A stereotype is a false generalization about an individual or group, even though many stereotypes have some basis in reality. It involves drawing a conclusion that has the effect of creating social distance and closing down the process of learning about others. But there is also a political dimension to this form of categorizing. Stereotyping robs individuals and groups of complexity, reducing them to the crude dimensions of a "type." This is particularly destructive when the individual or group has a history of being defined in narrow or negative ways by the dominant group. Even "positive" stereotypes can be oppressive. For example, women and people of color are often viewed as more emotional, sensual, and spiritual than are white males. While these may be positive characteristics, they are also used to place women and people of color in a position closer to "nature" and thus as less culturally "advanced" than white males. Groups that have been stereotyped may make new uses of these characteristics in the process of redefining themselves, just as they may struggle to break free from older definitions altogether.

In small groups in class (or outside of regular class) you will be looking at photos of Muslim women and you will discuss together what you believe these photos tell you about these women.

Try to cover the following questions: Where does this woman live? Why does she cover? When does she cover? What religion is she? What are her relationships like with other women, with men, with her family? Is she married? If so, what is her relationship like with her spouse? What work does she do? How is she treated because of her dress? Is she "free"? Is she "equal"?

I will then give you a brief **real** bio-sketch of these women. Compare your thoughts about these women with what you now know about their real lives.