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The *Ḥijāb* at Cross-Purposes: Conflicting Models of the Erotic in Popular Islamic Advice Literature

Hina Azam

University of Texas at Austin

hina.azam@mail.utexas.edu

Abstract

An examination of popular advice literature geared toward Muslims living in the West, such as the type commonly available in U.S. mosques and at online Islamic bookstores, indicates that there exist at least two potentially conflicting narratives regarding the *ḥijāb* (the veil or headcovering) as a pious practice. The first narrative presents female sexuality as a natural and positive force, as long as it is properly channeled. The *ḥijāb*, in this narrative, is not meant to categorically repress women's erotic nature, but is a pragmatic social practice meant to avoid eroticism in the public sphere, where it would be a source of temptation and disorder. Often corresponding to this narrative is a notion of (female) sexuality as static, and a gender ideology that deemphasizes difference. A second narrative presents erotic desire and fulfillment as a marker of attachment to the world and an assertion of the ego (*nafs*), and therefore negative. In this view, the *ḥijāb* is an ascetic practice, a means by which a woman may discipline her self and develop a greater spiritual-moral faculty. This narrative frames sexuality as malleable, and also tends to emphasize gender difference. This paper seeks to tease out the conflicting models of the erotic that emerge in this genre of writing. It further demonstrates how authorial deviations from a text's core argument regarding veiling and eroticism can reflect an instrumental use of these narratives and models in favor of the predetermined conclusion, which is the obligation to veil, and to which end both models of eroticism and both narratives of veiling are bent.

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Keywords
ḥijāb, veiling, Islam, women in Islam, popular religion, eroticism, sexuality, asceticism

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the ways in which eroticism is constructed in popular Islamic discourse. As "popular Islamic discourse" is a vast category, I have narrowed the scope of this study to didactic materials that are available in the U.S., written in English, and directed and/or marketed toward a Western Muslim readership. U.S. Muslims acquire their religious education in a variety of ways, such as through Friday sermons at the mosque, recorded lectures, magazine or internet articles and blogs, conventions and workshops, study circles, and a wide spectrum of print works that are available from mosque libraries and Islamic booksellers. For most American Muslims, who have not pursued a specialized study of religion and who are reliant on English-language materials, these various resources function as the major sources of information on the myriad issues that concern living one's life according to Islamic norms. For this article, I concentrate my analysis on the last-named segment of these popular resources, namely, the array of print publications that are available through mosque libraries and physical and online Muslim booksellers operating in the U.S.[1] Insofar as the tracts examined here are found at or distributed through mosques with immigrant connections and vendors importing materials produced overseas, my data set is also culturally delimited; alternative didactic writings that might be available through African American mosques and vendors have not been surveyed here.

In order to excavate the notions of eroticism that are embedded in the genre under study here, I have concentrated my survey on those works that are most topically relevant, namely, publications on veiling and modest dress (*ḥijāb*, *niqāb* or *purdah*), although I have also included titles addressing gender relations and marriage. The reason for selecting tracts specifically on veiling for a study of eroticism is that veiling is often presented in popular religious discourse as a solution for a problem or range of problems, one of the most salient of which is the drive to sexual

1. On occasion, I have drawn examples from other types of advice texts, provided that the examples illustrate themes already present in the data set, that the sources are modern, and that they are similarly geared toward non-specialists. These occasional examples suggest that the same themes might be at play outside the set of writings circumscribed here.

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expression and pleasure. These texts, then, are particularly suitable ones of which to ask the following questions: Are erotic attraction, expression and pleasure presented as positive, negative, or neutral phenomena? Are they considered natural and normal aspects of the human personality, or as aberrations of some sort? How are erotic impulses to be handled? What roles do religion generally, and veiling specifically, play in handling erotic impulses? My central thesis is that this discourse contains two main—and fundamentally conflicting—narratives of the erotic.

Central to my selection criteria was that the publications surveyed be "popular," in terms of level of discourse and ideological representativeness: As such, the tracts surveyed here are directed toward the generality of Muslims, rather than to a scholarly elite or a non-Muslim academic audience. Second, they seek to establish continuity with traditional patterns of religious thought and practice, rather than provide a progressive or revisionist critique of those patterns. Third, they represent the dominant approach within this type of publication to questions of gender relations, sexuality and dress. Given these criteria, the tracts surveyed here generally come from a traditional or conservative perspective. Although one can find at Islamic booksellers titles written from an academic or progressive perspective, they comprise a very small proportion of available material. When one narrows one's focus to writings pertaining to veiling and eroticism, the percentage of writings that might be considered liberal or progressive becomes negligible.

My choice of the term "eroticism," as well as my reasons for preferring it to "sexuality," requires some explanation. Eroticism, as I utilize it, is an idea broader than "sex," which is limited to the act of intercourse, or even "sexuality," which remains centered on cohabitation and also leads us toward issues of gender identity and sexual practices. The notion of *eros*, however, may be used to describe an affective state that includes but is not limited to or focused on cohabitation. "The erotic" and "eroticism" enable us to address not simply the physical and physiological aspects of intimacy, but the emotional or affective aspects as well; to move outside of a physical focus, so as to include the various non-sexual components of romantic attachment. The idea of the erotic is also distinctly attuned to the question of pleasure, making it critically different from sex. If it may reasonably be suggested that not all sexual encounters are pleasurable, and by the same turn, that one may share an erotic bond with another that does not involve sex, then the value of

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using "eroticism" rather than "sex" or "sexuality" as our central category of analysis will be evident.[2] For purposes of this inquiry, I identify the components of eroticism, or erotic love, as desire (including inclination and attraction), expression (of desire or attraction, whether through verbal or gestural means), and pleasure (meaning any satisfaction of desire, whether through gazing, approaching, conversing with, or touching one's object of desire). So now, to reiterate the guiding question for this analysis: How does popular Islamic advice literature present the various components of eroticism?

The topic of *Ḥijāb* in popular English-language advice literature

Let us begin with a general description of the data set—that is, English-language didactic titles on veiling that are directed toward and easily available to lay (predominantly Sunni) Muslims in the U.S. Some of them are by well-known contemporary figures from the Arab world, such as the Saudi cleric ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ibn Bāz,[3] the Syrian scholar Muḥammad Saʻīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī,[4] and the Egyptian-Canadian Jamal Badawi.[5] Others hail (or hailed) from South Asia, such as the influential Abu'l-Aʻla Maududi,[6] the staunch Mawdudi-esque polemicist Safia Iqbal,[7] and the Indian interfaith peace activist Wahiduddin Khan.[8] Didactic tracts may

2. For discussions on the meaning(s) of *eros* that illustrate its Greek origins and its significant extra-sexual connotations, the reader might peruse the many influential modern theoretical works on *eros* including Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) (1920); Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love* (1930–1936); Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955); C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960).
3. ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz b. ʻAbd Allāh Bin Bāz, *The Danger of Women Participating in the Work Arena of men*, trans. Abu Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Shakir and M. S. Yate (Middlesex: Message of Islam, 1997).
4. Muḥammad Saʻīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Women between the Tyranny of the Western System and the Mercy of the Islamic Law*, trans. Nancy Roberts, ed. Anas al-Rifāʻī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʻāṣir, 2006).
5. Jamal Badawi, *The Muslim Woman's and the Muslim Man's Dress according to the Qur'an and Sunnah* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1980).
6. Syed Abu'l Aʻla Mawdudi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1972).
7. Safia Iqbal, *Woman and Islamic Law* (Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 1994 [1988]).
8. Wahiduddin Khan, *Hijab in Islam*, trans. Farida Khanam (New Delhi: Goodword Press, 1995).

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be found written not only by Sunnis but also by Shi‘is, such as Iranian artist and activist Zahra Rahnavard,[9] and the Iranian scholar and revolutionary ideologue Murtaza Mutahhari.[10] Not all such publications are authored by famous preachers or scholars, however. Autobiographical accounts by ordinary Muslims also populate the shelves of Islamic booksellers, such as those by women who have donned the *ḥijāb* and seek to share their stories.[11] One also finds works by lesser-known moralists, some with a pronounced polemical tone and some highly derivative.[12] A sub-category consists of those works that expressly argue against *niqāb* in favor of *ḥijāb*.[13] Notably, nearly all these works on veiling are published overseas, in and for majority-Muslim contexts, and have subsequently been translated into English from Arabic, Urdu or Persian, apparently being considered particularly suitable for Western Muslim audiences, sometimes perhaps due to their quasi-canonical status (eg, Mawdudi's or Ibn Bāz's writings). Western authorship in this subgenre is rare but present.[14] Noting the cultural and linguistic origins of these authors and texts is important because it allows us to consider cultural and ideologi-

9. Zahra Rahnavard, *Beauty of Concealment and Concealment of Beauty*, trans. Sayyid Ali Reza Naqavi (Islamabad: Cultural Consulate, Islamic Republic of Iran, 1987).

10. Murtaza Mutahhari, *Hijab: The Islamic Modest Dress (Masaleyeh Hijab)*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications, 1988).

11. See, for example, Shazia Nazlee, *The Hijab: Dress for Every Muslimah—an Encouragement and Clarification* (Suffolk, UK: Jam‘iat ‘Ihyaa’ Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2005); Iman Daglas, *A Well-Guarded Treasure* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2004); Huda al-Khattab, *Bent Rib: A Journey through Women's Issues in Islam* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1997); Khaula Nakata, *A View through Hijab* (Jeddah: Abu'l-Qasim Publishing House, 1994); Debra Dirks and Stephanie Parlove, *Islam Our Choice: Portraits of Modern American Muslim Women* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2003).

12. Muḥammad b. Aḥmed Ibn Ismā‘īl. *The Return of Hijaab, pt.1: Confrontation of Hijaab and Sufūr* (London: al-Firdous, 2001); Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqui, *Islam Forbids Free Mixing of Men and Women* (Delhi: Rightway Publications, 2001); Halah bt. Abdullah, *A Comparison between Veiling and Un-Veiling* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1995); Abdul Rahman Abdullah, *Islamic Dress Code for Women* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 1999). Siddiqui is particularly noteworthy for his substantial lifting from Maududi, although without attribution.

13. See, for example, Sayyid Mutawallī al-Darsh, *Hijab or Niqab: an Islamic Critique of the Face-Veil* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003).

14. For example, see Katherine Bullock's *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002); Dirks and Parlove, eds., *Islam Our Choice*; and Ruqayyah Waris Maqsood, *The Muslim Marriage Guide* (London: Quilliam Press, 1995).

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cal distinctions between the relatively homogenous and traditionally oriented Muslim cultures of "eastern" or "Muslim world" authors (i.e. those from predominantly Muslim countries) and the religiously and culturally diverse background out of which the western authors write.

As mentioned above, the writings surveyed here are traditional or conservative in approach: All tracts argue that veiling the hair and body is incumbent upon all post-pubescent females in all non-kin contexts. However, they differ in what precisely they denote by veiling, and in the terms they utilize. All authors agree that other than the face, hands and feet of a woman—which may arguably remain uncovered—all other parts of her are erogenous (*'awra*), that is, intimate and not appropriate to reveal. The main item of contention is whether the face (and hands and feet) are to be considered *'awra*, and thus are necessary to cover.[15] In terms of terminology, some use *ḥijāb* to designate hair-covering and not face-veiling and reserve *niqāb* for face-veiling, and others using *ḥijāb* to refer to hair-covering *and* face-veiling. Use of these terms is often connected to whether or not veiling is seen by the author to be part of a larger system of gender segregation and female domestic seclusion: those who favor seclusion use the word *ḥijāb* as an equivalent for *purdah* (an Urdu term widely used by English-speaking Muslims to refer to a system of complete sex segregation) while those who reject seclusion deliberately use the word *ḥijāb* as a liberatory opposite to *purdah*. While these definitional issues are important to keep in mind so as to avoid confusion when reading quoted passages from these texts, I highlight them only briefly here, since a detailed analysis of terms and usages is not critical to the purposes of this essay, whose purpose, rather, is to present an archaeology of the erotic in popular Islamic didactic texts. Thus, for convenience, I will use the terms "*ḥijāb*" and "veiling" interchangeably to denote female covering of the body, and will use the terms "*purdah*" and "seclusion" interchangeably to denote ideal systems of sex segregation.

The popular publications that I have surveyed uniformly endorse veiling as an obligatory practice, and disagree only on whether or not a woman's face (and hands and feet) are to be considered erogenous (*'awra*) and therefore necessary to cover. The narrow spectrum of approaches can be explained by the fact that all examined writers are committed to

15. Some support and others reject face-veiling. A less-represented third perspective is that face-veiling is not required (as is head-covering), but is praiseworthy and desirable.

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upholding traditional religious norms and maintaining continuity with the received discourses of Islamic law, although this continuity is often articulated through an Islamist (i.e. *salafī*) approach, rather than through a legal-traditionalist (i.e. *madhhab*) approach. This right-leaning Islamist approach features the construction of moral arguments on a combination of scriptural sources and "scientific" reasoning, in favor of which a reliance on classical sources (such as medieval legal, theological or exegetical texts) is often bypassed. We also find significant repetition of rhetorical features, such as argumentational structure, illustrative examples, supporting evidences, authority citations, and phrasing.

A summary review of popular didactic works on veiling thus reveals significant substantive similarities (e.g. the argument that veiling is obligatory) and stylistic similarities (e.g. the recycling of authority quotes from previously-published works). Upon closer reading, however, these substantive and stylistic similarities mask competing narratives of veiling, built upon contradictory underlying models of eroticism. These competing narratives are what I characterize as a *pragmatic* narrative, built upon a generally positive (or at least neutral) model of the erotic, and an *ascetic* narrative, built upon a generally negative model of the erotic. These two contrasting models of eroticism not only differ in their fundamental valuations of desire, expression and pleasure, but also are anchored in differing notions of gender and of the human being, as we will see. It is important to say at the outset that these models, and their respective narratives of veiling, do not reflect a neat bifurcation of authors or even works. Although one notes that certain authors tend to characterize eroticism positively or negatively, or to present veiling as either a pragmatic or ascetic strategy, there are occasionally examples of discursive deviation, leading to a seemingly inconsistent bricolage of discursive elements. We will have an opportunity to examine such deviations in more detail below. First, let us delineate the two main underlying narratives of veiling that animate popular Islamic discourse.[16]

16. We also note here that both models of the erotic found in these texts are heterosexual in nature. The real possibility of homosexual desire is not seriously contemplated, other than in an indirect manner, in the context of showing the depravity of un-Islamic non-veiling societies, or when describing rules for women to minimally cover their bodies in same-sex situations. Thus, rather than repeatedly refer to these models of eroticism as heterosexual in nature, I ask the reader to keep this assumption in mind.

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The first narrative: Positive eroticism and the *ḥijāb* as pragmatic practice

The first model of sexuality that is found in this literature presents sexuality, or eroticism, as a normal part of the human make-up and a positive, constructive force in social life. For Murtaza Mutahhari, the Shī'ī *āyatullāh* and Iranian revolutionary, for example, erotic forces are powerful and must be wielded carefully, but carry great potential for good, particular as a springboard for cultural production and spiritual attainment.[17] He emphasizes the pleasures of the erotic relationship and designates these as blessings from God. "The legitimate pleasures which spouses receive from each other are considered to be blessings in Islam, among the Divine rewards.…Islam…not only does not forbid it, but it encourages it…"[18] Katherine Bullock, an academically trained American convert, quotes Timothy J. Winter, a British scholar and also a convert, as saying that Islam has a "sex-positive attitude."[19] Rejecting the idea that erotic desire is evil, Bullock elaborates, "The Qur'an and Sunnah provide that sexual desire is part of God's creation of the human being, something both men and women have…[F]emale sexual desire is seen as natural and not evil.…"[20] She interprets the Qur'an as supportive of erotic desire, writing, "Sexual desire is not evil. The Qur'an [in Q 2:187] is saying that God has ordained husbands and wives to 'associate' with each other sexually, and to think of the husband-wife relationship as mutually caring, loving, and beautifying."[21] A little further she insists that desire itself carries no moral valence, but is only negatively or positively framed by the context in which it is realized. "So, to emphasize, in Islam there is nothing evil or undesirable about the body and its desires.…Desire *per se* is neither of the devil nor intention to virtue. It is the context that determines virtue."[22]

In this model, eroticism is a constant and irrepressible feature of the individual makeup: Although it may be hidden from view or suppressed for periods of time, it is impossible to fundamentally change it. Eroticism is constructed as something "springy": something that springs back,

17. Mutahhari, 12–13.
18. Mutahhari, 24.
19. Bullock, 158.
20. Bullock, 159.
21. Bullock, 159.
22. Bullock, 162.

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good as new, once the hindrance (e.g. distance from the opposite sex) is removed.[23] This notion of eroticism as constant and irrepressible—or "springy"—is connected to the previous idea of desire and expression being normal, natural and positive aspects of human life, the underlying logic being that that which God has created as the norm must also be fundamentally good and morally acceptable. Underscoring the irrepressibility or naturalness of eroticism, S. Abul A'la Maududi, the South Asian Islamist thinker, paints a portrait of seamlessness between human eroticism and the workings of the natural world, and emphasizes the link between the erotic and the aesthetic:

> …the world around them abounds in factors that perpetually arouse their sexual impulse and make one inclined to the other. The soft murmuring breeze, the running water, the natural hues of vegetation, the sweet smell of flowers…in short, all the beauties and all the graces of nature, stimulate directly or indirectly the sexual urge between the male and female.[24]

Because in this model eroticism is a normal and positive element of not only human nature but all things, modification to one's erotic impulses is neither possible nor desirable. That which is natural, according to this narrative, cannot be changed, but only channeled. The Saudi tract *Islamic Dress Code for Women* thus affirms that Islam is "the religion of nature,"[25] and that nature—as God's creation—cannot be altered. "Islam does not curb natural desires but coordinates them properly so that man and woman cannot feel inclined to unlawful activities."[26] Erotic interaction is not problematic in and of itself, as long as religion guides those interactions. Indeed, because sexual desire, expression and pleasure are natural and legitimate phenomena, the eros-positive narrative regards celibacy or an overly ascetic religiosity as a morally flawed strat-

23. My choice of the word "springy" comes out of conversations and involvement with Muslim women who cover, from references to the way veiling women often speak about the flattening effects of the scarf on hair—an effect that is ironic in light of the popular male imagination of women's uncovered hair being luxuriant and well-coiffed. While in part a humorous reference to fantasies of veiled women, I find the notion of "springiness" an apt descriptor of the notion of eroticism as something intrinsic and unchanging, ever-ready to bounce back, unaffected by emotional or psychological factors.
24. Maududi, 85.
25. Abdullah, *Islamic Dress Code*, 22.
26. Abdullah, *Islamic Dress Code*, 23.

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egy: One frequently finds references to the idea that Islam is opposed to celibacy and monasticism, or that Muslims should not fast and pray to the point that they are neglecting their conjugal duties.

And yet, even if erotic impulses cannot and should not be fundamentally changed, this positive model of eroticism recognizes desire and expression as powerful forces, forces that can wreak havoc in society if not regulated. This model thus gives rise to a pragmatic narrative of veiling—pragmatic because it is aimed not at effecting any fundamental change in erotic impulses, but rather at providing a working strategy to deal with their presence. This strategic or pragmatic approach is implicit in Bullock's defense of veiling, which she claims does not "smother" women's sexuality but only hides it from public view.[27] "To sum up, *ḥijāb* does not smother femininity or sexuality. Rather, it regulates where and for whom one's femininity and sexuality will be displayed and deployed."[28] This regulated sexuality/femininity, she contends, remains intrinsically unchanged and can be brought out in homosocial and marital spaces: "In the home, in women's gatherings, and with one's husband, Muslim women can dress up, play with, display and otherwise enjoy their beauty and sexuality."[29]

This pragmatic narrative is thus communally oriented, and frames the *ḥijāb* as legal or ethical in nature. The social utopian ideal of the pragmatic narrative nearly entirely ignores the esoteric or interior dimensions or benefits of veiling. For instance, the classically trained Syrian scholar Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī explicitly refutes the idea that *ḥijāb* is primarily for the personal moral or spiritual benefit of the wearer herself. Rather, for him, the removal of erotic elements from public space is directed purely toward communal morality, particularly male virtue, although women benefit through an increase in social esteem. "[T]he wisdom of the hijab lies not in the fact that it helps the woman to adhere to the virtuous morals; rather, it lies in the fact that it helps the men who look at the woman to practice self-restraint…and to relate to her as a human being…"[30] The function of religion, in the pragmatic narrative, is the strengthening of the social order (as opposed to individual happiness or personal spiritual attainment). This concept of Islam as first

27. Bullock, xxxii.

28. Bullock, 199.

29. Bullock, 199.

30. Al-Būṭī, 236.

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and foremost a utopian blueprint is reflected, for instance, in common references to Islam as a "system."[31] Religion attains this utopian objective through the imposition of external restraints (that is, of commands and prohibitions) in order to eliminate from public space an otherwise pervasive eroticism. "Thus the object of Islam," writes Maududi, "is to establish a social order that segregates the spheres of activity of the male and the female, discourages and controls the free intermingling of the sexes, and curbs all such factors as are likely to upset and jeopardize the social discipline."[32] Laws enforcing female veiling and gender segregation are critical to the program of de-eroticizing public space.

The social orientation of the pragmatic narrative is illustrated in the subsumption of individual to communal interests. An extreme example of this is seen by Maududi's rejection of individualism as a morally legitimate value, or of privacy as a legitimate legal concept.

> The concept of personal freedom is one of the absurdities of [modernity]…[T]he kind of liberty being demanded for the individual cannot have any room in the community life.…Human society consists in inter-linked inter-dependent relationships…Due to this mutual relationship no act of man can be taken as purely private.…How can one say that a person's using one of his natural gifts freely [should be permitted]?…The argument that the pleasure sought by a man and a woman in a private place does not at all affect society is just childish…[I]t harms the whole of humanity.[33]

Indeed, for Maududi, eroticism threatens communal life precisely because it is *personal*. For him, one who seeks personal pleasures is criminal, because he is breaking the social contract and violating the social order: such a one is "a thief, a cheat, a robber."[34] A similar—though much milder —contest between the erotic and the communal lies behind Mutahhari's opinion that the former impedes economic productivity: "That which paralyses the working force is the corruption of the work environment by the element of seeking the satisfaction of sexual pleasures."[35] Public eroticism, in this model, is framed as a direct threat to the material and economic well-being of society, and thus must be prevented at all costs.

31. See, e.g., Ibn Ismā'īl's references to "the Islamic system" (11).
32. Maududi, 24.
33. Maududi, 99.
34. Maududi, 100.
35. Mutahhari, 16.

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The *ḥijāb*, in this communally-oriented narrative, is not intended to fundamentally alter male or female eroticism but is rather promoted as a pragmatic social practice that simply obscures (specifically female) erotic expression. By obscuring her own erotic nature, the veiling Muslim woman prevents the blossoming of desire in surrounding men, and thereby contributes to the moral and social reform of society. Her act is a selfless one, a type of charity, in which she subsumes her own natural eroticism—in itself blameless and even good—to the greater societal benefit. The idea that women who veil or withdraw from society are being charitable toward men, as well as to other women, is expressed by the American woman convert Iman Daglas, who writes, "Showing our beauty may stir a man's sexual desire.…By properly covering, we are …helping our Muslim brothers to refrain from committing a sin. The Prophet said: 'Restrain yourself from doing harm to anyone for that is also a charity…'"[36]

Eliminating eroticism from public space is presented as strengthening the social order in yet another way: by preventing divorce. The Indian scholar Wahiduddin Khan thus links the absence of regulation upon gender interaction to the weakening of the social order via an increase in divorce rates.

> Only the placing of restrictions in society can provide a deterrent to divorce. While the lack of restrictions in society weakens the fabric of family life and creates many social evils, constraints, on the other hand, strengthen family bonds, which greatly benefit the human race.[37]

and

> The sole reason for [the increasing divorce rates in modern society] is traceable to the promiscuity of…unrestricted society…One's loyalties keep changing. In a segregated society, where interaction between men and women is almost non-existent, a man associates only with his spouse, which keeps him from forming new loyalties, while in a free society he comes upon new faces every day, one better than the other.[38]

For Khan, other possible factors for increasing divorce rates, such as economic or legal options for women, or a greater cultural value on marital compatibility and erotic love between spouses, are not considered. Rather, the pragmatic narrative permits only one solution to eroticism's

36. Daglas, 23.
37. Khan, 16–17.
38. Khan, 15.

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potential threat to the social order: the elimination of any and all gender interaction from public life. Such public elimination, one is led to believe, will enhance private fulfillment.

A key idea in this pragmatic narrative of veiling is that of *channeling*. As we have seen, the positive model of eroticism does not advocate a total elimination of erotic desire, expression and pleasure from life, but rather, a restriction of those elements from the public sphere only, due to the inherent tension between eroticism and social order. What is proposed, then, is the managing or channeling of naturally diffuse and chaotic erotic forces into a single space, which is marriage. This is in fact what is implied above by Wahiduddin Khan in his linking of gender mixing and increased divorce rates. The pragmatic narrative of veiling thus can be linked to an ideal of erotic marriage—that is, to the notion that within marriage, sexuality is not only permissible but to be extolled. Huda al-Khaṭṭāb writes, "the sexual urge is a normal part of the human condition, male and female, one which is to be controlled and channeled, via marriage."[39] The link between veiling and erotic marriage is found in Mutahhari's comment that "the Islamic modest dress is nothing more than ... the limiting or restricting [of] sexual needs to marriage."[40] In *Islamic Dress Code* we find: "By such means [ie marriage], man and woman can lead a happy life fulfilling their sexual desire lawfully and safely."[41] Al-Būṭī similarly confirms the link between erotic pleasure in marriage and the function of veiling in preserving and enhancing these private pleasures. "What is referred to as the *ḥijāb* is, in essence, nothing more than a logical barrier which serves to separate the women's participation with the man in social and humanitarian tasks on one hand, from her participation with him in the pursuit of sexual pleasure and satisfaction on the other." [42]

The ideal of erotic marriage underscores the fact that in the pragmatic narrative, the veiled woman's de-eroticization remains only superficial, a performance for the public sphere. Insofar as eroticism is regarded positively, virtuous womanhood, in this model, is a privately erotic womanhood. Illustrating this idea is a popular late 19th-century Iranian advice tract entitled *Disciplining Women*, which describes the good Mus-

39. Khattab, 95.

40. Mutahhari, 39.

41. *Islamic Dress Code*, 26-7.

42. Al-Būṭī, 226.

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lim woman as one who is tame on the outside but wild in bed. "Too swift a pace in walking does not suit a woman…Too eager a gait and an exaggerated movement of the hips are the mark of beauty in quest of passing pleasure; grace and good taste avoid such things."[43] This ideal of publicly de-eroticized womanhood is combined with an encouragement to, and expectation of, private libidinality. "[T]here should be no question of reserve [in bed], nor of waiting for the man to make the first advance.… Shamelessness is better in bed than prudery; therefore do not imagine that your dignity will suffer if you surrender utterly to love."[44] Although this work is not, to my knowledge, translated into English, it is popular a exemplifies the fusion of public virtue and private eroticism that anchors this narrative.

The ideal of erotic marriage is pivotal to the pragmatic, *eros*-positive narrative of veiling. However, this ideal, gives rise to a particular sexual ethics: Women in this model are not simply *permitted* to provoke and express desire in marriage, but are *expected* to do so. After all, the logic goes, if eroticism is a constant, there is no reason why it should not spring into action once moral bars are removed. Texts that exemplify this narrative suggest that women are morally obligated to act in an erotic manner within the marital space, by adorning themselves, being pleasant of manner and being sexually available. Daglas declares, "We *should* do everything allowed by Allah …to make ourselves beautiful for our husbands.…We *should* take very good care of ourselves, inside and out. We *should* wear make-up and perfume, fix our hair and wear nice clothes ... But it should be for our husbands alone."[45] A starker example of the erotic obligation embedded in this narrative is provided by al-Būṭī, who, in words intended to convey Islam's sex-positive attitude, writes, "Islamic law allows the woman— *indeed, calls upon her*—to reveal her femininity *to the utmost extent*, sipping with the man from the cup of delight which *God has given them by right*."[46] The internally contradictory framing of eroticism within marriage is noteworthy: al-Būṭī simultaneously claims that a woman *may* express eroticism, through dress, adornment

43. *Disciplining Women*, anonymous, tr. E. Powys Mathers as *The Education of Wives* (London: John Rodker, 1927), 3:224, cited by Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Veiled Discourses – Unveiled Bodies," *Feminist Studies* 19(3), (Autumn 1993): 491–492.

44. *Disciplining Women*, 247, at Najmabadi, 492.

45. Daglas, 43, emphasis added.

46. Al-Būṭī, 230, emphasis added.

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and behavior, and that she also *must* do so; that God has given her the *right* to sexual enjoyment and also the *duty* to provide that enjoyment to the man. The distinction between duty and right is here blurred.

The ideal of erotic marriage is framed by some authors, particularly women, as bidirectional: the ethical imperative to provide erotic satisfaction is directed back toward males. The Japanese convert Khaula Nakata, living in France, writes, "Some wives only get dressed up when they go out, not caring how they appear at home. But in Islam a wife tries to be beautiful for her husband. A husband also tries to look pleasant for his wife. This consideration for each other makes conjugal life pleasant and joyful…"[47] However, Nakata's insistence on the bi-directionality of attraction and desire does not change the moralization of eroticism within the marital space. In short, the de-eroticization that veiling is supposed to achieve outside the marital space is accompanied, almost by logical necessity, by an *obligatory* eroticization within the marital space, at least of women.[48] Although this anti-liberatory corollary to the socially liberatory function of *ḥijāb* in the pragmatist narrative is not articulated or suggested by all the works I examined, it looms in the background, bolstered by a long tradition of legal thinking on the nature of marriage and the place of sexuality within it.[49]

The second narrative: Negative eroticism and the *ḥijāb* as ascetic practice

In contrast to a positive model of eroticism, one can discern in several didactic texts on veiling an attitude toward eroticism that is sweepingly negative. Although *sex* (that is, intercourse) is regarded as good insofar

47. Nakata, 13–14.

48. See, for example, al-Būṭī, who dichotomizes the public and private spheres along erotic lines. (al-Būṭī, 225–226)

49. The notion of women's obligatory sexual availability to their spouses is a central tenet of classical Islamic marriage law, but one that is rarely stated in the didactic literature under study here. Kecia Ali, who has sought to highlight this tenet, criticizes much of contemporary Muslim feminist work precisely on the grounds that it obscures this tenet even as it seeks to salvage, and promote, more benign or positive aspects of classical marriage law. [Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006)] The ominous underside of the pragmatic narrative of *ḥijāb* that I point out here, in which a positively-framed eroticism easily becomes an obligation of sexual availability, is closely linked with classical understandings of marriage even if the authors of these tracts do not make those links explicit. On the conceptualization of marriage as an exchange of rights, see also my dissertation (Duke University, 2007).

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as it is necessary for procreation, *eroticism* (that is, the combination of desire, expression and pleasure) is regarded by some writers as a disruptive animalistic force with minimal redeeming value. It is this distinction between sex and eroticism that Maududi intends when he writes that "[t]he social system should, on the one hand, curb motives leading to abnormal and sensual tendencies. On the other, it should open ways for the satisfaction of the normal urges in accordance with the requirements of nature."[50] A general anti-eroticism is reflected in Abdullah Ahmed al-Swailem's introduction to Halah Bint Abdullah's tract, where he writes that the Qur'an and Sunnah save women "from the abominated ways of the people of pleasure, whims (caprice) and sex."[51] The Iranian professor and political activist Zahra Rahnavard conveys a similar opprobrium of eroticism. Eroticism, which she compares to opium, destroys modesty, piety, innocence, faith, reason, spirituality ("awakening"), freedom ("protest and revolt"), honor and morality ("conscience"). She writes, "When sex fills the atmosphere of the society, intelligence, power of revolt and awakening all disappear."[52] Rahnavard's attack on eroticism cannot be read as only applicable to extra-marital sexuality, but is thoroughgoing. She implies that seeking erotic enjoyment is fundamentally akin to idolatry, and therefore to be eliminated from all spheres of life: "My purdah…gives glad tidings of a society…in which all its members …turn toward God, not dollars, money, without there being any head, without any position, wealth, prestige, so-called beauty, sex, lust, (filthy) enjoyment…"[53]

A severe anti-eroticism is also exemplified by Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqui, who writes:

> The sex instinct is the greatest weakness of the human race. That is why Satan selected this [weak] spot for his attack on the adversary, and devised the scheme to strike at their modesty. Therefore, the first step he took in this direction was to expose their nakedness to them so as to open the door of indecency before them and beguile them into sexuality."[54]

Siddiqui here harks back to the primordial Fall of humanity in the

50. Maududi, 90–91.
51. *A Comparison,* Bt. Abdullah, 10.
52. Rahnavard, 25.
53. Rahnavard, 34.
54. Siddiqui, 70.

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Garden through the leading astray of Adam and Eve by Satan. Sexuality in its entirety carries the mark of sin and serves as a perpetual reminder of humanity's disobedience to God. To ensure the inculcation of a properly negative view of eroticism, Maududi advocates specifically training society's members to regard sexuality not as something simply to be publicly restricted, as the pragmatists would argue, but rather as something intrinsically degraded and degrading. He proposes creating "a civilization with a non-sexual atmosphere by inculcating monastic ideas in the mind, and by educating the people to look upon the sex relation as something base, despicable and filthy…"[55]

Yet another source of negativity toward the erotic is the British educator and convert Ruqayyah Waris Maqsood, author of a popular marital advice manual called *The Muslim Marriage Guide*. Here, she compares erotic love to sickness and blindness.

> Sometimes, when one has fallen in love one is almost in a state of sickness which impairs the mental state. They say 'love is blind'…Often the person in love is so besotted with the beloved that they simply cannot see the things that are 'wrong' with the loved one. Or if they can, they assume that their love is so powerful that it will overcome all obstacles and incompatibilities…Some hope![56]

The value of religion, in this negative model, is to enable individuals to rise above their animal nature, which includes their erotic tendencies. The implication here is that eroticism, although universal in the sense that all people are born with the same basic urges, is, in the course of an individual person's lifetime, something malleable, capable of reshaping and reformation. This fundamental transformation of the human being is akin to a return to the pre-concupiscent state. Siddiqui thus argues, "The natural inclination of man is to sexual desire, over which he cannot have full control, except by undergoing a thorough transformation."[57] In proposing this reformation, the negative model of eroticism differs from the positive model, in which eroticism is constant and irrepressible, not

55. Maududi, 90–91. I have already cited Maududi above, in my presentation of the first model and narrative of eroticism and veiling. This is because his is a particularly complex approach to the topic at hand, in that he views erotic impulses as natural and necessary for human civilization, and also as unclean and degrading in their actual expression or fulfillment. His approach is both highly communalistic and highly ascetic.
56. Maqsood, 15.
57. Siddiqui, 56.

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to be eliminated but simply directed into licit avenues. The *eros*-negative narrative regards as ideal the suppression of erotic impulses through a disciplinary regime whose objective is to transform those impulses into spiritually or morally beneficial action—that is, to sublimate them. The sublimation of eroticism is similar to the channeling advocated in *eros*-positive texts, but differs in a key respect: While the pragmatist narrative seeks a redistribution of eroticism by restricting desire, expression and fulfillment to legal relationships (i.e. marriages), it does not suggest a transmutation of erotic urges as such; on the contrary, the removal of eroticism from extra-marital contexts is conceived as causing or enabling an intensification of eroticism within marriage. The *eros*-negative approach, in contrast, envisions a true sublimation of erotic forces into non-erotic forces, such as those of cultural achievement and spiritual attainment. This is illustrated by Maududi, whose contempt for sexuality pervades his work, and for whom the erotic love relationship is frivolous on its own; it is useful only insofar as it is sublimated toward social production. "Islam…aims at canalizing man's sex energy by moral discipline so as to render it conducive to the building up of a clean and pious culture instead of wasting it in dissipation and erotic passions."[58]

This negative model of eroticism serves as the springboard for what I term an ascetic narrative of veiling—"ascetic" because eroticism is framed within it as a signifier of the self's attachment to this world and its pleasures. These attachments are designated as evil insofar as they lead one away from God and enable a type of idolatry of the material realm. In this narrative, the material realm is condemned as a whole, and what is advocated is a broad detachment from materiality through a disciplining of the body and the ego. The link between eroticism and worldly attachment is sometimes made indirectly, such as by the British-born Shazia Nazlee, who in her pamphlet on veiling identifies commonalities between eroticism and the sins of extravagance, waste, and vanity—topics that have no obvious relationship to veiling or sexuality, except through the shared topoi of desire and pleasure. "Extravagance and wastage are both disliked by Allah and forbidden by Him. Wealth is wasted on vanity and creating passions that make one another untrue to each other."[59] Other writers, such as Rahnavard, link eroticism to materialism more directly, using the sort of critique of

58. Maududi, 24.

59. Nazlee, 12.

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capitalism that was central to Iranian revolutionary thought. Women's erotic expression makes them accomplices in society's deviation from God and toward worldly concerns (*dunyā*):

> Yes, they are in need of conquering new markets. This is why they use all your special qualities, your hair, your voice, your body, your tastes, your physical features for the publicity and sale of their waste products …[W]hat an effective means you have become for spreading ignorance and unawareness among the minds, stupefying the youth, deviating from the right path half of the population…[You] have turned into a base, a stronghold for trampling morals, modesty, chastity, nobility, valour, rebellion and sacrifice.[60]

Ukasha Zaid likewise connects the erotic with materialism, and alludes to the primary theological and spiritual sin of idolatry. "One of the causes for this moral and spiritual degeneration of the Muslim women is the deification of the cult of sexual liberalism, materialism and libertinism emanating from the West…."[61]

In some variants of this narrative, women's attachment to the world is portrayed as stronger than men's, due to their possession of an "ego-self" (*nafs*) that is less disciplined. For example, the highly influential Persian/South Asian madrasa textbook, the *Kulliyāti Chāhar Kitāb*, emphasizes the relationship between observing religious law and overcoming the ego-self (*nafs*). In it, women are described as having an overly strong ego-self, which leads them to become hypererotic. Audrey Shalinsky summarizes the view of the *Kulliyāt* on women thus: "Women themselves are strongly and inherently linked to infidelity, a consequence of unrestrained *nafs*.…In addition, laziness, immodesty, propensity to gossip, anger, concern with self-adornment…are perceived to be the consequences of excessive or uncontrolled *nafs*."[62] Among our selection of texts, some authors express a similar suspicion of the particularly female attachment to worldly goods. Siddiqui, like Rahnavard above, draws attention to what he sees as a uniquely female desire to win social approval. He writes, "Why is this craze for beautification among women becoming more and more catching every day? Most surely, it is due to their feminine urge to win the approbation of men and to fasci-

60. Rahnavard, 39.
61. Zaid, 1.
62. Shalinsky, 327.

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nate them. But what for? Is it an innocent urge?"[63] Siddiqui here refers indirectly to the notion, deeply embedded in the Muslim ethos, that one should only seek the good pleasure of God, and that to seek any earthly approval marks an attachment to the world that is sinful at its root. His singling out of women as engaged in self-beautification signals his designation of women as more driven by their ego-self than men.

In order to achieve spiritual success, according to these writers, one must seek to escape from the bonds of earthly desires, include erotic ones. Through ascetic discipline, these fetters can be loosened, and perhaps even severed. Veiling, in this context, is more than simply a pragmatic mechanism for restricting erotic impulses to morally and socially acceptable relationships, or for enabling women to play a role in the social reformation of their societies by lessening the appearance of desire in men. Rather, it is an ascetic and transformative practice, a means by which the veiling woman herself may decrease her attachment to the material world, lessen her desire to beautify herself in order to garner social approval, male attention, and worldly goods. Nazlee makes clear this transformative, ascetic intent in her description of Islamic clothing: "Garments should not reflect worldly honour," she writes.[64] And elsewhere, she declares, "Any Muslimah who wears her Hijab to gain worldly pleasure or for the praise of others [is] once again ignoring the true purpose or meaning of Hijab. [The Hijab] should be worn since it has been ordered by Allah; to gain His pleasure. It is not for gaining worldly fame or praise from the people, but as an act of pure worship."[65] Rahnavard raises a similar warning to women who adopt the veil but remain unchanged internally. "Beware," she writes, "your purdah alone is nothing. It can be a shell without a kernel. [You may be] wearing this vitalizing dress without ever having tried to refine and reform yourself in order to deserve this dress, this attire."[66]

That the veil enables a separation from the profane realm can also be seen in several writings. As stated in an article on jannah.org, *ḥijāb* separates woman from the evil of the world. "Head-covering," the author writes, "highlights the Muslim woman as a pure, chaste woman and sets her apart ... The hijab is a sort of 'screen' between the chaste Muslim

63. Siddiqui, 94.

64. Nazlee, 33.

65. Nazlee, 38.

66. Rahnavard, 33.

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woman and the evil that exists in the world."[67] Nazlee similarly explains that veiling "acts like a shield which protects the woman from prying eyes and dirty thoughts."[68] The negative valence placed upon attraction and desire are signaled by the use of words like "prying" and "dirty." The world—and, specifically, the world of men with their lustful ways—is to be shunned at all costs.

On a positive note, the ascetic narrative presents veiling as a practice that supports spiritual attainment, this latter being framed alternately as devotion to God or as internal psychic strength. The writings at jannah.org, for example, explain how veiling supports the female wearer's self-actualization by separating her from the outer world: "The Muslim woman does not try to address anyone…when outside of her home. She is not concerned if men find her attractive…She leaves her home as a self-confident part of the human race, not as a fashion-plate seeking stares and adoration in order to gain self-esteem."[69] In her tract, Nakata makes it clear that veiling was part of her inward spiritual journey.

> My heart, so hungry for spiritual nourishment, absorbed every word of the lecture…Before going to the lecture room the next Sunday, I… put on the scarf…The few hours I spent at the mosque made me feel so happy and content that I kept my scarf on even after leaving in order to preserve this happiness in my heart…This was my first public appearance in *hijab*, and I sensed a difference within myself. I felt purified and protected. I felt closer to Allah…[70]

In a more homiletic tone, Nazlee explains that the *ḥijāb* "should create God-consciousness within the Muslim woman and help us to get closer to the creator of the heavens and the earth."[71] And in the writings of Rahnavard, veiling's transformative effect reaches cosmic proportions. For her, the veil becomes a vehicle of not only personal but also communal upliftment and salvation. She writes, "Through this dress, [Islam] has bestowed upon you a garden, a green field the horizon of which is spread before you to infinity. You may achieve heights, rise and strive for the

67. "Hijab: how it protects and benefits women and society," http://www.jannah.org/sisters/hijab_protect.html (accessed 6/17/08).

68. Nazlee, 29.

69. "Hijab: how it protects and benefits women and society," http://www.jannah.org/sisters/hijab_protect.html (accessed 6/17/08).

70. Nakata, 5.

71. Nazlee, 28.

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deliverance of yourself, your land, your religion, your culture and your oppressed masses, and fly high toward God, the Absolute Perfection."[72]

The theme of psychic or spiritual self-actualization found in these texts must be read as a corollary to that of *tawḥīd*, or pure devotion to God. Only when one has discarded the bonds of enslavement to the illusory powers of the material world can one truly be free, truly worship and live according to God's rules. Freedom is none other than bondage to God alone. Veiling, through its squelching of erotic expression and the self-centeredness that comes from provoking worldly desires, functions to efface the ego, to replace attachment to the world with attachment to God, and to replace illusory human love with the perfect love of God. Therefore, when a woman does not veil, the most important casualty is not men's virtue or social order, but the unveiled woman herself. As Daglas writes, "We mustn't wrong our souls by being a source of temptation."[73] Later in the same work, Daglas references again the idea that veiling, through distancing women from their own eroticism, helps women's spirituality. In speaking of her husband's family's reaction to her decision to veil, she writes, "Now, *Alhamdulillah*, the family is very proud of us for doing what we feel is best for our souls."[74]

This internal focus helps to distinguish the ascetic and pragmatic narratives. Whereas in the pragmatic narrative, there is rarely any spiritual desideratum explicitly mentioned, the ascetic narrative directly addresses spiritual attainment as well tensions that exist between spiritual and material attainment. The pragmatist perspective is primarily oriented toward the social, toward the ramifications of erotic expression and desire on communal interactions, and toward the moral reformation of society through each person upholding the parts of the law that are applicable to him or her. The ascetic perspective, on the other hand, is oriented toward the individual. Veiling, although socially beneficial, is first and foremost for the personal benefit of the wearer herself, who through it is able to reach greater purity and proximity to the divine. Writes Nakata, "Wearing a scarf strengthened my relationship with Allah."[75]

As we have shown above, texts exemplifying a pragmatic approach to veiling portray eroticism as a natural part of human nature, something

72. Rahnavard, 45.
73. Daglas, 23.
74. Daglas, 25.
75. Nakata, 8.

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that has only to be channeled into the proper outlet, which is marriage. By contrast, the ascetic narrative presents desire, expression and fulfillment as having little real legitimate place in the spiritual life. Rather, the ideal for one who would truly be moral is a minimization or elimination (through sublimation) of erotic elements. How, then, does the ascetic approach characterize the conjugal space? Is not marriage, as a licit sexual sphere, one in which eroticism may be celebrated, or at the least, freely indulged? On the contrary: Marriage, in the ascetic framework, is emblematic of a spiritual rather than fleshly union. Because eroticism continues to be viewed with nearly as much suspicion within marriage as without, the ideal marriage verges on the anerotic. Erotic love as a basis, objective or component of marriage is expressly denigrated; as elements of degraded materiality, such inclinations are cast as invalid reasons for marriage. Nazlee, for instance, declares that "a marriage based upon worldly matters is ultimately never going to be a successful marriage whereas a marriage based upon Islam is in fact the blissful and peaceful marriage."[76] Rahnavard explicitly criticizes those who take aesthetic-erotic considerations into account when seeking spouses: "This image of…a beautiful woman [takes root] as an established value in the minds of men, to the extent that even at the time of making the most important decision (in life), namely, marriage, they are after finding a spouse possessing such physical qualities."[77] The anerotic ideal of marriage is strengthened through the identification of marriage's—and thus sexuality's—main purpose as procreation, a purpose that is explicitly contrasted with erotic satisfaction. Shams Ali, for example, writes, "The purpose of 'sex' is reproduction of the Human Race, not abuse of the human body in search of perverse 'pleasure.'"[78]

Particularly instructive of the anerotic vision of marriage is Maqsood's work, one of the most popular English-language advice manuals on marriage that is specifically intended for Western Muslim audiences. According to Maqsood, the correct basis of a successful union is "compatibility." She writes, "People intending to marry need to know from the outset whether or not they are compatible with each other."[79]

76. Nazlee, 23.

77. Rahnavard, 6.

78. Shams Ali, "Undersanding the Muslim Hijab," Truth, Honesty and Justice, at http://www.worldjustic.org/taj/2004/hijab.html (accessed 6/1/08).

79. Maqsood, 15.

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Although it is possible that erotic attraction or the anticipation of intimacy be included in her definition of "compatibility," a careful reading of her manual reveals that her idea of "compatibility," while it assumes physical cohabitation (and thus does not contravene the norm against celibacy), does not include erotic attraction or pleasure. Rather, "compatibility," to her, consists of similarity of family background and shared cultural and moral values.[80] In fact, Maqsood portrays marriage based on erotic love as crass and exploitative – exploitative because eroticism can only mean a *taking* of pleasure, not a *giving*.

> Unbridled passion might seem flattering at first, but it actually betrays a selfish unconcern for the other person's happiness. It might also sow seeds of doubt ... as to the real motive for the marriage. Was it merely to provide an outlet for passion, or was it genuinely to share a lifetime with someone who is truly appreciated and loved?[81]

For Maqsood, erotic desire, expression and pleasure—even if mutual —are clearly to be contrasted with "true appreciation," "genuine" intentions and "love."

Eroticism is further an object of suspicion for Maqsood because it is artificial and temporary. Here then, we see Maqsood harking back to the notion of *eros* as idolatry, that is, of giving oneself over to something that is false. By identifying erotic love as intrinsically artificial and temporary, she signals to the reader that he or she should beware of giving any value to such feelings. Maqsood presents the idea of seeking erotic fulfillment within marriage in particularly ugly terms. She begins by saying that aside from love for God, which is the first key to a happy marriage, the second key is realistic assessment of one's own needs and the tentative spouse's ability to fulfill them.[82] The desire for erotic engagement is discounted as one of those "needs": "These needs are not just for a man to have a cheap servant or concubine (a maid, or an available sex-partner for whenever he feels 'in the mood'); or for a woman to have someone to shower her with gifts—or to provide—a beloved baby (a sugar-daddy or a stud-bull)."[83] It is critical to note that Maqsood does not qualify this or other such statements as being descriptive of only extreme or exceptional cases of lust, nor does she balance out these statements with

80. Maqsood, 16.
81. Maqsood, 16.
82. Maqsood, 13.
83. Maqsood, 13.

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descriptions of a normal, healthy or morally legitimate eroticism. One is left with the impression that any expression of desire on the part of the husband is exploitative and degrading: she puts "in the mood" in quotes, and she denigrates the desiring and desirable wife by referring to her as a concubine and "an available sex partner." Maqsood makes no distinction between good and bad eroticism within marriage; her critique is of desire, expression and the anticipation of pleasure themselves.

The ascetic narrative's negative portrayal of eroticism within marriage can be seen in the idea that the erogenous zones of the body are shameful, not to be exposed to one's partner. Maududi, for example, explains that even in marriage, "Islam does not approve that even a husband and his wife should expose their shameful parts before each other."[84] This negative portrayal of erogenous parts of the body, and by extension, of enjoyment of one's spouse's body, is also traceable to the Prophetic *sunna*. Al-Darsh cites the relevant hadith as follows: "A wife of the Prophet (ṣ), according to al-Tirmidhī, reports that she never saw the Prophet (ṣ) completely naked." Al-Darsh then comments, "The same ideal of decency and chastity finds expression in the restrictions placed on men and women in their family life."[85] At another point, too, al-Darsh insists on intersecting the intimate marital space with rules of prudery: "[E]ven in their utmost privacy, husband and wife should conduct themselves with decorum and refrain from acts of mere animality."[86]

The two competing models of the erotic are constructed with the use of certain scriptural materials, that is, Qur'anic verses and hadith reports, but are distinguished by their varying utilization of these materials. The positive model of the erotic, as we have seen, presents marriage as an eroticized space, and the seeking of pleasure as a legitimate objective of marriage. Authors who reflect this model of eroticism, and of erotic marriage, often cite a particular Prophetic hadith in which he recommends that a man look at the face of the woman whom he is considering marrying. In the *eros*-positive writings, the purpose of this "look" is portrayed as being for the man to determine if he finds the woman attractive; on this basis, these authors argue that erotic attraction is valid factor in marital decision-making.[87] Writers who uphold an ideal of anerotic mar-

84. Maududi, 170; see also Siddiqui, 71.

85. Al-Darsh, 16 and 27.

86. Al-Darsh, 16.

87. Notably, the evaluative "look" is routinely described as being for the benefit of the

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riage also cite this hadith, but frame it in a way that undermines its *eros*-positive significance. One example of such undermining is the Egyptian British scholar Syed Mutawalli ad-Darsh, who explains that the man in question had already proposed to the woman—without seeing her face—and that the Prophet was here recommending that the man look at her face specifically because "the women of Madina have some defect in their eyes." [88] Ad-Darsh, by presenting an alternate (or fuller) commentary, turns this potential *sunna* in favor of erotic marriage into a warning to would-be husbands: Examine your bride so as to ensure the terms of your marriage contract. The contrasting framing of hadiths such as this one demonstrate how both narratives of eroticism and veiling draw upon the Qur'an and *sunna* in order to bolster their points of view.

Ideological anchors

Each of the models of eroticism outlined above—the positive and the negative—and their respective narratives of veiling—the pragmatic and the ascetic—seem to be associated with, and anchored in, particular conceptions of ideal womanhood and of human nature. It is to these ideological anchors that we will now turn.

Competing conceptions of womanhood

The *eros*-positive narrative, as exemplified in the texts analyzed here, generally draw upon a liberal conception of womanhood—that is, one that builds upon liberal notions of the fundamental similarity of all human beings and also with liberal feminism and its emphasis on the essential similarity of men and women. Men and women, in the *eros*-positive model, may exemplify within themselves a sort of difference that creates mutual attraction, but this difference only exists in limited areas, such as sexual urges or parenting instincts, and is not conceived as undermining their essential identity. Even in these areas, men and women should be imagined as sharing similar experiences and drives, even if they manifest themselves differently. The *eros*-negative model, in contrast, tends to draw upon a difference model of gender—that is, its upholders assert that males and females, although they share a basic

male partner only. The idea that women may have a "look" at their suitors is not normally addressed. This does not mean that women's desires are not important in an eros-positive narrative: Since men are not assumed to be physically veiled or spatially secluded, the assumption is that women may easily examine potential male suitors.

88. Al-Darsh, 88.

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humanity, are essentially different. These two theses on the essential nature of woman—the liberal thesis and the difference thesis—give rise to and dovetail well with the alternate functions of veiling forwarded in the pragmatist and ascetic narratives, respectively.

Arguing for the liberal conception of the essential sameness of males and females, Bullock writes that Islam "does not posit essentialized male-female difference."[89] The most important corollary to this sameness is a fundamental equality. For al-Būṭī, therefore, the *ḥijāb* makes socially possible an underlying and potential gender equality; it is "a means of confirming the woman's partnership with the man…and of protecting her equality with him."[90] This essential similarity means that men and women are also similar—even if not identical—in their erotic desires. Al-Būṭī here seeks to put gender difference and sexual attraction between men and women in a larger context of a shared humanity:

> Women share with men in all aspects of humanity and, like men, they have been endowed with all types of mental and physical capacities… This, then, is the common denominator which joins them. At the same time, the woman is set apart from the man by her God-given femininity and by the alluring charm which God has made to be a source of enjoyment in which both genders share. Moreover, this enjoyment and its catalysts…spring from instinctual impulses and responses innate to the man and the woman alike. Thus, the man encounters in the woman both a partner in intellectual and practical pursuits…and an "other" to which he is instinctively drawn through the womanliness which has been planted in her being.[91]

For al-Būṭī, the difference between men and women is only the difference of otherness, which enables eroticism, and this eroticism, too, is mutually and similarly experienced. Outside of this, men and women are largely the same.

According to this liberal model of womanhood, women are not to be eroticized in their entirety, for at least two reasons: First, this would contravene the fundamental principle that men and women are essentially the same; if men's bodies and actions are not treated as wholly erogenous, then women's bodies and actions should not be, either. Second, a complete eroticization of women would necessitate a prescription to

89. Bullock, xxxii.

90. Al-Būṭī, 234.

91. Al-Būṭī, 225.

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total gender segregation and female seclusion, which would contravene this model's underlying liberal commitment to women's equal participation in public life. Accordingly, Mutahhari rejects the eroticization of woman as a whole, as evinced in his comparison of seclusion norms with imprisonment. "The duty for covering…does not necessarily mean that [women] should not leave their homes. It is not the intention of Islam to imprison women."[92] Khattab also rejects the total eroticization of woman that she perceives in calls for women's seclusion:

> Perhaps the major root of the purdah issue is the way women are viewed: their entire bodies and even voices are deemed to represent an overwhelming temptation and moral danger to men, so we must cover up and shut up (and put up with it)!…[A]re men so feeble-minded and weak-willed that they are so easily led astray?[93]

Female seclusion (*purdah*), Khattab declares, is overkill, an overly severe response to the Qur'anic injunction against "wanton display" (*tabarruj*) of one's body.[94] Pursuing education, going to work, and participating in the mosque and proselytization (*da'wa*), she says, are legitimate and even laudable activities, a far cry from "free mixing," which is prohibited.[95] Khattab agrees that the objective of Islamic dress is the elimination of eroticism from public life, but she denies that all of woman is erogenous, a denial that signals the liberal tenor of her approach. Bullock, in her critique of seclusion, even refers to her position as possibly feminist in nature.

> There is a feminist critique to be made of cultural views of women… that arguably overly sexualize the female presence, leading to controlling and containing women (for example: complete *purdah*, that is, seclusion; barriers in mosques between men and women's prayer areas…; sexualizing the voices of women, requiring them not to talk, or only to whisper in the presence of strange men; complete segregation in restaurants, buses, banks, and so on).[96]

Although Bullock does not designate her feminist critique as liberal in origin, that her particular vision of Muslim womanhood builds upon liberalism is evident.

92. Mutahhari, 8.
93. Khattab, 77.
94. Khattab, 83.
95. Khattab, 83.
96. Bullock, 152.

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The refusal in *eros*-positive writings to regard womanhood and eroticism as coterminous leads, as we have seen above, to a rejection of seclusion and absolute gender segregation, even while the commitment to eliminating eroticism from public life is maintained. The purpose of veiling is framed accordingly, in a way that is harmonious with the pragmatic narrative of veiling and its particular motifs, such as prioritization of the exoteric over the esoteric and the social-communal over the individual: Insofar as social order and communal life are key values of religion, female participation in social-communal life is regarded as good, both for the participating women and for the larger society. *Ḥijāb*, then, is not cast as a system of female seclusion, but rather as a means by which women may legitimately enter the public space. For al-Būṭī, for instance, the purpose of covering is to allow women to participate in society; it is clearly *not* part of a larger program of segregation. "The *hijab*," he writes, "is a divinely given means by which it becomes possible for the woman to take part with the man in building society…."[97] He is highly critical of seclusion ideals, saying that *ḥijāb* is not meant to be part of a larger "confinement of women" to the "harem," of "isolating the women from society and depriving her of opportunities" of socio-economic participation. He calls segregationist programs and ideologies "backwardness," and rejects face-veiling as part and parcel of the same backwardness.[98] Bullock concurs, writing that *ḥijāb* "is [properly—*HA*] linked to a view that does not limit women to the home."[99] She rejects Fatima Mernissi's contention that *ḥijāb* symbolizes a general attempt to eliminate women's sexuality—and thus women—from public life. Rather, as Bullock hopes to demonstrate through her subjects, it is a strategic device to de-eroticize women, and thus to *enable* their public participation. Khattab, in her typically passionate prose, also insists on the social liberation afforded by the veil:

> "Total purdah"—keeping women shut up in the house…is not even particularly Islamic. Women have a lot more to offer than producing babies and cooking fancy meals. Our skills, intellect, insight, etc. are vital to the well-being of the community and of the Ummah.…Men and women are allowed to have contact when necessary for the purposes of education, work and furthering the Islamic cause. Hijab…often prove[s] to be

97. Al-Būṭī, 224.
98. Al-Būṭī, 240–241.
99. Bullock, xxxii.

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> liberating in that we are no longer objects on display, we can just get on with the work at hand.[100]

As with all these excerpts, Khattab's choice of words, particularly her contention that "we are no longer objects on display," is telling. This notion of women being "on display" is normally associated by Muslim writers with non-veiling societies' hyper-eroticization and thus objectification and commodification of women. By using the same language to argue against seclusion ideals, Khattab is indirectly accusing supporters of seclusion of hyper-eroticizing, objectifying and commodifying women, just as non-Muslim societies do.

Similarly passionate in his denunciation of face-veiling (*niqāb*) and seclusion is ad-Darsh, who writes:

> [T]he *purdah* system as it exists among middle-class Muslims has nothing Islamic about it. It is purely a non-religious social custom.…Women in early Islam were not totally confined to their homes…but when they did come out they dressed and moved in a particular way which did not make them objects of attraction…[101]

Ad-Darsh clearly believes in the importance of distance between men and women, but rejects the idea that that distance is to be accomplished by removing women from public space. Public space, he seems to say, is meant to be equally accessible to men and women, provided that all potentially erotic interaction is eliminated. This liberatory presentation of the veil has been observed in several academic treatments. What I am seeking to do here is theorize this presentation in terms of a positive model of eroticism and a pragmatic narrative of veiling: *Ḥijāb* is argued as enabling women's equal public participation specifically *because* it obscures women's erogeneity and thus mitigates the erotic dimensions of the social-communal arena.[102]

Ascetically-oriented writers, in contrast with the pragmatists, tend to draw upon the idea of radical gender difference. For this group of writers,

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100. Khattab, 86.

101. Al-Darsh, 34–35.

102. An example of how public de-eroticization of women is framed as supportive of women's efforts to achieve equal social participation and cultural status, and of the plausibility of *ḥijāb* being a central means to this liberal ideal, is found in al-Būṭī, who argues that *ḥijāb*'s purpose is "to protect the souls of the men who look at the women lest their physical, instinctual desires prevent them from appreciating the woman's identity as their intelligent, thinking counterpart" (al-Būṭī, 252).

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eroticism is among the key markers of this gender difference: males are often envisaged as being more naturally libidinous—possessing stronger or insatiable desires, and requiring more frequent satisfaction—while females are usually portrayed as having a lesser, more retiring libido. Asserting an intrinsic contrast between male and female eroticism, and specifically between male aggressiveness versus female inhibition, Siddiqui writes the following:

> There is…a fine psychological distinction between a woman's looking at men and a man's looking at women. The man is by nature aggressive. If a thing appeals to him, he is urged from within to acquire it. On the contrary, the woman's nature is one of inhibition and escape. Unless her nature is totally couped, she can never…make the first advances toward the male who has attracted her.[103]

The *eros*-negative orientation with which the difference model of womanhood is usually associated means that for both men and women, as we have seen, the supplanting of erotic desires and pleasures with non-erotic ones is held up as an ideal. This ideal of erotic sublimation, when combined with a belief in radical gender difference—as exemplified in notions such as the greater libidinality of males—tends to lead to a fundamentally different program of *ḥijāb* than that supported by the liberal-pragmatic perspective: This program is usually one of complete gender segregation achieved through total seclusion of women (*purdah*). Such segregation and seclusion not only support the ascetic objective of eradicating erotic forces from public and private life, they also continually reinscribe the idea of intrinsic and ineradicable difference between men and women.

That Islam intends not simply a "portable" covering of the female body, but rather an entire system of segregation and seclusion, is affirmed by Siddiqui, who declares the woman's entire person to be erogenous (*'awra*), and who writes, "It is thus clear that Islam insist[s] on the segregation of the sexes to the utmost extent…"[104] His predecessor, Maududi, regards veiling as the outer limit of acceptable conduct by women, the external edge of a system of seclusion. Islam does *not* grant general liberty or freedom of movement to women, as the liberally-minded *eros*-positive pragmatists claim; nor does it promote equality of the sexes.

103. Siddiqui, 61. Again, Siddiqui is here taking almost verbatim from Maududi. (See Maududi, 186.)

104. Siddiqui, 42–43, 50.

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These are all Western ideas, to be rejected.[105] The idea of veiling not as a starting point for equal social participation but rather as the outer edge of acceptable conduct is voiced by Muhammad Ibn Ismā'īl, who writes, "The maximum liberty given to a woman by the Islamic system, in terms of her clothing, is only to show her face and her hands, if necessary, and that she may only go out to fulfil what is necessary."[106] Rahnavard, noted above for her spiritualized reading of the veil, also insists on the necessity of seclusion: "O Woman!…[N]ow that you have accepted Islam as a system of life and an Ideology, also accept purdah, and under its vitalizing dress recreate yourself and get a new life."[107]

Female seclusion and complete gender segregation serve the difference model of womanhood by creating and continually reinforcing alienation between males and females and thus producing an exaggerated sense of women's dissimilarity from men. Indeed, the hiddenness of women itself becomes the marker of femininity and natural womanhood. This is seen in writings such as that of Siddiqui.[108] Nakata, who, as we have seen above, describes veiling as an instrument by which she can attain nearness to God, sees women's value as inextricably tied to their seclusion: "If you keep something hidden, it increases in value."[109] Swailem, too, argues for seclusion and restriction to the home as expressions of natural womanhood. "Allah ordered her to cover her whole body and to stay in her home. It is the home inside which she can give ultimate tenderness, love and kindness because it is the natural place where she can exercise such qualities."[110] The desideratum here is not for women to veil themselves and thus enter public space, but to veil themselves and remain secluded to the greatest extent possible.

Furthermore, the female "value" or authentic femininity that is posited in this framework as being produced by concealment is conceived entirely in erotic terms, as a lack of—or freedom from—eroticism. A wom-

105. Maududi, 22.

106. Ibn Ismā'īl, 19.

107. Rahnavard, 29. It is worth noting that Rahnavard herself no longer seems to uphold this ideal of complete veiling and seclusion, or *purdah*, as evidenced by her prominent role in recent Iranian political life, which include her public appearances without a face-veil.

108. Siddiqui, 1. "The Holy Qur'an ordains that *purdah* or seclusion of women is the protector and saviour of the honour, modesty and chastity of the fair sex."

109. Nakata, 14.

110. Swailem, 11.

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an, in this narrative, is not erotic as long as she is concealed or secluded; it is only when she comes out of concealment—is unveiled—that the anerotically-conceived authentic woman becomes eroticized.[111] Texts written from this viewpoint do not normally use sexually-charged language to describe virtuous womanhood, but only vicious womanhood: The logical corollary to designating concealment as the primary factor in producing and preserving feminine value is designating non-concealment as the primary factor in women's eroticization, and thus degradation. For those who uphold a difference model of womanhood, it is not anything a woman does while in public space, but her simple presence there, that is unseemly. Shaykh ʻAbd ar-Raḥmān as-Sudays, of Saudi Arabia, is quoted by Nazlee as follows: "So stay in your homes [O women].... With Islam you are a 'protected jewel,' but without it you are dolls in the hands of wrongdoers, a mere object of amusement and a merchandise of trade."[112] For Maududi, a woman's exit from seclusion is cast as "aimless roaming on the roadside," going out to eat at a restaurant as "visiting" hotels, and pursuing education (other than home economics) is termed "abandonment" of roles of daughter, wife and mother.[113] The language of these passages evoke images of harlotry, as does the sinister portrayal of female public presence found in Ibn Ismāʻīl, who writes, "However, those who have a defeated mentality...their women...uncover excessively...[T]hese women go out displaying their charms, walking in the markets, mixing with men in universities, visiting hotels and theatres, and talking freely with strange men."[114] Again, the choice of language shows the specifically erotic casting of women's public activities; the above description could easily be describing a woman wearing headscarf and long garments, going through her day, running errands at the mall, participating in class or work, and then meeting with female friends to see a movie—activities that would be unobjectionable in the liberal-pragmatic model of eroticism, womanhood and veiling.

Women who do not veil, in this narrative, are highly eroticized, but this does not mean they are seen as feminine; rather, erotic women are

111. Occasionally, those who uphold the difference model do envision women as privately erotic as well, such as Nazlee, who writes, "Like a jewel or a diamond, every part of a woman is a source of attraction, from the ends of the hair to her toenails." (Nazlee, 30)

112. Nazlee 39, quoting *al-Mu'minah Magazine*, Dec. 1995.

113. Maududi, 25.

114. Ibn Ismāʻīl, 19.

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presented as being "like men." Authentic womanhood is concealed and anerotic, while unveiled women are both hyper-female and quasi-male. Siddiqui, for example, argues that women's entry into the economy/labor force distorts their natural femininity, to the detriment of society. Their masculinization is not only financial, social and political, but also *erotic*: Women, he says, become increasingly predatory as their erotic impulses are heightened.[115] He elsewhere declares,

> In the West women are renouncing the role of woman and…it leads them finally to the negation of life itself. They are thus losing their charm and grace, sweetness and modest traits. Women…dress like men and act like them.…Her conception of freedom is nothing but emancipation from womanliness.[116]

In at least some texts, the uneasy confluence of apparently antithetical traits—those of simultaneous eroticism and masculinity—is reflected in language that appears to make diametrically opposed claims at the same time. For example, Zaid criticizes unsecluded Muslim women, writing that long pants and long-sleeved shirts are examples of "scanty dress and masculine attire."[117] Women's freedom, he continues, "has reduced her to a sex symbol, nay a virtual man, expected to work and bear hardship of the outside world like him and to become a man-woman combined."[118] Daglas similarly alludes to the gender ambiguity of unsecluded or improperly covered women when she asserts, "Wearing tight pants and jeans not only reveal a woman's shape and size to anyone looking at her, it is also considered dressing like a man."[119]

One key way in which ideal womanhood is de-eroticized in the ascetic narrative is by identifying women as naturally fitted to that perhaps most non-erotic of roles, motherhood. In these texts, then, sexual desire in women is entirely subsumed to the reproductive end. For Maududi, for example, women's true nature—that is, authentic femaleness—is motherhood, itself conceived as antithetical to eroticism: "the love of offspring becomes her very nature."[120] Shams Ali, exemplifying this idea of natural motherhood, writes, "The purpose of the woman's 'femininity'

115. Siddiqui, 6–7.

116. Siddiqui, 64–65.

117. Zaid, 8.

118. Zaid, 14.

119. Daglas, 62.

120. Maududi, 141.

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is to give birth to her children, to feed them with milk in the early stages of life and to bring them up as healthy human beings." Siddiqui, following Maududi, similarly defines woman's true purpose and real source of happiness as motherhood. He describes women's formation thus:

> [From] the time that sex formation of the foetus starts, the physiological structures of the two sexes begin to develop differently. The female physical system is evolved in order to bear and bring up children. It is to meet the requirements of this end that all physiological changes take place in the female body from infancy to maturity…"[121]

At another point, Siddiqui writes,

> "[That] the woman is physically, intellectually and intuitively best equipped for her real function of motherhood can hardly be disputed by anybody. Therefore, if her attention is diverted to other unimportant activities, humanity is bound to suffer. In such a case she becomes just a plaything in the hands of men and a slave to their foolish demands."[122]

This identification of women with motherhood coincides neatly both with the portrayal of female eroticism as passive and with a conception of true womanhood as anerotic.

Competing anthropologies

Human nature is conceived differently in the pragmatic and ascetic narratives. The pragmatic narrative, in which eroticism is portrayed as a neutral or positive manner, appears to be anchored in an anthropology in which the value of both the physical and non-physical aspects of the person are emphasized, while the *eros*-negative ascetic narrative seems to be anchored in an anthropology that gives primary value to an internal human essence, and which regards the physical body as superfluous and of little importance. Indeed, the positive model toward eroticism found in the pragmatic narrative of veiling is made possible because of the value given in this discourse to the body. The ideal in this narrative

121. Siddiqui, 11–12. He supports the idea of natural motherhood elsewhere, saying: "Since biologically woman has been created to bring forth and rear children, psychologically also she has been endowed with such abilities as suit her natural duties." (15) This maternal character, he says, "in fact is the true character of woman in life. It helps her in the performance of her real functions as well as in the realization of her creative purpose." (18)

122. Siddiqui, 23ff.

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is not to suppress bodily urges, but rather to satisfy them and balance them. The work of achieving this balance falls to the mind, that is, to reason or intellect, for while the body is not less valuable than the mind and points the way to valid needs and desires, it is incapable of the moral discernment necessary to pursue these needs and desires in a morally sound and balanced manner. In the *eros*-positive model, this rational aspect is identified as the "authentic self." Bullock's explanation of the veil's function, for example, suggests that there resides, behind one's physical or phenomenal aspect, an internal substance. "*Hijab*…[reminds] people that [women's] worth is not based on appearances, but on their pious deeds. From this perspective, *hijab* is a symbol of a religion that treats women as persons, rather than as sex objects."[123] Mutahhari similarly refers to women's authentic or true selves, to be discovered through veiling the body. "It is only in this way that women will rediscover their real personality…"[124] Critically, however, we do not sense in pragmatically oriented texts an antipathy toward or denigration of the body.

An antipathy toward the material, however, is more pronounced in the ascetic narrative. Here the body is considered to be less noble and its drives less important than in the pragmatic narrative; in addition, the substantive component of the human being is framed in distinctly spiritual or mystical terms. Eroticism is seen as something that resides in the body and thus is extrinsic to the authentic or true spiritual self, particularly for females, who are already ideally conceived as having little sexual desire or capacity for pleasure to begin with.[125] The ascetic narrative partitions the body into noble non-erogenous and ignoble erogenous parts, such as when Maududi speaks of "shameful parts" that are not permissible even for spouses to see or touch one of the other.[126] To be truly "human," then, is to escape the body and eroticism and attain an authentic spiritual selfhood. Rahnavard's text is particular illustrative of this anthropology. Through Islam and veiling, she writes, "the Muslim woman discovered the mysteries of her being and came to realize that her existence was not confined to her body and sex, but was primarily a divine and celestial substance which was to be exalted and elevated in

123. Bullock, 219.

124. Mutahhari, 69.

125. Siddiqui, 94.

126. Maududi, 170.

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order that it may be salvaged…"[127] The veil, for Rahnavard, is an instrument by which a woman may leave aside material existence and find her authentic spiritual self. "The body which is destined to decay, to be… [eaten by] worms, even at the pinnacle of its beauty is but an obstruction in the way to real beauty. The beauty of concealment, therefore, lies in the elimination of the physical values in order to revive the values of the real self of a woman…"[128]

Siddiqui similarly posits as ideal the freeing of oneself from one's body and its desires; sexual engagement is tolerated in the conjugal sphere, but the primacy of the spiritual over the bodily is pronounced.

> [Islam] does not condemn sexual relation of men and women, yet it does not approve of their being wholly taken up with them. It rather urges them to devote their energies to the higher and nobler ends of life…Islam gives both man and woman ideals that elevate them far above the purely animal level of needs and passions. The Holy Qur'an and the tradition of the Holy Prophet [pbuh] are full of moral precepts that aim at the spiritual elevation of [the] human soul [and] discipline it to exercise self-control…[129]

For Siddiqui, then, sexual urges may be fulfilled, but only for prophylactic purposes. *Kulliyāt Chāhar Kitāb* expresses a similar spiritual anthropology and arrives at a similar ascetic ideal. "The killing of *nafs* [is not] possible except by means of the use of the dagger of silence, the sword of hunger, or the spear of solitude and humility…If you are a slave of your sexual desire, even if you think you are free, you are a prisoner."[130] Nakata, too, sees an illuminated, spiritualized selfhood that is brought out through veiling and that is veiled when the body is visible. She writes that when she first glimpsed the faces of veiled women, when the women "removed their face covers, a sort of inner radiance was apparent."[131] The ideal presented in these passages is a spiritual elevation, obtained through ascetic discipline and conceived as diametrically opposed to bodily pleasure.

127. Rahnavard, 7.

128. Rahnavard, 4–6.

129. Siddiqui, 28–29.

130. Shalinsky, 326.

131. Nakata, 10.

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Conclusion: ambiguities and ambivalences

In sum, then, we see that English-language Islamic advice literature presents its readership with not one but two largely opposed functions of veiling, within each of which is embedded a model of eroticism that is incompatible with the other. On one side, we encounter a pragmatic narrative of veiling—one that regards veiling as a purely mechanical means of hindering eroticism in the public realm, and in which eroticism is itself regarded either as a morally neutral, natural human set of impulses, or even as a positive aspect of life, to be sought and celebrated within the parameters of legal marriage. In this narrative, women and men are portrayed as essentially similar, a portrayal reminiscent of liberal feminist ideology. Accordingly, women who are careful to do their part in obscuring eroticism—and de-eroticizing themselves—in public space are free to engage with men on non-erotic and egalitarian terms; complete veiling, gender segregation and female seclusion are regarded as unnecessary and overly stringent, hyper-eroticizing practices. The *eros*-positive model is constructed on an anthropology that bifurcates the human being into two parts, the body and reason (or mind), and although it regards reason as rightly in charge of the body's acts, it does not regard the relationship between the body and mind as inherently antagonistic, nor does it regard the body and its impulses as intrinsically an impediment to achieving the virtuous life. Virtue, on the contrary, is conceived as achieving a balance between the various desires of the body.

On the other side, we encounter an ascetic narrative of veiling, in which veiling is regarded as not simply a means of obscuring but of actually transforming the self through an eradication of erotic tendencies. Eroticism is viewed negatively in this model, as a signifier of materiality. The impetus toward erotic expression and pleasure is regarded as a signifier of human attachment to the world, an attachment that interferes with spiritual achievement and that must therefore be attenuated to the greatest degree possible. The material aspect of the human being, for the negative model of eroticism, is regarded as inferior to the esoteric aspect. In this narrative, women and men are presented as radically different. This difference is both marked and underscored through the injunction to complete veiling and female seclusion, and by a de-eroticized portrayal of ideal womanhood. Marriage, in this narrative, is described as a framework within which cohabitation may licitly occur, but it is not a truly erotic space because desire, expression and pleasure remain suspect.

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At this point, it may be helpful to step back and make some observations about these narratives. Perhaps most important is that my objective here has been to try and unearth models and narratives that are not always explicitly delineated by the authors themselves. My models and narratives are, in other words, theoretical constructs, abstractions that hopefully enable us to decipher more clearly particular claims and lines of argument, and to see how metaphysical claims relate to ethical injunctions. In the preceding sketch, I have sought to draw my hypothesis in as clear a manner as possible, so that its general outlines be comprehensible. The actual functioning of these models (of eroticism) and narratives (of veiling) in contemporary Islamic advice literature is more complex. Any simple schematization of the argumentation structure of these texts is complicated by the fact that while certain discursive motifs tend to be consistently correlated (such as the anerotic marriage ideal with the ascetic narrative of veiling and the erotic marriage ideal with the pragmatic narrative), there are other motifs that are variously associated with either of the two narratives. One example of such a variable motif is the particular definition of erotic interaction an author utilizes. Is any and all interaction between the sexes to be regarded as erotic in nature, or are some forms of gender interaction anerotic, such as in the contexts of work or education, or when eye contact is not made, or when the voice is intentionally divested of erotic signaling? How different authors identify erotic interaction may not neatly or consistently align with their portrayals of eroticism as positive or negative, nor with the narrative of veiling upheld.

A second variable motif is the designation of female erogeneity. According to some texts and authors, a woman is erogenous in her entirety, from her hair to her toes, and perhaps even including her voice, presence or any activity in which she participates. These texts tend to regard a woman's erogeneity as determined simply by her femaleness. In this view, because she is entirely female, there is no part of her that is not erogenous, nor is her erogeneity determined contextually. Other texts imply a limited and situational erogeneity of women, such that there are aspects or parts of a woman that are not necessarily erogenous —such as her face, hands or feet—or that aspects of her eroticism can be intensified or lessened depending on her behavior or the context.

A third variable motif complicating any simplistic schematization has to do with particular authors' tolerance of potential manifestations of

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the erotic in the public sphere. This, too, is somewhat removed from the moral evaluation of eroticism itself, but affects prescriptions for conduct. In some writings, even potential erotic interaction is intolerable. At the other end, we see tolerance of a minimal amount of eroticism, particularly where the law is not violated and in which such interaction is only occasional or potential. In other words, there is a recognition among some authors that women who leave their faces uncovered and who participate in public life *might* attract male attention, but this minimal amount of potential attraction is acceptable because such attention can be mitigated through individual moral action, such as lowering the gaze, avoiding being alone with a non-*maḥram* male, and the like.

These variable discursive motifs intersect with the two main narratives of eroticism and veiling in a variety of ways. For instance, a particular author might have no tolerance for the possibility of erotic interaction in public life, but might adhere to a relatively relaxed definition of female erogeneity, and thus be willing to allow women to show their faces, pursue education or careers outside the home, or speak with men in the workplace. In this case, the author's relatively relaxed rules do not conflict with his or her intolerance of potential eroticism outside the conjugal space. In another instance, a writer might consider the face erogenous, but is willing to let women's faces show, because he or she tolerates a certain potential for erotic desire in public space. In sum, a particular author's regard for a woman's face, or voice, or presence as erogenous, or his or her tolerance for potential attraction to emerge in social life, are variable elements that do not necessarily indicate his or her model of eroticism or narrative of veiling. They do, however, make the process of mapping out these models and narrative more complicated, and require an attempt at nuance in any such mapping.

A second factor that complicates the argumentation structure of these texts is best considered by recalling that these are advice texts, geared specifically to persuade readers of the religious obligation to veil. The rhetorical aims of these texts means that although most authors adhere in the main to one of the two narratives of veiling, and thus to one of the two models of eroticism presented above, this adherence is always more or less instrumental. Almost all authors deviate on occasion from their core ideology, employing elements of the opposing model or narrative, even if such appeal or employment produces logical inconsistencies. Such deviations and inconsistencies mean that a single author or

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text may draw upon both models and narratives, depending upon which (s)he perceives as rhetorically more effective at the moment.

Ad-Darsh, for example, derides face-veiling and female seclusion, saying that those who commend such practices are "obsessed with sexuality." His derision would presumably imply that women's faces are not uniformly erogenous, that some men are able to view women's faces without moral threat, and that insistence upon total veiling indicates aberrant psychology and need not be indulged. This inference is contravened, however, by other passages, wherein he argues that a man may in no circumstance (except when evaluating her for purposes of marriage) look at a woman's face—even if he is not attracted to her.[132] Al-Darsh thus simultaneously appeals to incompatible notions of female erogeneity, the second of which conflicts with his largely pragmatic narrative of veiling. One explanation for this deviation is that the doctrinal and social consequences of following through on the idea that women need not cover their faces are unsupportable, and so the seclusion ideal is implicitly strengthened despite its explicit rejection.

Rahnavard provides another example of an author's instrumentalist deviation from her own core narrative. The reader might recall Rahnavard's highly mystical, ascetic approach, visible in her repeated condemnations of erotic desire and pleasure. However, she at one point surprises us with an allusion to erotic pleasure within marriage: "I entrust my sex-appeal, feminine character and features solely to the limits of my family, so that throughout my life I may be pure and fresh like the morning dew, so that…my sex, my special features and my feminine culture may achieve feminine perfection within the garden of my home….[133] Here, in the midst of a tract that treats eroticism as utterly superfluous and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic being, Rahnavard suggests that marriage is a place of sexual longing and realization. The author's appeal to the opposing ideal of erotic marriage seems geared toward readers who are not persuaded by her call to asceticism, to convince them that veiling and seclusion are compatible with conjugal desire and pleasure as well, and to respond to those who would see her ascetic ideal as contravening the legal traditions' legitimation of sexual pleasure.

A final and most interesting instance of rhetorical deviation is seen in Bullock's thesis that Islam "does not posit essentialized male-female

132. Al-Darsh 11, 14, 34–35, 77–78.

133. Rahnavard, 47.

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difference,"[134] a claim that is in line with her overall liberal feminist approach. She fortifies her liberal feminist vision of Islam throughout her work, such as by arguing in favor of women's greater social, political and economic participation. This vision, however, runs up against her *a priori* rhetorical commitment to the necessity of *ḥijāb*, leading her, particularly toward the end of her work, to contest the liberal feminist rejection of inherent gender differences, and to affirm the existence of such essential differences.[135] The problem for Bullock is that a rejection of natural gender differences leads to an undermining of the universal veiling norms that she is seeking to defend, while asserting such essentialism plays into the hands of feminist critics of veiling. Her solution is to assert a socio-cultural determinism while rejecting a biological determinism. That is, she rejects the idea that men's and women's biological differences cause men to malevolently eroticize and harass women, but asserts nevertheless that such behavior is universally inculcated in males through socialization patterns.[136] One may ask whether positing universal gender socialization is appreciably different from positing biologically-determined behavior, but what is more relevant to our point is that Bullock deviates from her straightforwardly liberal narrative and develops this compromise version of gender essentialism in order to bolster the obligation of veiling.

Thus we see that no author adheres purely to one model of eroticism or supports only one function for veiling, but rather, that authors occasionally deviate from their core narratives, either to address problematic scriptural indicants or prevailing religious or cultural ideals that seem to contravene the author's argument. These discursive inconsistencies complicate any simple reduction of particular authors' arguments to one or the other model of eroticism or narrative of veiling. At the same time,

134. Bullock, xxxii.

135. Bullock, 200.

136. Bullock's argument deserves full quotation here:

> I argue that what the Qur'an is offering us is a description of the durable dangers to be found for women in the public arena. Covering for women is argued for more as a strategy than as a statement of essentialized female/male identity.…In contrast to the liberal/postmodern position which hopes that socialization will eventually eliminate male harassment of women, the Qur'an is suggesting that this is an enduring feature of human existence. This need not imply biological determinism, XY chromosomes means harasser of woman: most men treat women well. It is rather that socialization makes this kind of male behavior constantly replicated and replicable.…The Qur'anic position implies that patriarchal male socialization is going to be a stronger force than any counterforce can be (205).

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these outsteppings do not undermine the existence of fundamental tensions in this literature, because, as explained above, the models and narratives I outline are theoretical; their actual deployment in works on veiling should not be expected to be perfectly consistent or "pure."

We opened this essay by introducing the category of popular Islamic advice literature on *ḥijāb* and gender relations that is marketed and accessible to Western Muslim audiences. We asked how the various components of eroticism are constructed in this category of writings. What I have sought to demonstrate here is that if this literature is considered collectively, one finds a fairly deep ambivalence toward the erotic: One reads that Islam is a "sex-positive" religion, but one is also encouraged to maintain serious suspicions about the moral legitimacy of desire, expression and pleasure. One encounters an advocacy of marriage as an erotic space and a simultaneous exalting of ascetic dissociation from the body and its cravings. One discovers a presentation of womanhood as entirely erogenous and also limitedly so, and thus a call both to hiddenness and also to visibility, to privacy and also to publicity. Although this study has been of texts and is not ethnographic in nature, one may surmise that readers of this didactic literature who take it as a source of moral or practical guidance would be left with an ambiguous picture of how they should treat their own, and others', erotic impulses, even in the marital context.[137] As one respondent to Ilkkaracan and Seral states

137. There is a considerable amount of ethnographic work that has been done on veiling/*ḥijāb* among Western, American or English-speaking women. This work suggests that the sort of bifurcation that exists in the didactic literature, between an ascetic narrative of veiling built upon a negative model of eroticism and a pragmatic narrative of veiling built upon a positive model of eroticism, also exists among the women interviewed for those ethnographic studies. This does not mean, of course, that these women's attitudes toward eroticism and veiling are due to their consumption of the particular tracts studied here alone. To determine precisely where veiling women get their information, or the impact of particular didactic materials on their views of eroticism, would require further ethnographic work.

For examples of ethnographic research on veiling that specifically pertains to the themes raised here, please see the following: Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough, eds., *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003); Stefano Allievi, "The Shifting Significance of the *Halal/Haram* Frontier: Narratives on the *Hijab* and Other Issues," in *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Austin: University of Texas, 2006); John Bartkowski and Jen'nan Ghazal Read, "Veiled Submission: Gender, Power and Identity Among Evangelical and Muslim Women in the United States," *Qualitative Sociology* 26:1 (2003); Janet Bauer, "Sexuality and the Moral 'Construction' of Women in an Islamic Society," *Anthropological Quarterly* 58(3), (July 1985); Katherine

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when describing her experience of marriage, "For years you are taught that sex and sexuality is the devil to be feared. Then, in one night, it is supposed to become the angel to be loved. This is just not possible."[138]

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138. Ilkkaracan and Seral, 194.

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