1988). Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 64) argue that patterns of acculturation are dependent on parental human capital, modes of incorporation into American society (the legal and social contexts of the reception that the immigrants face based on their ethnicity—e.g., whether they are more or less likely to face racism),[6] family composition (one parent or two), gender (females are more likely to be under the influence of their parents) and the level of involvement with, and control exerted by, the co-ethnic community.

[5] Gans, restating a Chicago School definition of the late 1940s, defines assimilation as 'the "newcomers" mov[ing] out of formal and informal ethnic associations and other social institutions into the non-ethnic equivalents accessible to them in that same host society' (1997: 877). The concept of assimilation has been extensively critiqued since the 1960s. The most notable critiques are from segmented assimilation theory which highlights the shortcomings of older notions of assimilation by showing how not all immigrants are upwardly mobile (Gans 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997) and transnationalism, which shows how even second-generation immigrants maintain links not only with their ethnic groups, but with their sending societies (e.g., Levitt and Waters 2002; Smith 2006). But the meaning and importance of assimilation as a theoretical concept for understanding post-1965 immigrants has undergone resurgence recently, rescued from ideological baggage accrued over the years in political and cultural debates over how immigrants should adjust (Alba and Nee 2003; Brubaker 2001; DeWind and Kasinitz 1997; Morawska 1994).

[6] For non-white immigrants, some writers refer to this process of heightened discrimination as 'racialisation' (e.g., Maira 2004).

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Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 53–4) describe three types of acculturation patterns among families across first- and second-generations: consonant, dissonant and selective acculturation. Consonant acculturation occurs when both child and parents gradually abandon the home language and culture and 'Americanise' at roughly the same pace. This pattern is likely to occur when the parents have greater resources such as higher income and educational levels. Dissonant acculturation is where the child learns the English language and American ways faster than her parents. This is more likely when the parents' educational and economic resources are limited. The third type is selective acculturation, where both parents and child are embedded in a co-ethnic community in such a way that the cultural shift slows down and promotes partial retention of the parents' home language and norms. Selective acculturation is further associated with having more co-ethnic friends.

For Portes and Rumbaut, acculturation is an intermediate variable. They use this distinction between these three types of acculturation as a basis to assess patterns of assimilation—selective acculturation leads to upward assimilation combined with biculturalism, consonant acculturation leads mostly to upward assimilation, though sometimes blocked by racism and; dissonant acculturation leads to downward assimilation, as these individuals assimilate into the lower class in the inner city (2001: 62).

While their argument is persuasive—segmented assimilation is after all the dominant paradigm in immigration studies in the US in spite of recent critiques (for example, Alba and Nee 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2004; Waldinger and Feliciano 2004)—it cannot address or account for the situation that I began the paper with: for variations in acculturation within the same economic class and ethnic group, even within the same family.

There is a parallel literature on acculturation in psychology (for example, Berry 1997; Berry et al. 2006; Bhatia and Ram 2001). Interestingly, neither of these literatures in psychology or sociology draws much upon the other. Berry, the most influential theorist of acculturation in psychology, uses a scheme of four categories (which bear a resemblance to Portes and Rumbaut's types of acculturation, and also to mine, which I elaborate below) with which to understand the psycho-social ramifications of acculturation: 1) assimilation, when the individual gives up

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her cultural identity to join the dominant group; 2) separation, where the individual places a value on holding onto her original culture and seeks no contact with the dominant group; 3) integration, where the individual maintains ties with her own ethnic group and the dominant group and; 4) marginalisation, where the individual loses contact with both her original culture and the dominant society (Berry et al. 2006: 306).

One factor that many studies of assimilation address, even if they do not put a great theoretical emphasis on it, is the importance of peers (for example, Gibson 1988; Waters 1994). While Portes and Rumbaut do discuss peers as a contextual factor affecting acculturation, especially with regard to factors leading to downward assimilation such as involvement with gangs and countercultures (2001: 59–62), peers do not figure as one of their main variables that account for the patterns of acculturation. In Berry's work (for example, Berry et al. 2006) peers do figure as one of the variables, among a host of others. Unlike Portes and Rumbaut, Berry's framework does seem to allow for an understanding of a greater degree of variation in acculturation within groups. But, like Portes and Rumbaut, Berry and colleagues see acculturation as a process of adaptation to the host society.

This idea that individuals acculturate to a 'host society' or American culture in the abstract is problematic. In their criticism of segmented assimilation, Kasinitz et al. (2004) argue that many second-generation children and young adults in New York City today, rather than 'Americanising', or acculturating to American society, are creating a hybrid second-generation culture—something that the models of Portes and Rumbaut, and Berry, seem not to account for. For example, Kasinitz et al. (2004: 16) write, 'the real cultural "action" may not be in the interplay of immigrant cultures with a homogenous and dominant American culture but in the interactions between first- and second-generation immigrant groups and native minorities'. The interactions between groups surely must play out through individuals, especially through peers. Peers are important to this new cultural form, but their importance is not theoretically specified by Kasinitz et al. I argue that, for a more nuanced understanding of variations in acculturation patterns, we need to look more closely at the effect of peers. That is, acculturation is not oriented to the abstract notion of a 'host society', but rather to concrete persons.

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III
Understanding acculturation: A status model

When I was young, my mother used to warn me, 'Don't hang out with those Americans!' (My pleas that I, too, was American fell on deaf ears). Implicit in my mother's understanding was the belief that peers have a tremendous influence on people's behaviour. Her fear was that by hanging out with 'those Americans', I would become like them.

To better understand acculturation, and especially variations between individuals who come from the same family or social backgrounds, I go outside mainstream theories of immigrant assimilation. I build upon Harris's (1998) group socialisation theory and Milner's (1994, 2004) theory of status relations. Harris argues that we can better account for the development and outcomes of children by looking at their peers, rather than their parents. The ways in which children think and act and the cultures they create result from their interactions with peers—not a vague notion of 'peer culture', but concrete persons. She boldly, and counter-intuitively, argues that parents do not matter; peers do. For example, when discussing the children of immigrants, she shows how the acquisition of language and accents is a result of what language peers speak, and how they speak it (1998: 254–5, 288–9). This should be an obvious point, as American-born children of immigrants, whose parents may speak limited or no English, are generally native English speakers who speak with the same accents as their friends.

Milner, drawing on Weber, conceptualises peer groups as a type of status group. Status for Milner is gained through conforming to group norms and making intimate associations (especially around eating, dating and marrying) with those of greater, or at least equal, status. One of Milner's (1994, 2004) central points is that where status, or social approval, is an important resource that people compete for, conforming to group norms and making the right kinds of intimate associations will be critical to maintaining or improving one's status. In his study of American high schools, Milner (2004) shows how students have little substantive economic or political power, but they do have the power to create their own status systems where they define the rules and the cultural content. Milner, like Harris, observes that parents in the US have less effect upon their children than is usually assumed, in part, because adolescents spend

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much less time with parents or adults than they do with their peers. Moreover, peers, not parents, are the ones who can confer, or take away, status. They strive to gain status for the sake of having status, which is not necessarily linked to economic or political power. This dynamic of seeking status has been the focus of dozens of Hollywood movies on teens trying to be popular, such as *Can't Buy Me Love* (1987), *Jawbreaker* (1999) and *Mean Girls* (2004).

Taking into account the insights of Harris and Milner, I reconceptualise acculturation as another way of saying that second-generation immigrants learn to conform to the norms of their different high school, university, post-school peer/status groups, and learn to make the right kind of intimate associations. This definition diverges from the idea that acculturation is a process of adaptation to American society or peer culture in the abstract. I am emphasising here that the basis of acculturation is conformity to the norms of the peer group, and the types of associations the peer group encourages and discourages.

How people choose their peers is an interesting and important question, though outside the scope of this article. Partly it is elective affinity—individuals choose to associate with those who share a common lifestyle (for example, they are religious or not religious like us, they like to party, they like to study), and partly it is defined from outside, where they are 'forced' or 'lumped' with others 'like' them, such as 'nerds', 'freaks', and those of the same race, ethnicity or religion; this is sometimes due to discrimination against individuals based on ascribed characteristics that could lead to a situation of 'reactive ethnicity' (Ragin 1977). There is certainly an interaction effect here between individual personality and inclination and peer support. Personality traits (religiosity, 'nerdiness', etc.) and ascribed characteristics may influence an individual's choice of peers, or lead peers to choose them, or have certain peers forced upon them. But once linked to peer or status groups, the rules of conformity to norms and associations will apply. For example, people are not religious just because they are concerned with how others think of them. Many, if not most, are concerned about violating religious injunctions because of their religious beliefs, irrespective of others' opinions. But the concern often intensifies *because* of peer group norms and intimate relations within the peer group.

Following Harris and Milner, I explore how status concerns and processes are useful to understanding acculturation of second-generation

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South Asian Muslims, whose peers variously include immigrants and non-immigrants, co-ethnics and non-co-ethnics, coreligionists and non-coreligionists. These peers have a strong (sometimes, conflicting) influence upon the acculturating behaviour patterns of individuals. I argue that acculturation is not a 'one-time-only' affair, but is continually negotiated, and may vary over the individual's lifetime. There are different status groups that the individual is associated with, and different norms to which s/he will conform (or deviate from). Self-identification and integration into different groups may vary over time for the individual.

The importance of peer group status for individuals generally decreases in the American context once out of high school or university. However, there are pockets in our lives where status remains important, especially in our various social circles, such as co-workers, friends and acquaintances and religious communities. Since individuals are differentially affected by status processes, depending on which peer groups they belong to, a status-rooted theory is better situated than other theories to explain variations in patterns of acculturation between individuals, and over an individual's lifetime.[7]

IV
Three patterns of acculturation

In the rest of the article, I operationalise this theoretical synthesis of Harris's and Milner's models by examining the range of variation in acculturation

[7] Many people assert the importance of September 11 as a monumental event affecting Muslims in the US (e.g., Maira 2004). I take issue with this. While September 11 clearly affected many Muslim communities, especially Arab and Pakistani working-class communities, the idea that September 11 somehow *qualitatively* affects all Muslims in a way different from other events that had negative repercussions for Muslims in the US is not justified. Previous events, including the first Gulf War, the bombing of the Federal Center in Oklahoma City in 1995 and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, all served as catalysts for a re-evaluation among Muslims of what it means to be Muslim (Ali 2005). The after-effects of the attacks of September 11 do not on their own explain patterns of religious community, ethnic identity formation and de-acculturation, as the processes we see today were already happening well before the September 11 attacks. In my own research, I found no significant differences in patterns of identity formation and acculturation pre- and post-September 11. While there were heightened tensions for many second-generation (as well as first-generation) Muslims in school, work, etc., these largely died down after a few months, similar to what happened after the other events mentioned above.

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patterns that emerged from my ethnographic research through three ideal-typical approaches to acculturation—acculturationists, partial acculturationists (which corresponds roughly to Portes and Rumbaut's [1996] notion of selective acculturation) and de-acculturationists.[8] These patterns are the result of variations in types of associations and conformity to peer group norms. As ideal types, I mean that they are a convenient way to illustrate and compare differences in the variety of acculturating behaviour that these individuals engage in. Further, these are not monolithic categories; there is a great deal of variation within each. Nor is this an exhaustive list, these categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are they bound or fixed—individuals often move between one and another pattern of acculturation over the course of their lifetime. They are, however, the most general tendencies to emerge from my research. Among the individuals I interviewed in New York, ten were acculturationists, eight were partial acculturationists and five were de-acculturationists. The women with whom I conducted the twenty-two e-mail interviews were all de-acculturationists.

I highlight differences between these ideal types by giving illustrative examples of how individuals approach different types of 'American' behaviour. Much of the acculturating behaviour that these individuals exhibit can be understood by looking at intimate relationships—the people in their peer groups and the types of norms within these peer groups to which individuals conform. The crucial peer and status groups here are co-ethnic friends, 'American' friends, non-co-ethnic second-generation immigrant friends, family and religious community—specific status groups that define the norms for these individuals and define the boundaries of the types of intimate associations that are acceptable. In short, who one's peers are affects one's acculturating behaviour.

[8] A fourth ideal type could be labeled 'non-acculturationist', i.e., those who never adopted 'American' peers or their behaviour patterns. One group who could be considered non-acculturationist might be Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, New York. They have their own schools, a wide range of social services, a very high degree of geographical concentration in neighbourhoods like Williamsburg and Borough Park and for the most part associate only among themselves (e.g., Kranzler 1995). While I had not come across any South Asian Muslims like this in the course of my research, with the nascent growing popularity of Islamic schools and large and increasing numbers of highly religious Muslims in universities and the insularity this provides, I would predict that this could become a significant category in the future.

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Interestingly, I did not find a striking difference by gender in acculturating patterns. The most important factor was age; people under the age of thirty were much more likely to be de-acculturationists and less likely to be full acculturationists, whereas the reverse was true of those who were over thirty. This result is confirmed in the Pew Research Center report on Muslim Americans. They found that 50 per cent of the Muslims aged between eighteen to twenty-nine years went to the mosque weekly or more, while only 35 per cent of the Muslims over thirty years of age did so. Conversely, 39 per cent of the Muslims over the age of thirty seldom or never went to the mosque, while only 26 per cent of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds seldom or never went to the mosque (2007: 6). This is likely to be a result of immigration trajectories.[9]

Acculturationists

I use the term acculturationist here to describe those immigrants who adopt the norms of their 'American' peers—native-born whites, African Americans and non-co-ethnic second-generation immigrants not from South Asian or Muslim families (henceforth, American peers).[10] These acculturationists tend to downplay or disregard norms of their families

[9] In 1965, an immigration law was passed that allowed for immigrants from Asia and elsewhere to migrate to the US (from 1924 to 1965, due to a xenophobic atmosphere reflected in legal restrictions, the number of immigrants dropped from over one million per year at their peak in the early 1900s to just thousands in the middle of the 20th century). The number of immigrants arriving after 1965 was initially small, but grew rapidly, and the bulk of these post-1965 immigrants to the US have arrived since 1990. Since the bulk of post-1965 immigrants are relatively recently arrived, younger second-generation children are probably much greater in number than children of immigrants who came before 1990. Further, the younger children of parents who came post-1990 are more likely to have had Muslim and co-ethnic friends than those second-generation Muslims who came of age pre-1990. Regarding years of arrival, the Pew Research Center report found that of immigrant Muslims only 16 per cent immigrated before 1979, 23 per cent arrived in the 1980s, 33 per cent arrived in the 1990s and 28 per cent arrived between 2000–2007 (2007: 15).

[10] Some may find it problematic that I include other immigrants in the category with 'American' peers. I do this to point out that by foregrounding peer relations with all these people, the acculturationists are making relations with co-ethnics less important. I follow Kasinitz et al. (2004) in the way they view peer relations across ethnic groups among the second generation as a kind of assimilating trend, but one at odds with the interpretations of the paradigmatic approaches current in immigration studies. In any case, these types of relations certainly do not reinforce the boundaries of within-group relations.

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and ethno-religious communities and tend not to be religious. They privilege associations with American peers and distance themselves from those of their religious group. While family is important to them, being with their American peers is just as important, if not more so. One way to see this is by examining how many of these individuals lived 'double lives', where they hung out with and were influenced by the norms of their American peers, and hid this from their parents.

Living the double life: 'Bad' Muslim, 'good' American

For Muslims, acculturation can be problematic because behaviour that is normative and acceptable for most Americans—e.g., alcohol consumption, premarital sex—is *haraam* (forbidden) for Muslims. Many of my respondents stressed the importance of drinking and dating as important norms for being socially accepted by American peers. For Muslims, drinking and dating are acts that can be seen as a repudiation of everything they have been taught about right and wrong behaviour. If discovered, these acts may have serious consequences for family relations.[11]

Acculturationist Muslims desire to be accepted by their American peers, even though they know that the behaviour that they engage in with them is generally not acceptable to their parents and community. To conform to their American peers' group norms and at the same time maintain relations with their parents, acculturationist Muslims often lead double lives, one for peers and a sanitised version for parents.[12] As Marina, a computer salesperson in her mid-thirties said, 'It's just easier to pretend you're doing what they [her parents] want you to do, than flaunt it in their faces. I mean, why cause unnecessary conflict, you know?' The desire to minimise conflict leads people like Marina to 'act Muslim' with their parents and community. Acting Muslim, then, is an instrumental

[11] It is not necessary that full acculturationists adopt these particular acts of their American peers, but they regularly do so, especially when these norms were central to the particular peer group.

[12] The double life is not unique to South Asian Muslims; it also applies to the thousands of homosexuals still in the closet, afraid to come out to family and friends because their sexuality is a violation of norms of sexual conduct, and because they fear the sanctions that may be imposed (disowning, physical violence, or worse).

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activity, intended for show, rather than being an act of faith. In the course of my research, I came across very few acculturationists who were open with their parents from a young age about their dating and other haraam behaviour.

Most acculturationists I interviewed led double lives, though of varying degrees. For example, Amjad (mentioned in the beginning of the article) associated almost exclusively with American peers—who were mostly Jewish and second-generation Chinese and Koreans—in his high school in New York City. Like his American peers, but unlike the vast majority of Indians and other South Asians in his school, he drank and smoked marijuana and dated. His parents were strict and he was not allowed to go out at night, so all his activities had to be done during the daytime on weekdays and weekends where they were easily concealed from his parents.

Unlike Amjad, most acculturationists I met generally did not engage in haraam behaviour in high school, but changed once in university, their first experience of living on their own. One such person is Farhan, a doctor in his mid-thirties. In high school, Farhan was, in his parents' estimation, generally an obedient Muslim child who did not drink or date. His main peer group was composed mostly of whites and second-generation Chinese and Koreans, though very few South Asians or Muslims. He recollected that few in his group dated, and less than half drank. Though he did not drink, he innocently (chastely) dated a classmate.

Once Farhan left his parents' house (and their rules) for university, he started drinking and had many sexual relationships, without his parents' knowledge. Those peers he was closest to were mostly white, and their group activities included alcohol consumption and discussing their sexual relationships. Upon graduating from medical school, he had a relationship with a white Catholic woman who insisted he introduce her to his parents. When he refused, she gave him an ultimatum. He tried to explain that she would be quite unacceptable to his parents, i.e., his relationship with her violated the rules covering intimate associations and did not conform to Muslim norms of chaste behaviour. She did not relent. So he ended the relationship rather than destroy the image that he had created of himself for his parents, and by extension, his religious community.

Farhan's example is typical of acculturationists. As they privilege their American peers over family and religious community, they then often

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conform to the norms of their American peers that conflict with those of their families, leading to the necessity of a double life. They tend not to be religious, and have intimate relationships with people from outside the religious community. But when relationships become serious, decisions need to be made. In this case, Farhan ended the relationship. In other cases though, individuals marry someone from outside the religious group.

Marrying out

Out-marriage is often seen as a major, if not the ultimate, indicator of structural assimilation, of acceptance into mainstream America (Alba and Nee 2003: 90–4). For Muslims (as for many others), out-marriage is an extreme violation of status rules of proper intimate associations. It strains the boundaries of the group, and is often seen as threatening the group's continued viability. Violating the rules of status in such an egregious manner provokes the possibility of significant sanctions. Parents may forgive relationships with non-Muslims that do not end in marriage as youthful indiscretion, but are more rigid when it comes to marriage.

What happens when couples violate rules regulating this most intimate of associations? They can accept the consequences—sometimes reduced status in the religious community, possibly expulsion from the status group (i.e., through being disowned by their parents). Alternately, they can pretend not to violate the rules by keeping their marriage secret (Leonard 1999). But these are inherently difficult, even volatile situations.

A more common approach is to 'transform' the prospective spouse through conversion. By making the spouse a Muslim, the relationship becomes acceptable to the parents and the community. Out-marriage conceptually, then, is no longer considered to be a violation of status rules of intimate associations. In fact, it is acceptable for Muslim men to marry women 'of the Book', i.e., Christians and Jews, without having to convert them. This is not the case for Muslim women marrying Christian or Jewish men. In practice, though, I found that both men and women try to transform their prospective spouses.

Many conversions I observed were heartfelt, and the convert became a devoted Muslim, much to the delight of the family and religious community. Another strategy is where the spouse converts, but in name only. For example, Amjad, before getting married went with his wife to the

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mosque so she could convert. After receiving her certificate of conversion, they went home and celebrated with a beer. Amjad was not a practicing Muslim, and his wife had no intention of becoming one.

Why bother converting then? While the acculturationists have no intention of changing their day-to-day behaviour, conversion is important for the family to be able to accept the prospective non-Muslim spouse as a 'proper' family member, and for the Muslim spouse's family to maintain face in the Muslim community. Further, the converted spouses are welcomed as equal members at community religious functions like the twice-yearly Eid prayers. Thus, everyone is at least minimally satisfied, if not happy, with this arrangement.

Another major concern of some first-generation parents is that while they may acknowledge that their children are not particularly religious, they are keen to see that their grandchildren should be. The mother of Aisha, an Indian Muslim doctor who married a white doctor explained to me why she put up little resistance to her daughter marrying a non-Muslim:

> I know that his conversion is not real. Why would it be, when my daughter herself is barely a Muslim? But she was getting old [she was thirty when she married], and I figured at least she is getting married. My thought was, okay, she is not religious, and the boy obviously is not, but at least I can work on the child. I can raise the child to at least know her religion.

We can see that a major concern of the mother is that Aisha, and more explicitly her daughter, still be part of the religious community. Aisha's mother knows that she may not change her religious behaviour, but she can make the granddaughter a 'proper' Muslim. The husband's conversion ensures Aisha's continued membership in good standing (as well as the husband's), and goes far in ensuring that the grandchild is brought up within the community.

While the number of exogamous marriages is likely to be small relative to other types of marriages among South Asian Muslims, they happen frequently enough for the couples, the parents and the community to have developed strategies to cope with their occurrence. So long as the outsider partner converts, the family and community, begrudgingly or happily, accept him or her, and the relationship is redefined such that it

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is not in violation of status rules. But, importantly, this does not necessarily affect the acculturating behaviour of these individuals who still privilege relations with their American peers.

Partial acculturationists

Where the behaviour of acculturationists is often in direct conflict with the expectations of parents and the religious community, partial acculturationists tend to balance concerns of acculturating to American peer groups with conforming to norms of behaviour of parents and South Asian Muslim peers and the religious community, and tend to be at least somewhat religious. I use the term partial acculturation to refer to those individuals who adopt many mainstream cultural practices of their American peers, but retain many cultural practices of their parents and religious community.[13] While there is a broad range of behaviour that falls under this category, especially of religious behaviour, I concentrate here on acculturationists who modify their public behaviour vis-à-vis parents and the religious community so that the need for keeping up a double life dissipates. These people exemplify the idea of partial acculturation, and show continuity with acculturationists.

Marrying in

After living a 'double life', many young acculturationist adults change their behaviour and associations to conform to their parents' and religious community's expectations. They look to marry a Muslim, hopefully one who is also South Asian. These individuals often are still not religious. When looking for a mate who will be acceptable to their parents and others in that status group, they often look for a 'moderate' Muslim, i.e., someone who does not pray five times a day, does not have a beard (if male) or wear the *hijab* (if female), and is not overly religious. Often it is preferable that the marriage partner is Muslim 'in name only', and has no problem with drinking or doing other things that run counter to their

[13] This is similar to Portes and Rumbaut's (1996: 243–53) notion of selective acculturation. They emphasise the effects of selective acculturation on educational and future occupational and economic outcomes. I use the term partial acculturation to emphasise that I make no such link here.

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religious beliefs. Thus, the appearance of marriage to a Muslim is maintained, and the rules regarding intimate associations appear not to have been violated.

This approach toward marriage was quite common in the community with which I spent the most time. Often, an individual who was fully acculturated changed behaviour when it was time to marry. An illustrative example is that of Sarah, a financial analyst in her early thirties, who described her earlier years this way: 'I felt that I was always religious, had a good upbringing. But I took on the flavour of whoever I was hanging with at the time'. Sarah was very forthcoming about the effects of peer influence. In high school and university, Sarah's friends were for the most part white or second-generation Asians or Indians, and like her older brother Farhan (mentioned above) she had very few Muslim friends. In university, she was in a sorority, drank and had sexual relationships, i.e., she conformed to the norms of her American middle-class high school, university, and later, 'yuppie' (young urban professional) peer groups.

But as she crept closer to the age of thirty, she decided to marry a South Asian Muslim. She drifted from her old set of friends and found many new Muslim friends. She stopped drinking altogether and became somewhat religious. She went on a 'dating spree' (her words) with only Muslim men. Eventually she found one acceptable to her temperament (second-generation Indian; prays, but not too much; had lovers, but doesn't drink), moved in with him for three months (unbeknownst to their parents), and then married him. Thus, she did not openly violate the rules of marriage of her religious community.

Sarah's older brother Farhan had a similar change. Like Sarah, Farhan drifted from his American peers, as he had little time for friends outside of work. In his early thirties Farhan also decided to marry a Muslim woman. He had a few not-so-chaste encounters with second-generation South Asian Muslims he met on a Muslim matrimonial website. Eventually, Sarah introduced him to a second-generation Pakistani doctor. They went on ten chaste dates and then got married. He also stopped drinking and became a little religious, going to Friday prayers which he rarely did before marriage.

I should stress here the fluidity of both Sarah and Farhan's behaviour. When younger, they would both be considered acculturationist. But their marriage choices and later religious behaviour could not have been

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predicted based on earlier behaviour patterns. The major change was a shift in adulthood in peer group composition. Both drifted from their American peers—Sarah replaced hers with a more Muslim peer group and Farhan's main status group basically became his more religious wife, sister and other relatives and people in the religious community. Their peers reinforced and amplified their newly acquired religious behaviour. Their acculturating behaviour is the reverse of what theories of assimilation predict—they shifted away from broader societal norms of behaviour (more specifically, norms of their American peers), in essence going from more to less acculturation.

De-acculturationists

The final category I consider is de-acculturationists. I coin the term de-acculturation to refer to a process where men and women who are (usually) partially acculturated actively divest themselves from the behaviour of their American peers and certain aspects of mainstream American culture they deem to be contrary to Islamic norms (I should emphasise that this does not put them completely outside mainstream society). The process of de-acculturation has become especially prominent among some (though by no means all) young Muslims in the US because of shifts in the American social landscape in the late 1980s and 1990s that created conditions conducive for the creation of highly religious Muslim peer groups. There has been a noticeable shift in the US from a general assimilationist ideology, where ethnic expression by non-whites was frowned upon (at the least), to the rise of multiculturalism as an ideology and practice in the 1990s. This has given space to, and legitimated the public expression of ethnicity (Glazer 1997; Hollinger 1995) and opened up avenues for multiple sources of status (Milner 2004).[14]

[14] In addition to multiculturalism, there are other factors that help to account for the increased occurrence of highly religious Muslim peer groups. The Muslim population has grown as a result of the post-1965 immigration. The Pew Research Center estimates that there are 1.4 million Muslims in the US over the age of eighteen (2007: 9). As the number of Muslims increases, their attitudes toward religion and religiosity have changed. There has also been a corresponding shift in how Islam is being taught to, and read by, young Muslims—immigrant teachers and religious leaders are giving way to dynamic, American-born leaders such as the white convert Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, a forty-seven year old scholar and preacher.

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The Muslim de-acculturationists I interviewed went to high school and university as multiculturalism became the dominant paradigm in schools and in the broader culture from the early 1990s onward. They tend to have shed relations with American peers, and even with not-so-religious Muslim peers, and begun to associate more with other very religious individuals, as well as segregate themselves by gender. Additionally for these Muslims, their Islamic peer group provides a stable alternate source of status from mainstream groups in and out of schools. Most of the de-acculturationists I interviewed and interacted with were not this religious from a young age. They became more religious in high school and university; in fact, many became far more religious than their parents.

From what I have observed, the number of de-acculturationist Muslims seems to be growing and their numbers among younger Muslims are larger than among those slightly older. Indeed, the Pew Research Center survey on Muslims in America found that of eighteen to twenty-nine year-old Muslims, 60 per cent considered themselves Muslims first, while only 25 per cent considered themselves American first. This is in stark contrast with Muslims thirty to thirty-nine years old, of which only 43 per cent considered themselves as Muslims first, while 31 per cent considered themselves American first.

These people are assimilated in the sense that they speak English fluently and went to mainstream schools (hardly any I interviewed went to Islamic schools). Those who work have jobs in the primary labour market (none I interviewed worked in ethnic niche economies). Further, all were residentially assimilated, living in neighbourhoods where Muslims and South Asians were distinct minorities. Their story of cultural assimilation, however, is different. At some point (again, usually in high school or university), they changed their peer groups and behaviour patterns and started to actively oppose and reject many American cultural forms that they themselves may have participated in, or at least tolerated. I found it was common in my study that younger adult Muslims in their early-late twenties were more religious than their elder acculturationist or partial acculturationist second-generation siblings in their late twenties-thirties, for example, the difference in behaviour between Shameela and Amjad outlined at the beginning of the article. Again, the Pew Research Center's survey results support this: 50 per cent of eighteen to twenty-nine year old Muslims regularly attend the mosque while only 35 per cent of those over thirty do (2007: 6).

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Identity

There is a growing movement among many younger Muslims to regard Islam as not just occasionally praying and reading the Quran, but as a way of life. These de-acculturationist Muslims are often more religious than their parents, seeking out knowledge for themselves rather than relying on what their parents have taught them. This is an interesting norm among this group—that it is not enough to pray, but that religion must be studied and knowledge actively acquired on one's own and through group interaction. For example, there are many *halaqa*s (Islamic study groups) formed and run by students and young adults (with no input from elders), something quite uncommon just a decade ago. One halaqa I attended on a Sunday in September 2002 was led by a twenty-six year old second-generation Pakistani who owned his own cellular phone sales company. Aside from me, he was the oldest person there.

Younger second-generation Muslim immigrants are creating a new, 'back to roots' community of Muslims not previously seen in this country (for example, Ali 2005; Naber 2005; Schmidt 2004). This type of Islamic identity is not simply conservative or orthodox, but is a new type of identity altogether in the US. The de-acculturationists privilege Islamic identity over their parents' ethnic identity; they separate their religious identity from their ethnic identity, something their parents do not do. I found that these young, de-acculturating Muslims take this 'pure' Islam as their primary form of identity, and their primary peer group is composed of other 'back to roots' Muslims. Of those I interviewed, nearly all had been partial acculturationists early in their lives, but then adopted a more religious set of peers, usually in high school or university. As this peer group becomes central in their lives, their relationships with others, including less religious Muslims, often attenuate. Some even reject as *haraam* 'American' behaviour that they previously engaged in, some as seemingly harmless as listening to music that makes use of any instrument other than a simple drum, which they see as Islamically acceptable.

Both men and women de-acculturate, though with different types of reactions from family, friends and others. One way in which we can observe the de-acculturation of men and women is through appearance. Men who de-acculturate quite often grow beards. While this is a visible marker of 'Muslimness', it does not make them stand out, as many men

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in the US have beards. On the other hand, Muslim women who de-acculturate and change their dress patterns do stand out. The ever-increasing number of women who have taken up the *hijab* and the *jilbab* are especially noticeable as their appearance is so obviously counter to standards of American norms of dress (for example, see the special issue on hijab in *Sociology of Religion* [Read 2007]).[15] In the 1980s, few women, old or young, wore hijab, let alone jilbab. One second-generation Arab Muslim woman interviewed in the mid-1980s said about clothing:

> How women dress outside the mosque is their own private business. I don't want to go to university with my head covered, and wearing a short skirt does not make me a bad Muslim. I am a Muslim, and I am proud to say it, but I want to say it in ways other than dressing in obnoxious clothing. I want to blend in as far as my clothes go. I want to look normal. (Haddad and Lumis 1987: 132)

Looking 'normal' in the mid-1980s for a young woman meant conforming to the dominant dress patterns of their peers, e.g., skin-tight designer jeans and sweatshirts with the necks cut off (recall the 1983 film *Flashdance*). The only young people wearing ethnic dress in public such as the South Asian *salwar kameez* (long shirt and loose pants) were recent, first-generation immigrants, often derogatorily called FOBs (fresh off the boat). The second-generation children often kept their distance from these people in school, so as not to lower their own status by associating with these lower status individuals.

I argue that since the 1990s, this is no longer the case. Young, second-generation Muslims are de-acculturating by wearing the *hijab* and the *jilbab*, rejecting the norm of 'acceptable' modes of dress of their American peers. Most women I interviewed who wore the *hijab* or the *jilbab* had not worn these all their lives, but rather had made a conscious decision, usually in high school or university, to do so, again largely due to their

[15] In my research I have noticed that these women tend to be more religious than women not wearing hijab (though many women who do not wear hijab are also very religious). De-acculturation is also prevalent among men, but I concentrate on women, as the hijab is the most visible marker of Muslim identity in the US. This marked increase in religiosity and hijab-wearing became quite noticeable in the 1990s.

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interactions with their highly religious Muslim peers, even though they face opposition for wearing hijab in schools, at work and in other public spaces.

This relatively new approach to identity and dress has led to some distancing between the de-acculturationists and others. Interestingly, parents often actively discourage their daughters from wearing the *hijab*, and especially the *jilbab*, which many parents see as unnecessarily extreme. Also, acculturated second-generation women in their late twenties and thirties sometimes have strong negative reactions to the younger women wearing the *hijab*, often their own siblings or cousins. I have observed few women of this age who wear the *hijab* or the *jilbab*, and they are mostly opposed to the wearing of either. A few of these twenty- and thirty-something women joked with me of the burgeoning '*jilbab* mafia', a comment on the growing numbers and public visibility of young women who wear the *hijab* and the *jilbab*.

Some acculturated and partially acculturated second-generation Muslim women told me that they thought wearing the *hijab* was just a fad, a fashion and that younger women adopted it only because their friends wore it. This is interesting since the young women who wear the *hijab* and the *jilbab* often said they learn good Islamic practice and habits from their friends (Ali 2005; Peek 2005; Schmidt 2004). For instance, Shameela (mentioned in the introduction) associated mainly with other Muslim girls in high school. In her junior year of high school she became more religious as she befriended even more religious Muslim girls. She started wearing the *hijab* in her junior year and the *jilbab* in her senior year. In university, her peer group consisted almost exclusively of 'back to roots' Muslims. As she became more religious and more engrossed with her religious peer group, she lost touch with most of her other friends, including many of her not-so-religious Muslim friends.

The effects of their peers has led to a redefinition of the norms of clothing for these religious young women, leading to an increase in the number of young women wearing the *hijab* and the *jilbab*, increasing the prominence of this type of status group among Muslims, and also their visibility to non-Muslims. As a clothing norm, the wearing of the *hijab* could lead to a schism between *hijabi*s and non-*hijabi*s (this is a speculative proposition, though based on underlying tensions I have been told about and have observed). The *hijab* could go from a symbol of religiosity to a synonym for religiosity itself, so that only *hijab*-wearing

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women will be seen as religious within their community, something many religious Muslim women who do not wear the *hijab* would seriously contest.[16] The theory of status relations would predict this: if wearing the *hijab* is a high-status behaviour among this status group, then those who do not wear it will be degraded in the eyes of both religious women and men, which could easily lead to tensions, or to non-*hijabi*s being marginalised or ostracised, leaving, or even being expelled from the group.

Marriage

The young de-acculturationist Muslims are very direct about marriage; they see it as a religious obligation and they work quickly to marry. They may allow parents to arrange their marriages, or, often, they choose their own mates—using their peers as intermediaries—without going on dates. These Muslims I interviewed and observed tended to marry in their early-mid twenties, often while still in university, as opposed to the acculturationists and partial acculturationists, whose marriage patterns mirror those of other educated Americans, i.e., they marry later in their late twenties and thirties.

The de-acculturationists face different challenges from those of acculturationists and partial acculturationists when it comes to marriage and their parents' reactions. While most parents support their de-acculturationist children's lifestyle choices, some parents find the religious fervour of their children excessive and oppose early marriages. Shameela exemplifies this pattern. She was approached, through a third party, by a young, second-generation Pakistani Muslim who graduated from the same university as her a year earlier. They communicated by instant messenger

[16] A British Muslim nurse when reflecting on her experience with a self-righteous *hijabi* said: 'A few years ago I was asked to interpret for a child psychologist during family therapy. I arrived to find a teenage Bengali girl (the client) and her *hijab*-wearing mother waiting for me. I introduced myself as their Bengali interpreter and found myself taken to task by the mother. "What is your job?" she demanded. I explained I was a nurse and an interpreter for the hospital. She continued briskly: "We need to leave early. It is Ramadan and we are fasting." "So am I," I said. She looked me up and down, remarking dismissively: "Oh, but we are pure Muslims. It is different for us." I refrained from challenging this patently judgmental comment. Instead I carried out the tasks allotted to me and left, reflecting how a piece of cloth could be a symbol of purity' (Arif 2005: 23). Her statement shows how the lack of a piece of cloth can be interpreted by some as a symbol of impurity.

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and phone calls, sometimes meeting in person, though always accompanied by chaperones (their own choice; their parents did not demand, nor even suggest it). Both sets of parents strongly expressed their disapproval of this prospective marriage, saying they were too young, as both were in their early twenties. But Shameela turned religious precepts against them, arguing it was her religious duty to marry. Their parents relented and, after a year, they married.

This strategy of marriage where the choice of spouse is based on religious lifestyle is becoming more common. This precludes marriages across peer groups of varying religiosity in the US. That is, you do not often find marriages between the highly religious and non-religious, as religiosity is a central status concern for de-acculturationists, and non-religiosity is often a parallel status concern for acculturationists and some partial acculturationists. This contrasts, for example, with urban Muslims in India today, for whom, generally, religiosity is not a primary status concern (positively or negatively). Rather, it is other status markers such as education, wealth, having a foreign visa and even caste, that are primary concerns (see Ali 2002).

While these people take religion as their primary identity and marry based on religiosity, there are still some limits. Even though these young adults profess that they can and will marry any Muslim, i.e., of any ethnic or class background, it is still rare that they do so. The bulk of marriages tend to be somewhat 'endogamous'[17]—South Asians marrying South Asians, Arabs marrying Arabs etc. It will be interesting to see if this pattern changes with the third-generation children of these second-generation immigrants.

V
Conclusion

Building upon Harris's group socialisation theory and Milner's theory of status relations, I have argued that variations in acculturating behaviour

[17] I use the term endogamy rather loosely here. While strictly speaking, marriage between Pakistani and Indian or Bangladeshi Muslims could be seen as exogamous, there is such a great degree of social connection and cultural overlap that they have merged in the US into a grouping known as South Asian, especially for the second generation. A similar process holds for second-generation Arabs.

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among second-generation South Asian Muslims can best be understood as a product of differential conformity to norms, and to differences in peer group composition and types of intimate associations. A disclaimer is warranted here: the empirical material presented is limited to middle-class South Asian Muslims in New York City. The dynamics of peer influence on acculturating behaviour may be different for working-class Muslims or for Muslims from other nationality groups, and may not apply to non-Muslims. This dynamic may also not be present in other countries such as the United Kingdom or France. Still, the data here provisionally support the theoretical argument, as the data can best be understood by looking at how individuals are affected by interactions with concrete individuals and groups.

This status-based approach allows us to begin to understand in a more relationally nuanced way why individuals can alternate between acculturating and de-acculturating at different times in their lives. Acculturating behaviour is fluid, i.e., individuals can change their behaviour over the course of their lifetime. The theory further predicts that as the individual's peer groups change over time, so too will types of behaviour as a reaction to which group norms are important, and which types of relationships are valued—or devalued—by the group.

An interesting question to consider in the near future is how the third-generation grandchildren of immigrant Muslims will behave. At present, the children of many of the older second-generation acculturationists and partial acculturationists in their mid-thirties and beyond are entering pre-schools, grade schools and middle schools. As I noted earlier, the younger de-acculturationists tend to get married earlier, and their children are also getting to school age. Will the patterns of behaviour of these third-generation children be similar to their second-generation parents? Will they acculturate more, or possibly, remove themselves further from social interactions with other non-Muslim Americans? Will the children of acculturationists become even more 'American' and their Muslim or South Asian identities become 'symbolic' as Gans (1979, 1994) described the ethnic and religious identities of so many white, third-generation Europeans? These are especially interesting questions to ponder on, as the number of mosques and religious schools in the United States increases and Muslims are finding greater numbers of Muslims to interact with, even in areas that until recently had few Muslim immigrants.

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