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Title: Muslims in the Greek System

**About the
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Abstract: For the first part of my research project I would like to look at the participation of Muslim students in the Greek system. The first part is determining the number of students involved. For that, I would use data from the student archives to find the percentages of Muslim students at the University and Muslims in sororities and fraternities. For the second part of my project I plan to interview non-Muslims and Muslims who participate in the Greek system, as well as Muslims who choose not to participate. I'll start by talking to my friends, both Muslims and non-Muslims who are part of the Greek system. I will find more people by contacting the sororities and fraternities on campus, as well as the Muslim student organizations.

The purpose of this is first to see the non-Muslim impression of Muslims both within and outside of the system and second to get a Muslim take on sororities and fraternities. I would also like to find out if an individual's level of devoutness affects his/her decision to pledge. With this project I hope to ultimately figure out if there is a representative number of Muslims in the Greek system, and if not, why? I predict that my research will show that the Muslim population involved in the Greek system is not representative to the percentage of Muslims on campus.

Question:

1. What factors most influenced your decision to join or not to join a sorority/fraternity?
2. How important is your religion to you?
3. As a Muslim, how do you feel about the drinking culture of the Greek system?
4. Do you know of any/other practicing Muslims within your house?
5. Do you think there are a lot of Muslims in the Greek system? Why or why not?
6. Do you ever feel that you have to compromise your religious beliefs in order to fit in on campus/within the Greek system?
7. Do you think there is any prejudice against Muslims within the

Greek system?

8. What race do you think most of the Muslims within the Greek system are?

9. Do you find it difficult to be a Muslim in the Greek system?

10. How do you, as a Muslim who doesn't participate in the Greek system, feel about Muslims who do?

Data (Field

Notes): Interview #1:

- Freshman
- Sigma Lambda Gamma “non-mainstream minority sorority” (UGC)
- IFC, Panhellenic, BGC, UGC
- Mainstream (Panhell. and IFC) have houses
- UGC “all minorities”
- UGC no rush → informationals “facebook, or on the quad”
- “One of my friends, her sister is a Gamma from another school. We didn't know anything. She just called one of the girls she didn't know from here who was a sister and that girl took us around.”
- “I couldn't pledge my first semester because they want you to get a feel for school and to shop around”
- “knew mainstream wasn't for me. Not a big fan of living with a whole bunch of girls, and drama. I wanted a smaller organization, where I could get involved more and hold a position”
- “def. cultural clash”. Stereotypical blond hair, blue eyes sorority girl for mainstream sororities.
- “I'm not religious”
- “I know that there are Muslim girls in the Indian sorority. They're all either Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist.”
- UGC → “[drinking] isn't as big of a concern”
- “def. able to hold religiousness in a sorority. What it comes down to is you make your own choices; you do what you want to. And you don't have to do what you don't want to
- big events are volunteering, fundraising, co-ops.
- “One girl never comes out with us and nobody takes that against her” (8:44)
- (9:26) “It's very hard to fuse the two together” (being Muslim and American) “culturally, It's possible”
- (on blending American and Muslim culture; 9:40) “MY older sister is very religious and she was involved with the Muslim community big time. She would even get comments from people

for hanging out with Muslim guys. But they were putting together events for the MSA. There's always going to be 'How religious are you?' and how you interpret things"

- Interviewee and twin are only family members born in America

- "My dad is super, super religious. My mom is a lot more lenient than my dad, but she's pretty religious as well. She's pretty chill. I think that's because of the experiences my parents have gone through with my siblings" (10:48)

- brother married Hindu

- how did your parents react when you told them you were going to join a sorority? (12:38)

- o "My mom, I don't think she completely understood what it was. My dad doesn't know. I haven't talked to my dad in a while"

- o "My parents are divorced, which puts us another step towards Americanized Muslims."

- o "My mom doesn't really care as long as I keep my academics up, I can do what I want. I told her what it's about, but I don't think she understands the negative connotations that are involved with a sorority or fraternity"

- o "When I was about to pledge, I told my older sister and she was relieved cause it was a lot better than what her vision of a sorority was" (13:20)

- As of what I know, no, there are not a lot of Muslims in the Greek system

- "For UGC, I don't think wearing a hijab would hinder your experience, it might be a small hindrance because they don't understand them. A lot of people just group all sororities and fraternities together but there's a huge difference huge, huge difference between IFC, UGC, BGC and Panhell." (15:27)

- (17:30) Why aren't there a lot of Muslims in the Greek system?

- "Definitely because of the negative preconceived notions that people have about sororities and fraternities. And because of the larger drinking behavior, and party behavior, but that's also just a stereotype. They don't know what we actually do, how many volunteer and service projects we do"

- UGC organizations are small and tight knit.

- "It's nice cause you get to bond with a lot of other minorities."

- (20:00) Promoting cultural awareness: "Cultural awareness is one of our principles. We have our meeting at LaCasa but we're trying to work more with the other cultural houses to show that we do promote cultural awareness."

- "It's good that I wasn't pledging during Ramadan because I still fast and I don't know what I would have done. But I'm sure they

would have made some special accommodations for me.”

Interview #2

- Persian → mom and dad both from Iran
- Dad came to America for college
- Arranged marriage
- In my family, one other girl covers. I have a pretty big family and most people don't follow Islam strictly
- (6:38) “a lot more protective of women than they were of men. But [my mom] also had a lot more responsibility when she was younger
- “they like to give me everything they can, and as far as the rules, my mom doesn't like to give them because she didn't like having them when she was younger, as far as dating. I'm allowed to date, my brother is allowed to date and is doesn't have to be a Muslim,”
- “They wouldn't care if I married a non-Muslim because they don't practice Islam.”
- Dad married before to white Christian; half-brother Christian. Dad divorced
- Parents 15 years apart
- Dad came here to go to school to be an engineer; mom came to marry dad
- “I don't think my dad would ever want to go back, to live in Iran”
- “People there are more family oriented than here”
- (9:36) Is that a Muslim or Persian thing? “I think people that are more Americanized focus on themselves more than on their family. I think it's more of a cultural thing than religious”
- (10:40) How did your parents feel about your decision to rush?
 - o “My dad was in an engineer frat. So my dad had some basis of that. I guess the whole thing is drinking and my parents don't really care about that. The important to my dad was if it was a good standing sorority, if they have good GPAs and if I would gain something from it. My mom thinks that it's focused around drinking too much. As long as I'm doing good in school I can still be a part of the sorority”
- (12:40) “It was my choice. When we put our hands on the bible in the sorority, it chose not to. They never really raised me knowing my religion. They wanted too but they don't really practice.”
- I practice my own thing and as far as a sorority it's never really affected that.
- (14:20) if something has to do with reciting something, I just

don't recite it. But I've never been forced to do anything

- "I don't think most people don't know I'm Muslim. It doesn't affect the sorority so I don't think they care"
- prayer beads, pray every night, never been to a mosque though
- (18:08) American vs. Muslim
 - o "I think I identify as Muslim-American. And I think anyone can if they've lived here long enough. I don't think America really has it's own culture, cause it's made-up of so many different cultures. Yeah you're American, everyone's American here. Duh!
 - (19:02) I think you can, but some people don't want to be because they look down on it maybe? I know people who do"
 - o (19:36) "A Muslim girl that covers would never join a sorority. I mean, when you're Muslim you can't drink and basically the whole Greek system revolves around drinking.
 - (20:40) "I think if I were to cover, I would feel kind of awkward. Can you image going to an exchange? No guy would ever talk to you cause they would just think that's weird. So I guess that [covering] would be kind of looked down upon."
 - (21:16) "I think more Muslim guys join because guys have it a lot easier than Muslim women do. But even though it might be easier for a guy, I don't think one who really practices more would ever join because he wouldn't believe in it."
 - Anything anti-Muslim (22:06) "If you're really Muslim maybe...every sorority is different, but their traditions might have something to do with religion, but not every sorority does. Even when you rush, that's a really hard process. You only have a little time to talk to girls at each house, and some sororities, you can tell what their qualifications are. They might look down on that." (Sorority Girls judging Muslim girls during rush)
 - (12:33) "I can see how a sorority might not be welcoming to someone who practices Islam heavily."
 - "Cultural houses are mostly minorities so you'd probably feel more comfortable there"
 - Why did you join a sorority? I was never really sure whether I wanted to do a sorority or not. believe it or not I didn't think it would be my thing. I know I'm a girly girl but I like to do my own thing a lot and I always had a mentality a sorority would be drama filled house with 200 girls. not the case. I rushed because I can't say no to something without trying it. There is a reason we have the biggest Greek system in the nation and why over 6000 students join a Greek organizations. I wanted to give it a try. Sorority is like a club, you meet new people, open opportunities, and have a family away from home. That is why I rushed. I always

like to meet new people and to get involved and that is a great way to do that. (I love our philanthropy as well!!) As far as Alpha Phi, it is a great house. All the houses that I rushed, all 19, were amazing houses with wonderful girls. obviously I can only choose one. No specific reason why I picked alpha phi, I just felt I fit in there, gut feeling, I placed them as my first, and they also offered me a bid. So it worked out. As far as my religion or nationality, none of those had to d

Interview #3

o (5:55) "I don't think I've ever seen a Muslim in a leadership position"

o (6:55) "The religion, I know a little bit because I've had Muslim friends before. In high school, there were kids who prayed during class."

o (7:50) P: "I haven't really been that exposed to Islam before I came her. It's a lot more diverse here than it is at home. But you still don't hear a lot about it"

o (8:40) Do you think Muslim girls are discriminated against?
"Yeah, I think that's a big factor. I don't know any Muslim people, but I know people who are Jewish. And a friend told me that some houses wouldn't pick girls with Jewish sounding last names. Its sad, but I definitely think it happens. Being Muslim could hold people back because they might be scare of what people might think of them, if they're going to judge them"

o Modesty; would Muslim dress keep girls from participating in events? (10:02) P: "When we hold events, we sometimes have to dress the same and look the same. If you wear the head scarf, they might be kind discriminative because there are time when we represent our sorority and we have to look a certain way."

o (10:52) "You can't just tell someone to take it [their hijab] off. You want them to be accepted but you should be respectful. I think it would be hard for them cause they would stand out."

o (11:55) "There's definitely a religious component to the sorority. There are prayers, that our just tradition from when the sorority was founded. There are some things you have to do involving religion. I don't think it's forced on you. It's more of a social thing. It everyone's doing it why would you say no?"

o P: "It's not like you have to put your hand on the bible. But everyone does it to fit in. a conformity thing. But it's not forced on you."

o (13:30) P: "My friend doesn't drink and she's in a sorority that has a lot of social events that involve drinking. It's probably hard

not to but she doesn't drink."

o (13:59) "It's a really big stereotype that the Greek community is a bunch of drunks. But there are a lot of people who decide not to engage in the activity and it's ok. We actually have risk management people who are forced to stay sober throughout the whole event. So if someone was Muslim and in a sorority, they could be risk management. Or they could just not drink."

o American vs. Muslim

o (16:38) "It depends where you grown up and the people you grow up around. I'm first generation but I consider myself Hispanic American. It depends who you hang around with because that's whom you identify with. I consider myself American because I was born here and raised here"

o (17:18) P: "I think one thing that a lot of first generation Americans struggle with is assimilating to the American culture. I think that when a Muslim, or anyone, is introduced to the Greek system, they assimilate into American culture, and it's not that they're trying to hide their identity, but they become very Americanized. When you want to be part of something, you just adapt to that culture.

o (18:18) "The same thing goes for the cultural fraternities and sororities. Cause they feel comfortable in that element because of how they identify themselves. Because some people might not be comfortable in a social house, where there's mostly Americanized people. I think it's hard for people who are Muslim to just hop into the American Greek system because it's so different. A lot of the morals are pushed back, a lot of things are pushed to the side and you conform to what they're telling you to conform to."

o (19:45) "Cultural understanding could be promoted more. No one really reaches out to the cultural sororities and fraternities. And they've never come to our house. The cultural houses and Panhellenic houses should work together more."

o P: "And it works both ways. We should support each other more"

o Sororities are historically white, and even though they're more diverse now, they still don't represent the diversity of school.

o Why did you join a sorority? P: actually it was kind of an impulse move- I really decided to rush the day before rush began- my roommate told me about Panhellenic and I decided to sign up just to experience rush. I really did not know that much about the Greek life other than the stuff they put on TV so I wanted to see for myself. there was no loss in trying it so I did and I was amazed how big Greek life is here at u of I- seeing so many girls

all come together from different houses to do philanthropic events is what really stood out and made me want to join– I like helping out people. Another reason was because I had the opportunity to connect with a group of girls that I can go to for anything. In h/s I was part of a dance team where it felt nice to be part of a group of girls that shared the same interest– I believe that’s what Alpha Phi now in my life represents. I felt comfortable with the warm welcome of Alpha Phi girls and by third invite I knew that I would fit in and be able to act myself. I have become way more involved in this organization and has definitely filled my college experience at u of I. religion and nationality weren’t big factors in deciding to join alpha phi, I think my choice was more based on the personality and genuineness of the girls that I was rushed by that determined my choice!

Interview #4

- (2:13) “My mom was Christian for most of her marriage to my Dad. It was when my sister and I got older and became more religious that she converted.”
- “People who are religious, it cycles up and down. Sometime your observant and sometimes your not.”
- (3:59) What is your identity? “It goes back and forth. When I was younger I would say ‘I’m American, I’m American.’ But when we came back here I went through a phase where I was like, ‘I’m Pakistani.’ But now, I can’t really identify with the Pakistani community that much, because they have some customs that I don’t like (4:22), like gender inequalities, and expectations and social pressures. Like when I got married, there was this pressure right away to have a baby. I think I can identify more with American people and with white Christian people, cause that’s what my mom was, and that kind of what I was used to growing up. But I can identify with both groups.”
- (6:37) American Greek system “For someone who is a white American Christian, they generally believe it’s ok to have premarital sex, and it’s ok to go out and drink socially. And that kind of stuff I’m not comfortable with. ” → Muslims generally aren’t comfortable with the Greek “sex and the city” culture
- (7:20) “A lot of Muslim women who were brought up here in fairly liberal families, they share a lot of values with American non-Muslim counter parts. But when it comes to Islam, there are certain boundaries you do not cross”
- (7:45) “Image of a lot of sororities even though they do charity work and stuff like that, there’s a lot of partying involved, and the

girls who you'd be in the sorority with in general date and stuff like that."

- (9:50) Stereotypes "I've met a lot of people who when they say 'I'm in a sorority,' I'm like wait, I didn't expect you to be in one. I kind of had this image that the typical sorority girl is rich, white, likes to party a lot, spoiled, rich, but I don't think is really true." Legally blond "all of the girls are perfect"
- "I listened to these two sorority girls talk for 20 minutes about clothes. I think a sorority like that would be hard for a Muslim girl to get in to."
- "I think that a lot of the Muslims in sororities and fraternities are not visibly Muslim"
- "I think people look at exclusively Muslim sororities favorably"
- Is there something un-Muslim about the Greek system? (16:15) "There are so many factors that go into it. The Muslim who joins a sorority or fraternity, probably wouldn't be active in the Muslim community any so the Muslim community wouldn't really know of that person to judge them"
- (17:15) It would be kind of weird if someone was in MSA and in a sorority.
- Muslim parents → "I don't think they would know anything about it. But if they did they probably wouldn't like it."

Discuss Muslims in the Greek System
(Final

Paper): The University of Illinois has the largest Greek community out of every other university or college in the United States. With the numbers growing every year, students in sororities and fraternities represent approximately 22% of the undergraduate population. Even students who choose not to actively participate in Greek life feel and see its presence everywhere, from sorority girls "canning" on the Quad to the mansions that house herds of fraternity boys. However, even though such a large number of students represent the Greek system, the Greek system does not necessarily represent the student body at the University of Illinois. For an organization that is supposed to promote sisterhood/brotherhood and school spirit, there seems to be a lack of minority representation within mainstream sororities and fraternities. The purpose of my research was to gain a better understanding of the involvement of the Muslim student population within the Greek system. With the hopes of gaining insight into why or why not Muslim

students choose to become involved in the Greek system, I conducted five interviews on campus. By chance, all of my interviewees were female, so my results really focus on sororities more than fraternities. For the record, I do not think this is because there are more female Muslims in the Greek system, but rather because I simply know more females on campus. Four of my interviewees are currently involved in Greek life; Zaina and Sabiya are Muslims, and Danielle and Sarah are not. The fifth interviewee, Nasreen is a Muslim student who is not in a sorority. I found these women by asking them if they would be interested in being interviewed, and by asking other friends if they knew any Muslims in sororities or fraternities who I could interview. Danielle, Sarah, and Sabiya live in my dorm, Nasreen is in one of my classes, and Zaina is the sister of another one of my classmates. My interviews were conducted individually, with the exception of Danielle and Sarah, who are roommates, and I interviewed them together. Also by chance, all of my interviewees happened to be first generation Americans, which will come up again later. Zaina is Arab (she did not specify which country her parents are from). Sabiya's parents are from Iran, but she identifies herself as Persian. Nasreen was born in America, but spent most of her childhood living in Pakistan, where her father is from. Her mother is white and only recently converted from Christianity to Islam. Sarah's parents are from the Philippines and Danielle's are from Argentina.

The first interview I conducted was with Zaina, who is a member of a United Greek Council, or UGC, sorority. Prior to our meeting, I didn't know much about UGC, or the Greek system in general. Zaina seemed frustrated that "A lot of people just group all sororities and fraternities together, but there's a huge, huge difference between IFC, UGC, BGC and Panhellenic." One of the differences that appealed to Zaina when she started looking at her sorority is that UGC sororities don't have official houses. She said, "I knew mainstream wasn't for me. I'm not a big fan of living with a whole bunch of girls, and drama. I wanted a smaller organization, where I could get involved more and hold a position." UGC sororities are in fact much smaller than Panhellenic ones, averaging eight members per chapter, as opposed to 137. Not having a house also impacts the functioning of the sorority. Since Zaina's sorority is service based, their big events revolve around volunteering and fundraising, and are often hosted at LaCasa or one of the other cultural houses. She was drawn to her sorority because, "cultural awareness is one of our principles. We

have our meeting at LaCasa but we're trying to work more with the other cultural houses to show that we do promote cultural awareness."

This highlights another major difference between UGC and Panhellenic sororities: UGC chapters are culturally based. Although anyone can join, there are sororities and fraternities specifically targeted at Latino/a students, Asian, South Asian, and—although there isn't a chapter on the U of I campus—Muslim students.

While each chapter individually is not particularly diverse, the goal of the United Greek Council as a whole is to promote cultural awareness, in addition to creating academic success and giving back to the community. As an Arab student, Zaina thinks, "it's nice cause you get to bond with a lot of other minorities." She thinks this is one of the aspects that would allow a Muslim girl to fit in with a UGC sorority. Danielle understands why the ethnic sororities might be more appealing to Muslim students than Panhellenic sororities, which she says "are historically white, and even though they're more diverse now, they still don't represent the diversity of school. It makes sense that a minority student would want to be with other minorities. Especially with the blonde-haired blue-eyes white sorority girl stereotypes." Nasreen admitted that one reason why she never considered joining a sorority is because of the "Legally Blonde stereotype where all of the girls were perfect." Over the years she's had many moments where that stereotype was broken, and many where it was upheld: I've met a lot of people who when they say 'I'm in a sorority,' I'm like wait: I didn't expect you to be in one. I kind of had this image that the typical sorority girl is rich, white, likes to party a lot, spoiled, rich, but I don't think is really true. Still, there have been moments, like when I listened to these two sorority girls talk for 20 minutes about clothes, where I'm totally shocked. I think a sorority like that would be hard for a Muslim girl to get in to.

Whether they're stereotypes or not, there are certain things that about sorority life that would never appeal to a girl who practices Islam.

Naturally, alcohol use in the Greek system was a subject that came up in all of the interviews. Zaina felt that "drinking isn't as big of a concern with my sorority as with mainstream sororities. One girl never comes out with us and nobody holds that against her." That's not to say that girls in UGC sororities don't party, but drinking is not really institutionalized like it is with the Panhellenic sororities.

Exchanges with the fraternities on campus are a central part to life in a Panhellenic sorority. At these events, it is perfectly acceptable even for underage students to get very drunk. Sabiya introduced the topic in her interview by admitting, “the whole Greek system revolves around alcohol. I hate to admit that but it’s true.” Danielle and Sarah agreed that drinking was a huge part of Greek life, but they insisted that it wasn’t as big of a deal as everyone seems to think. They both tried to convince me that, although drinking is a big part of Greek life, a girl could fit in sober. Danielle defended Greek culture by saying:

It’s a really big stereotype that the Greek community is a bunch of drunks. But there are a lot of people who decide not to engage in the activity and it’s ok. We actually have risk management people who are forced to stay sober throughout the whole event. So, if a girl was Muslim and in a sorority, she could just be risk management. Or she could just not drink.”

Sarah used the example of a friend who doesn’t drink and, “she’s in a sorority that has a lot of social events that involve drinking. It’s probably hard not to but she doesn’t drink.” Even though drinking is a big part of Greek life, it is one’s choice to participate. Both women were convinced that someone could fit in perfectly well in a sorority and abstain from alcohol.

I was surprised to hear the girls’ responses when I brought up the subject of covering, which seems to be a faux pas in sororities than not drinking. Modesty is a strong theme in Islam, and I wanted to know how the members of sororities thought a girl who wears a hijab would be treated if she were in a sorority. After saying that “a Muslims girl who covers would never join a sorority,” Sabiya gave a good example of how a girl who covers would be treated differently within the Greek system: “I think if I were to cover, I would feel kind of awkward. Can you image going to an exchange? No guy would ever talk to you cause they would just think that’s weird. So I guess that [covering] would be looked down upon.” Just for being different, a girl who wears a hijab would be singled out.

Sarah also talked about how it would be hard for a girl who follows Muslim dress codes to be in a sorority:

When we hold events, we sometimes have to dress the same and look the same. If you wear the headscarf, they might be kind discriminative because there are times when we represent our sorority and we have to look a certain way.

It seems silly, but it’s easy to see how covering would interfere with sorority functions. Danielle added that, “you can’t just tell

someone to take their headscarf off. You want them to be accepted, but you should be respectful. I think it would be hard for them cause they would stand out.” Almost every question with Danielle, Sarah, and even Sabiya came back to the issue of fitting in. It appears that, to them at least, sorority life is all about being part of the group, and therefore avoiding standing out. It seems that to truly be a part of a sorority, a woman has to abandon parts of her identity that clash with the culture of the sorority. That perhaps, is why there are basically no visible Muslims in the Greek system.

However, I think there are more non-practicing Muslims, or what I like to call “ethnic Muslims,” than people would expect. I call them ethnic Muslims because even though they don’t practice the religion heavily, or at all, they still identify with Muslim culture and practices. Sabiya put it the best when she said, “It’s not like a wear a sign that says ‘I’m Muslim!’ I mean, I don’t think most people know I’m Muslim. It doesn’t effect the sorority so why would they care?” Because these women don’t seem religious to outsiders (i.e. they don’t wear the hijab, and they don’t pray five times a day) everyone probably just assumes that they are America’s default religion: semi-religious Christian. Sabiya, Zaina, and Nasreen all agreed that a Muslim girl who is heavily into her faith would not join a sorority. For Nasreen, it simply came down to Islam being the ultimate decider:

A lot of Muslim women who were brought up here in fairly liberal families, they share a lot of values with American non-Muslim counter parts. But when it comes to Islam, there are certain boundaries you do not cross.

For Nasreen, and for many Muslims, it would be impossible to be part of Greek life and not cross those boundaries. That is why, for religious students like Nasreen, there was never any question as to whether or not she should join a sorority.

A big part of my research was trying to understand why there is something so un-Muslim about sororities and fraternities. I saw it as being strongly connected with the idea of what it means to be American, and how this compares to Islamic ideals. I originally chose to look at the Greek system because I wanted to look at the relationship between one’s American identity and ethnic identity. This is something that particularly intrigues me, and a theme that came up often in readings and other media about the Muslim experience in America. Many Muslims, even those born and raised in America, do not identify themselves as American, but rather as a Muslim or by their ethnicity. On the other hand,

Greek life is a phenomenon unique to the American college experience. I wanted to know how Muslim college students in America integrate those two identities.

Through my interviews I discovered that there isn't much integration going on, in terms of what activities the subjects participated in. However, in terms of their personal identities, all subjects considered themselves American, as well as the other factors that played into their identity (e.g. Muslim, Pakistani, Persian, etc.) When I asked Nasreen which culture she identified with, she explained:

It goes back and forth. When I was younger [and living in Pakistan] I would say 'I'm American, I'm American.' But when we came back here I went through a phase where I was like, 'I'm Pakistani.' But now, I can't really identify with the Pakistani community that much, because they have some customs that I don't like, like gender inequalities, and expectations and social pressures. I think I can identify more with American people and with white Christian people, cause that's what my mom was, and that's kind of what I was used to growing up. But I can identify with both groups.

Even though Nasreen is has some reconciliation between the seemingly contradiction identities of American, Muslim, and Pakistani, her Muslim identity shows outwardly through her participation in the Muslim Students Association. In fact, a common theme in the interviews was that a girl wouldn't be both an active member of the Muslim Students Association and in a sorority. Zaina explained this simply, saying, "it's very hard to fuse being Muslim and American together. Culturally, it's possible, but it's hard." Often times such fusion means giving up certain aspects of each culture, which is virtually impossible when it comes to religion.

When I explained to Sarah, Danielle, and Sabiya the conflict between one's Muslim identity and his/her American identity, I used a film about Muslim youth in Chicago as an example. Although all of the girls had grown up in America, they did not identify as American because they saw the cultural differences as strong enough to permanently separate them from American society. When I asked these girls what they thought of this, their answers were, as usual, simple and straightforward.

Sabiya said:

I think I identify as Muslim-American. And I think anyone can if they've lived here long enough. I don't think America really has it's own culture, cause it's made-up of so many different

cultures. Yeah you're American, everyone's American here. Duh! I think you can, but some people don't want to be because they look down on it maybe? I know people who do.

It was very interesting to hear her address the idea of discrimination by Muslims against American culture. It is seen often, especially in immigrants who believe Americans represent everything that Islam stands against. That is one reason why some Muslims separate themselves from American culture and don't become involved in organizations like the Greek system. While talking about being first generation in general, Sarah touched on the idea of abandoning one's old culture to fit in with Americans:

I think one thing that a lot of first generation Americans struggle with is assimilating to the American culture. I think that when a Muslim, or anyone, is introduced to the Greek system, they assimilate into American culture, and it's not that they're trying to hide their identity, but they become very "Americanized". When you want to be part of something, you just adapt to that culture. Danielle continued along this train of thought, touching again on the appeal of ethnic sororities and fraternities:

The same thing goes for the cultural fraternities and sororities. Cause the members feel comfortable in that element because of how they identify themselves; because some people might not be comfortable in a social house, where there's mostly Americanized people. I think it's hard for people who are Muslim to just hop into the American Greek system because it's so different. A lot of the morals are pushed back, a lot of things are pushed to the side and you conform to what they're telling you to conform to.

Again the idea is brought up that one cannot be a part of the Greek system without adapting to the culture. Sometimes that means ignoring certain traditions and pushing religious beliefs to the sidelines. It's as if to fully be a part of the Greek system, you have to abandon part of your identity.

Occasionally that can mean practicing traditions of another religious group. This didn't come up as an issue when talking with Zaina about the UGC sororities, but religion does play a role in Panhellenic sororities. Danielle explained the religious influences as customary, more than anything else:

There's definitely a religious component to the sorority. There are prayers, that our just tradition from when the sorority was founded. There are some things you have to do involving religion. I don't think it's forced on you. It's more of a social thing. If everyone's doing it why would you say no?"

Sarah added to the conversation referencing a specific practice that involves laying one's hand on the Bible. She said, "it's not like you have to put your hand on the Bible. But everyone does it to fit in...a conformity thing. But it's not forced on you." Danielle and Sarah, both Catholic students, aren't really bothered by the tradition. Sabiya seems to be one of the few who abstains from participating in the religiously rooted activities.

It was my choice. When we put our hands on the Bible in the sorority, I chose not to. My parents never really raised me knowing my religion. They wanted too but they don't really practice. I practice my own thing, and as far as a sorority, it's never really affected that. There are things I'm not comfortable with, like if I have to recite something, but I just don't recite it. But I've never been forced to do anything.

Even though Sabiya feels fine abstaining from certain practices, it once again brings up the issue of standing out. Within Muslim communities on campus, she wouldn't have to worry about making that decision.

In general, it seems that religion and the Greek system do not mesh together. If I could continue this research, I would be curious to see how religious the members of the Greek population consider themselves regardless of which domination they practice. Of people I've talked to around campus, most don't identify very strongly with their religion, if they consider themselves religious at all. For example, I know many Catholics in the Greek system that celebrate Christmas and Easter, and maybe keep Lent, but they don't go to church every Sunday or pray on a regular basis. Similarly, neither Zaina nor Sabiya considers herself to be religious. Religion, for whatever reason, is not a top priority for many students who are active in Greek life. This may just reflect the overall secularism of our generation, but perhaps it better explained by the intransigent demands of being either devoutly religious, or a member of a sorority or fraternity.

From my research, the most concrete conclusion I can come to is: when it comes to being actively Muslim and a part of the mainstream Greek system, the two cannot coexist. Muslim students are either involved in the Muslim Students Association and practice Islam (to varying degrees), or they join a sorority or fraternity. There is not one specific reason why, except that as a Muslim woman, joining a sorority is simply something you do not do.

When I asked Zaina, Sabiya, Danielle, and Sarah why they joined sororities, they all gave similar answers. Ultimately, it was about

how they would benefit from being in a sorority; would it help my GPA, would I get leadership positions and volunteer opportunities, will I make lasting friendships? When they asked themselves these questions before they pledged, the answer was yes. For girls like Nasreen, the questions are similar; they too are searching for academic success and bonds of sisterhood, but they see the answers in groups like the MSA.

If I could continue this research, I would love to interview more people, males especially. I'm very curious to see how the information I gathered applies across a larger subject pool.

Unless there are drastic changes within the Greek community, I don't think religious Muslims will ever be represented. As long as certain customs defy Islamic beliefs and traditions, Muslim students are not going to join mainstream sororities and fraternities. And honestly, I don't think the sororities or fraternities would know what to do with them if they did join.