



THE HIJAB

Liberation or Oppression?

A Detailed Discussion in the Light of Scientific Research

الحجاب: تحرير أم قمع؟

Dr. Gohar Mushtaq



الدار العالمية للكتاب الإسلامى



IN THE NAME OF

ALLAH

THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL



THE HIJAB
LIBERATION OR OPPRESSION?

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Pronunciation and Transliteration Chart

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
أ	short 'a', as in <i>cat</i>	a
آ — آى	longer 'a', as in <i>cab</i> (not as in <i>cake</i>)	â
ب	/b/ as in <i>bell</i> , <i>rubber</i> and <i>tab</i>	b
ت	/t/ as in <i>tap</i> , <i>mustard</i> and <i>sit</i>	t
ة	takes the sound of the preceding diacritical mark sometimes ending in h (when in pausal form): ah, ih or ooh; or atu(n), ati(n) or ata(n) when uninterrupted	h or t (when followed by another Arabic word)
ث	/th/ as in <i>thing</i> , <i>maths</i> and <i>wealth</i>	th
ج	/j/ as in <i>jam</i> , <i>ajar</i> and <i>age</i>	j
ح	a 'harsher' sound than the English initial /h/, and may occur medially and in word-final position as well	ħ
خ	as in <i>Bach</i> (in German); may occur initially and medially as well	kh

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Trans-literated form
د	/d/ as in <i>do</i> , <i>muddy</i> and <i>red</i>	d
ذ	as in <i>this</i> , <i>father</i> and <i>smooth</i>	dh
ر	/r/ as in <i>raw</i> , <i>arid</i> and <i>war</i> ; may also be a rolled 'r', as pronounced in Spanish	r
ز	/z/ as in <i>zoo</i> , <i>easy</i> and <i>gaze</i>	z
س	/s/ as in <i>so</i> , <i>messy</i> and <i>grass</i>	s
ش	as in <i>ship</i> , <i>ashes</i> and <i>rush</i>	sh
ص	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /sw/ or /s/ farther back in the mouth	ṣ
ض	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /d/ farther back in the mouth	ḍ
ط	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /t/ farther back in the mouth	ṭ
ظ	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing 'the' farther back in the mouth	<u>dh</u>
ع	no close equivalent in English: a guttural sound in the back of the throat	

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
غ	no close equivalent in English, but may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like the French /ʁ/ in 'rouge'	gh
ف	/f/ as in <i>fill</i> , <i>effort</i> and <i>muff</i>	f
ق	no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /k/ farther back in the mouth	q
ك	/k/ as in <i>king</i> , <i>buckle</i> and <i>tack</i>	k
ل	/l/ as in <i>lap</i> , <i>halo</i> ; in the word Allah, it becomes velarized as in <i>ball</i>	l
م	/m/ as in <i>men</i> , <i>simple</i> and <i>ram</i>	m
ن	/n/ as in <i>net</i> , <i>ant</i> and <i>can</i>	n
هـ - ه - ح	/h/ as in <i>hat</i> ; unlike /h/ in English, in Arabic /h/ is pronounced in medial and word-final positions as well	h
و	as in <i>wet</i> and <i>away</i>	w
و	long 'u', as in <i>boot</i> and <i>too</i>	oo
ي	as in <i>yard</i> and <i>mayo</i>	y
ي	long 'e', as in <i>eat</i> , <i>beef</i> and <i>see</i>	ee
ء	glottal stop: may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like 't' in the Cockney English pronunciation of <i>butter</i> : <i>bu'er</i> , or the stop sound in <i>uh-oh!</i>	(omitted in initial position)

Diphthongs

Arabic script	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
أَوْ، أَوِ	long 'o', as in <i>owe</i> , <i>boat</i> and <i>go</i>	au, aw
أَيّ، أَيِ	long 'a', as in <i>aid</i> , <i>rain</i> and <i>say</i>	ay, ai, ei

Diacritical marks (tashkeel)

Name of mark	Pronunciation	Transliterated form
◌َ fathah	very short 'a' or schwa (unstressed vowel)	a
◌ِ kasrah	shorter version of ee or schwa (unstressed vowel)	i
◌ُ dammah	shorter version of oo	u
◌ّ shaddah	a doubled consonant is stressed in the word, and the length of the sound is also doubled	double letter
◌ْ sukoon	no vowel sound between consonants or at the end of a word	absence of vowel



Arabic honorific symbols

(ﷻ)	<i>Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ</i>	The Exalted
(ﷺ)	<i>şalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam</i>	Blessings and peace be upon him
(ﷺ)	<i>'alayhi as-salâm</i>	May peace be upon him
(ﷺ)	<i>rađiya Allâhu 'anhu</i>	May Allah be pleased with him
(ﷺ)	<i>rađiya Allâhu 'anhâ</i>	May Allah be pleased with her
(ﷺ)	<i>rađiya Allâhu 'anhumâ</i>	May Allah be pleased with both of them
(ﷺ)	<i>rađiya Allâhu 'anhum</i>	May Allah be pleased with all of them
(ﷺ)	<i>rađiya Allâhu 'anhunna</i>	May Allah be pleased with all of them (females only)



Hadith grade terms

Sound: *ṣaḥeeḥ*

Reliable: *ḥasan*

Weak: *ḍa'eef*

Odd: *ghareeb*

Authentic: includes sound, reliable, or any grade in between

Acceptable: *sakat 'anhu*; the grader of the hadith did not comment on it, meaning that he found nothing unacceptable in it



About the Word ‘*Lord*’

The word *lord* in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is ‘master’ or ‘ruler’, and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: ‘the lord of the mansion’ or ‘Lord So-and-So’ (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God – Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah – not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

The Editor



Publisher's Note

All praises and thanks belong to Allah alone, the One, the Almighty, and the All-Merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad, the last of His messengers and prophets, and upon his family, his Companions, and all those who follow in his footsteps until the end of time.

The contemporary world in which we are living has already witnessed multiple attacks on the Muslim woman's freedom to wear the hijab and/or niqab. There is no dearth of people who openly wonder why Muslims are so obsessed with the Muslim woman's dress. While it is generally not a good idea to respond to every bitter criticism of the hijab and the niqab, it is always useful to explore and understand the rationale behind it. After all, if it has been ordained by Allah, it has to be beneficial for His creation!

In this book, Dr. Mushtaq has presented an invaluable collection of Qur'anic verses, hadiths, quotes of the Companions and the scholars, and, finally, the results of various researches and studies conducted by Western scholars. It proves that the hijab, indeed, is not only obligatory, but also full of spiritual, medical and social benefits. Real-life accounts of women and their experiences with the hijab have also been detailed as an inspiration. It is hoped that this book will prove to be a useful resource on this subject.

May Allah accept the efforts of all those who contributed to the production of this book, and may it be acceptable to Him, *âmeen*.

Muhammad Abdul Mohsin Al-Tuwaijri
Managing Director
International Islamic Publishing House
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Foreword

Dr. Gohar Mushtaq's book *The Hijab: Liberation or Oppression?* is a scientific study on the social system of Islam. In it are ample proofs from the Qur'an, Sunnah and Islamic scholars on the importance of hijab in Islam. This book sheds light on the etiquette of interactions between men and women in an Islamic society. Distinctively, much evidence from research published in prominent scientific journals is also presented in this book.

Dr. Mushtaq's book *The Hijab: Liberation or Oppression?* comes out at an opportune time when the issue of Muslim women's niqab (face-veil) is brewing in 'liberal' countries such as France, Britain and Holland. It is strange that these so-called 'secular' countries are so afraid of a 'small piece of cloth' which Muslim women are using to cover their faces (i.e., niqab) to the extent that they are trying to ban wearing the niqab by Muslim women in public places. It is actually not the niqab (face-veil) but the pious and radiant face of the Muslim woman that these mighty countries are afraid of. It is indeed very strange! This is a much needed book at a time and age when eyes are dazzled by modernity, where modesty has lost its value and many Muslims have embraced the apologetic edition of the religion of Islam.

All praise is due to Almighty Allah, Lord of all the worlds!

Maryam Jameelah¹
(Margaret Marcus)

¹ Maryam Jameelah, an American convert and a prominent female voice for Islam, is the author of numerous books on Islam.

About the Author

Gohar Mushtaq completed his high school education in Pakistan and then moved to the U.S. for higher studies. He received his Bachelor's of Science degree from York College of the City University of New York in 1995, and he was the valedictorian of his graduating class. Gohar received his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Chemistry (specializing in the area of biophysical chemistry) from Rutgers University in New Jersey, where he was the recipient of the Graduate Teaching Excellence Award in 2000.

During his childhood, he received a thorough Islamic education from his father. Later, he studied classical Islamic sciences from various Islamic teachers including Shaykh Abdur Rehman Kaashmiri (Brooklyn, N.Y.), Shaykh Dr. Ismael Mehmood al-Azharee (New Jersey), Mufti Abdur Rehman ibn Yusuf (United Kingdom), and Imam Tarek Chebbi al-Tunisi (Florida).

Dr. Mushtaq frequently delivers Friday sermons and lectures at various mosques and Islamic centres in the areas of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. He contributes articles (in English) to *Al-Jumuah* magazine and (in Urdu) to *Batool* and *Mesaaq* monthly magazines. He is also the author of the following books:

- *Growing a Beard: In Light of Qur'an, Sunnah and Modern Science* (IIPH, Riyadh)
- *The Intelligent Heart, the Pure Heart: An Insight into the Heart based on the Qur'an, Sunnah and Modern Science* (Ta-Ha Publishers, London)

- *Islam: Its Beauty & Wisdom* (Amana Publications, Maryland, U.S.)
- *The Music Made Me Do It – An In-Depth Study of Music through Islam and Science* (IIPH, Riyadh)
- *Muslim Youth in the Age of Dajjâl* (IIPH, Riyadh)



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- Izdehar Albowyha for permission to quote her poem titled “The Muslim Woman Unveiled” © 2010.



Introduction

The aim of this book is to present a clear understanding of the nature of the correct relationship between men and women in a social environment. This leads to an appreciation for the great design that the Creator has willed for the genders to fulfil on Earth. Through reason and convincing arguments, this book will prove that the moral concepts underlying the Western social system not only are irrational but also promise fatal results for humanity. The social scientific research presented in this book will draw attention to the superiority of the laws of nature; it will also establish that family life and adherence to the naturally-assigned division of labour between men and women serves the will of God.

Men and women have different natures and different functions. Civilization depends upon understanding and respecting those differences.

Radical feminists have long contended that men and women are similar, with the only differences being in their bodies and reproductive functions. According to these feminists, most of the apparent differences between men and women are socially constructed and produced by a repressive environment.² Furthermore, using the seductive powers of the media, the Pied Piper of feminism has persuaded many young people to abandon modesty and chastity.³

² Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

³ Graglia, *Domestic Tranquility*.

The same phenomenon can be seen in the Muslim countries, where Muslim feminists and modernist scholars are stuck in the 1960s. These groups claim that there are no biological differences between men and women, so it is possible to create a unisex society. However, these claims are based less on scientific facts, and more on personal beliefs or political agendas. Today's modernist and feminist Muslim thinkers use catchy slogans to bring Muslim women out of the hijab and the privacy of their homes into the market, so that they can exploit and 'sexualize' them. The slogans and promises of modernist Islamic scholars are indeed dazzling, yet they are completely devoid of the true spirit of Islam.

With much of the world seemingly against the family values encouraged by Islam, there was a need for a book clarifying the position of women in Islam in the light of modern social scientific discoveries. By writing this book, I hope to resolve the many misconceptions prevalent regarding women's position in Islam. I have made every attempt to support my contentions with research published in prestigious scientific journals. We now possess authentic scientific evidence that clearly demonstrates that the differences between males and females exist long before birth and have a deep biological basis. For scientists, these are established scientific facts. The general public, though (which includes the modernists and feminists of the Muslim world), is relatively unaware of the new science of 'brain sex' – the idea that the male and female brains are constructed differently right in the mother's womb, even before the child is born.

In modern Western societies, the seemingly mandatory dress code is immediately apparent. Typically, in the eyes of society, an appropriately-dressed male will be outfitted in long, relaxed trousers and a full-sleeved shirt. An appropriately dressed female will be attired in a short dress or skirt; the top half of the outfit often bares the arms, the shoulders and much of the chest. For the male, the norm is to wear more. For the female, less is deemed to be more suitable.

A closer look at modern societies shows that the female body is exploited in every manner conceivable. Vast amounts of money pour into and are earned from displaying the unclad female body in commercial advertisements, magazines and other forms of media. The ill-effects of these projected images need no mention. Cultural critic Neil Postman argues that our image-based society is drunk on sensuality and that the cameras have turned on our children, robbing them of their innocence. The media in this modern age, writes Postman:

...has played an enormous role, since it not only keeps the entire population in a condition of high sexual excitement but stresses a kind of egalitarianism of sexual fulfilment: sex is transformed into a product available to everyone.⁴

This is the age of ‘enlightenment’, in which virginity is belittled and in which men have lost their natural instinct to protect the women of their family. I am writing this book to restore this lost moral value and to accentuate the importance of the hijab. Contrary to common belief, Islam is the biggest benefactor of women in human history. The Islamic commandment of wearing the hijab provides liberation, protection and shelter to women. By wearing the hijab, a Muslim woman covers her body in order to preserve herself from the outsiders’ ‘visual theft’. The hijab provides a ‘moral raincoat’, particularly useful in the stormy climate of modernity.

I am indebted to the many people who have encouraged and helped me throughout the production of this book. They deserve a special mention here. I would like to express my thanks to Imam Dr. Tarek Chebbi (from Tunis, now residing in Miami, Florida) for his patience while reading the manuscript and for his deep, insightful comments regarding it. My relationship as a student of Imam Chebbi developed when I performed the Hajj (major pilgrimage) with a group that he was

⁴ Postman, *Conscientious Objections*.

leading.⁵ Since then, I have benefited a lot from him. I am also greatly indebted to Brother James Besada (an American Muslim convert) for his thought-provoking comments about the entire manuscript, despite him being under pressure from his studies at Madinah University at the time. I must also express my indebtedness and gratitude to Maulana Junaid and Mufti Abdullah Nana for their valuable comments and suggestions on the final draft. I am thankful to my daughters, Hadiyah and Hareem (ages 12 and 8 at this writing); their love for wearing the hijab has encouraged me to write this book. Lastly, I am most grateful to my wife, Sadia, because without her support and feminine intuition, this book might not have seen the light of the day.



⁵ Wherever possible, Arabic terms have been translated into English. In cases where we have chosen to retain the Arabic, the transliterated word or phrase is shown in italics the first time it appears in the text; the term is also defined in the glossary found at the end of this book. (Editor)

CHAPTER 1

Women: The Fundamental Building Blocks of the Society

In the fourth chapter of the Qur'an, Allah (*Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ* – Glorified and Exalted is He) has mentioned:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ۝﴾

(سورة النساء: ١)

﴿O humankind, fear your Lord, Who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through Whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.﴾ (*Qur'an* 4: 1)⁶

Men and women both come from the same essence; therefore, they are equal in terms of humanity. Islam, fourteen centuries ago, made women equally accountable to God in glorifying and worshipping Him, thus setting no limits on their moral progress. The status of women in Islam is one of equality and honour. The Qur'an has declared spouses to be each other's garments:

⁶ The translations of the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an in this book have been taken, with some changes, from Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings*. (Editor)

﴿... هُنَّ لِيَاسٍ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَاسٍ لَهُنَّ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٨٧)

﴿... They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them...﴾
(Qur'an 2: 187)

Islam regards the husband-wife relationship as complementary; each spouse completes the other's personality. The social system of Islam goes by the way of nature and is based on divine guidance. We cannot live in this world by fighting against nature; we must be in complete harmony with it. Social scientists and critics in Western countries have reached the same conclusion today.

Although the reports of the Western media often draw readers to conclude that Islam demeans and devalues women, the true teachings of Islam give women respect, honour and rights. This is testified by the fact that women outnumber men among the people who embrace Islam in Western countries. Why are so many women, who were born and raised in Europe and America, willing to reject their 'liberty' to embrace a religion that supposedly oppresses and enslaves them? How can Islam oppress women and yet appeal to so many of them? If Islam lowered the status of women, why would it still have more women than men embracing it as their way of life? Those Western women converts see some sort of freedom in Islam, for they would not accept a religion that devalues them.

London *Times* writer Lucy Berrington apparently realizes this paradox. In her article titled "The Spread of a World Creed," dated November 9, 1993, she writes:

It is even more ironic that most British converts should be women, given the widespread view in the West that Islam treats women poorly. In the United States, women converts outnumber men by four to one, and in Britain they make up the bulk of the estimated 10,000 to 20,000 converts, forming part of a Muslim community of 1 to 1.5 million.

In Germany, government officials estimated that 4,000 people converted to Islam in 2008, compared with an annual average of 300 in the late 1990s.⁷ In Europe, it is estimated that more than 50,000 people convert to Islam each year, and the majority are women. These women must see some sort of freedom in Islam, for they would not embrace a religion that devalues them.

Right at the time when Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) came with a message instructing men to be kind to women, theologians in Europe were discussing whether women were merely bodies or whether they had souls. That was the era in which people in the West believed in the authenticity of the claim of Aristotle, who regarded women as biologically inferior to men because he was under the impression that women had fewer teeth than men.⁸

In Islam, women are essential and significant, so much so that three chapters in the Qur'an relate to them explicitly: *Soorat* (Chapter) *an-Nisâ'* (The Women), *Soorat Maryam* (Mary) and *Soorat al-Mujâdilah* (The Arguing [or Pleading] Woman).⁹

⁷ D. Pulliam, "Rise of Convert Islam in Europe," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.getreligion.org/getreligion/2007/09/the-rise-of-convert-islam-in-europe>.

⁸ British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell remarks:
Aristotle maintained that women have fewer teeth than men; although he was twice married, it never occurred to him to verify this statement by examining his wives' mouths.
Russell, *Impact of Science on Society*.

⁹ This chapter concerns a woman who spoke to the Prophet (ﷺ) about a problem she had with her husband. It begins:
﴿Certainly has Allah heard the speech of the one who argues with you [O Muhammad] concerning her husband and directs her complaint to Allah. And Allah hears your dialogue; indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing.﴾
(*Qur'an* 58: 1)
Allah heard the woman's complaint and gave her the answer in this revelation. (Editor)

Islam grants woman equal rights to contract, to enterprise, to earn and possess independently. Her life, her property, her honor are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offense, her penalty is no less or more than of man's in a similar case. If she is wronged or harmed, she gets due compensations equal to what a man in her position would get (2:178;4:45, 92-93).¹⁰

Islam has never considered the presence of women an impediment to the spiritual evolution of men. For example, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to perform late-night prayers in his tiny room. When he would lower himself to prostrate, he would gently push aside the legs of his young wife, 'Ā'ishah (*raḍiya Allāhu 'anhā* – may Allah be pleased with her) in order to make room. This harmonious, natural scene is very different from that of an ascetic monk worshipping alone in a temple room.

The first person who embraced Islam and believed in the prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) was a woman: the Prophet's wife Khadeejah bint Khuwaylid (رضي الله عنها). The first Muslim to become a martyr in the path of Allah was a woman: Sumayyah bint Khayyât (رضي الله عنها), mother of the Prophet's well-known Companion 'Ammâr ibn Yâsir (*raḍiya Allāhu 'anhu* – may Allah be pleased with him).

The Prophet's wife 'Ā'ishah was such a brilliant scholar of Islam that many notable Companions used to study Islam from her, and she would teach them from behind a curtain. She is one of the six Companions who narrated the most hadiths (statements or actions) of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb (رضي الله عنه), the second caliph of Islam, whose entrance into Islam strengthened the oppressed Muslims of Makkah, accepted Islam because of his sister, Fâṭimah bint al-Khaṭṭâb (رضي الله عنها). After the death of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), the custodianship of the

¹⁰ Muslim, "The Koran and Women," accessed January 8, 2015. http://islamic-world.net/sister/the_koran_&_women.htm.

first Qur'anic text was entrusted not to a man but to a woman: Ḥaḥṣah bint 'Umar (رضي الله عنها), the daughter of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb (رضي الله عنه) and the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ).

In the Qur'an, pious women are mentioned as *ḥâfidhât al-ghayb* (those guarding the unseen) (*Qur'an 4: 34*).¹¹

Islam has always appreciated the femininity of women and regarded them as playing a role complementary to that of men. A woman is different from a man, and the Qur'an has accentuated that difference:

﴿... وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَىٰ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٣٦)

﴿...And the male is not like the female...﴾ (*Qur'an 3: 36*)

Their differences do not mean that they are opponents in any sense. Instead, they arise from each other and are for each other:

¹¹ This is referring to the verse in the Qur'an:

﴿...So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard...﴾ (*Qur'an 4: 34*)

Similarly, Ibn 'Abbâs narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: «The best wife is she who, if you look at her, will please you; if you bid her to do something, will obey; and who will safeguard herself and your property in your absence.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Imam as-Suyooṭī has graded this hadith as sound in his *al-Jâmi' aṣ-ṣaḡheer*, hadith no. 1774. Imam Abu Dâwood has quoted this hadith in his *Sunan Abi Dâwood*, hadith no. 1664, and he remained silent about it, which implies that this hadith is authentic. Moreover, 'Abdul-Ḥaqq al-Ishbeeli has graded this hadith as sound in his *al-Aḥkâm aṣ-ṣuḡhrâ*, no. 360. Imam an-Nawawi has graded this hadith as sound in terms of its chain of transmission, in his book *al-Khulâṣah*, vol. 2, no. 1076.

Hence, a righteous woman guards her husband's property, honour and reputation, as well as her own modesty and chastity, in his absence. Since this quality of righteous women 'guarding the unseen' has been described in the Qur'an and Hadith, it is very likely that such women will also safeguard their senses against committing sins. Such women will also protect their knowledge of Islam and transfer it in its pure form to the next generations.

﴿... مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٩٥)

﴿... whether male or female; you are of one another...﴾ (Qur'an 3: 195)

﴿وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا...﴾ (سورة النحل: ٧٢)

﴿And Allah has made for you from yourselves mates...﴾ (Qur'an 16: 72)

The rights and responsibilities of women are equal in value to those of men, but they may not be necessarily identical. Equality and sameness are two quite different things. Men and women are not identical, but they have been created as equals. This distinction between equality and sameness is extremely important. Equality is desirable and fair, but sameness is not. Bearing in mind this distinction, there is no room for imagining that a woman is inferior to a man. There is no ground for assuming that 'she' is less important than 'he' just because they are not identical to each other. A woman is not a replica of a male; she has a distinct personality of her own. Both men and women will be equally accountable for their own actions on the Day of Judgement.

Islam specifies different spheres of activity for men and women. For a healthy and proper atmosphere between the genders, Islam has set its codes for women as well as for men. In order to guard their femininity and save them from being oppressed, Islam tries to create a barrier between women and degradation, protecting them from the human wolves and predators in a society.

Islam acknowledges the inherent physical weakness of women in comparison to men; it places on men the financial burden of providing for members of the household. Ideally, no basic need should compel a Muslim woman to leave her home and compete with working men to secure money for the household; this is something that has befallen women in the West and has become more common in the Muslim world, too. The following chapters will present a detailed discussion of these subjects.

The divine religion of Islam seeks to protect women's morals and decency, to guard their chastity and to foil evil hands that seek to harm them. In order to achieve these noble objectives, Islam commands Muslim men and Muslim women to lower their gazes. It further decrees the full hijab for Muslim women, in order to preserve their chastity and the purity of both genders.

The power of a positive Muslim woman

Islam treats women with great respect and courtesy. Dr. Hammuda Abdul-Ati writes:

She is exempt from some religious duties, i.e., prayers and fasting, in her regular periods and at times of confinement. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honor in the sight of God... She is entitled to three-fourths of the son's love and kindness with one-fourth left for their father. As a wife she is entitled to demand of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister she is entitled to security and provision by the father and brother respectively. That is her privilege.¹²

Islam does not consider a woman's effort to be inferior to or deviant from that of a man's. Both are of one another. Allah, the Almighty, has mentioned:

¹² Hammuda Abdul-Ati, "The Status of Woman in Islam," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/statuswomen.html>.

﴿فَأَسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَمَلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّن بَعْضٍ... ﴿١٩٥﴾﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٩٥)

﴿And their Lord responded to them: Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another...﴾ (Qur'an 3: 195)

Sexual liberationists claim that society is based on male dominance, which exploits women. As evidence, they claim that the greater earning capacity of men results in the exploitation of women. However, this claim is not necessarily true since economic productivity is not a measure of social control. It actually represents social service. It is the female power on which the survival of society depends. A woman leaves an everlasting imprint on the economy of social life through childbearing. As the economist and social critic George Gilder pointed out, women do not control the economy of the marketplace; instead, they control the economy of the life force in our society. Values such as happiness, creativity, energy and morality are fundamental in any society. When they deteriorate, "all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put them back together again."¹³

Islamic history is filled with examples of positive Muslim women who left an indelible stamp on the pages of history, their influence surpassing that of many men in society. This is in line with the statement made by Imam adh-Dhahabi, a renowned scholar of Hadith (the collected statements and actions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) that with the Qur'an form the basis of Islamic law), "There are many men who have fabricated hadiths. However, no woman in the history of Islam has been accused of fabrication."¹⁴

If the intellectual integrity of anyone should be questioned, it should be that of men. In the history of Islam, women have always truthfully conveyed religious knowledge.

¹³ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

¹⁴ adh-Dhahabi, *Kitâb Tadhkirat al-Huffâdh*.

Areas in which women are better than men

As we stated previously, men and women are equals but are not identical; there is no reason to imagine that women are inferior. There are certain areas where men excel and other areas where women excel. For this reason, Islam generally specifies different spheres of activities for men and for women.

Today, modern scientific research has shown that women are more sensitive than men in terms of the senses. Scientists have discovered that females have better hearing ability than males.¹⁵ Women are also superior when it comes to verbal abilities; girls begin speaking before boys during the early developmental stages. Verbally, girls are more confident and fluent than their male counterparts, and speech disorders, such as stuttering, are much more likely to be found among boys.¹⁶ Girls also start reading earlier than boys. Based on a comparison of the brain centres that are related to language abilities, it was discovered that the brain centres in girls are six years ahead of those in boys.¹⁷

Whether as children or adults, females are very adept at face-reading. It has been demonstrated in scientific experiments that 3½-year-old girls have the ability to interpret facial expressions better than 5-year-old boys.¹⁸ Indeed, compared to men, women attach much more importance to the interpersonal aspects of life.

¹⁵ Garai and Scheinfeld, "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits," 169-299.

¹⁶ Durden-Smith and deSimone, *Sex and the Brain*.

¹⁷ Hanlon, Thatcher and Cline, "Gender Differences in the Development of EEG Coherence in Normal Children," 479-506.

¹⁸ Boyatzis, Chazan and Ting, "Preschool Children's Decoding of Facial Emotions," 375-382.

Women can see better in the dark, whereas men can see better in bright light. In addition, females have better visual memory than males.¹⁹ Due to this fact, women are often better at decorating homes and remembering the decorative style of a house's interior. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that, compared to men, women have a much better sense of taste.²⁰ Accordingly, women are usually able to prepare tastier dishes, and there is undoubtedly no replacement for mothers who cook for their families.

Finally, we have the stronger intuitive power of women; they notice things that men can easily miss. Due to their superior perception, women are better at grasping social cues and picking up important clues just from the tone of a voice.²¹ Neuropsychologist Anne Moir observes:

Men sometimes become exasperated at a woman's reaction to what they say. They do not realize that women are probably "hearing" much more than what the man himself thinks he is "saying." Women tend to be better judges of character.²²

In this regard, when it comes to the upbringing and character-building of a child, no one is better equipped than a mother to perform this huge task. If a mother leaves her home in search of a career while leaving her children at the day-care centre, the child's character-building will be negatively impacted.

To conclude, women are better equipped to receive a wider range of sensory information, to use that information in the best way, and to establish primacy in personal relationships. Women are naturally

¹⁹ McGuiness, "Sex Differences in Organization, Perception and Cognition," 123-155.

²⁰ Garai and Scheinfeld, "Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits," 169-299.

²¹ Bardwick, *The Psychology of Women*.

²² Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

better equipped than men to respond to a baby's needs. With her sharper array of senses, it is the mother, rather than the father, who can best comprehend the needs of a crying baby or understand a non-verbal hint by reading the face of an upset child. For the monumental tasks of child-rearing and home management, women are undeniably superior.

Women are the ones who bind families

Women are naturally more affectionate and caring than men. For men, power comprises dominance and sometimes aggression. Unfortunately, feminists have adopted this definition of power and have tried to apply it to women. The true power of women is of a more subtle nature, a power that lies in building relationships, binding families and building societies. As wives, women possess certain qualities that can make a vital difference in the lifespan of a union. In a few words, Moir highlights the paramount role that women play in saving marriages:

Partnerships work, against all the odds, not because women are submissive, and accommodate their domineering males; partnerships work because women's natural social skills – it's been called 'social intelligence' – enable them to manage a relationship so much better than a man.²³

Indeed, women are more socially intelligent than men. In a marital relationship, the woman is not simply subordinate to her husband; she is the one who keeps the family together due to her compassionate nature and superior social skills. In fact, nothing in this world is as valuable as a pious woman. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) informed his followers about the importance of a good wife, saying:

²³ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

«The world is but a (passing) pleasure, and the best of its pleasures is a righteous woman.» (Muslim)²⁴

Nothing in this world is as valuable as a pious woman

It is women who give men a sense of purpose in life. Women transform male lust into love; they channel the potential and undefined energies of men into the right direction, as pointed out by George Gilder:

Women conceive the future that men tend to flee; they feed the children that men ignore...Only she can give significance to his most powerful drives.²⁵

In every society of the world, men have the higher positions in jobs as compared to women. Men are much more likely to become Chief Executive Officers of major corporations, even though there is no shortage of highly educated women these days. Men are also more likely to start their own businesses or be leading politicians. In the field of inventions, men are far ahead of women; according to a March 2012 working paper titled “Why Don’t Women Patent,” available on the website of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), today 94% of commercial patents and 92% of regular patents are registered to men. Men also earn more than women; the average salary for women in the U.S. is only 73% of the average salary for men.²⁶ Because of their risk-taking nature, or perhaps because they

²⁴ All hadiths in this text have been checked and verified by IIPH’s researchers. It is rare, but it does happen that a hadith is not verifiable within the timeframe of researching and editing the book. In that case, a decision is made by the editorial board whether or not to include the hadith. It is IIPH’s policy not to include weak hadiths or fabricated (fake) hadiths in our publications. If a weak hadith is included in any text, it is only because the author of the book discusses it as a weak hadith. (Editor)

²⁵ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*, 5, 13.

²⁶ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

tend to be more free of domestic and child-rearing duties, men appear to control the economy in the society. We have to understand, though, that men and women are different and that the sphere of their duties is different. Women control another type of economy – the economy of the life force, which is crucial in determining the level of happiness, morality and solidarity in society.

Feminism versus modern science

In recent decades, two contradictory phenomena have occurred. Scientific discoveries have repeatedly shown that men and women are different – psychologically and biologically – and that each gender is better-equipped for different spheres of life. At the same time, feminists have continued to deny any such differences.

In the early twentieth century, scientific studies conducted in the U.S. showed that remarkable gender differences exist. It was highlighted that women have better hearing ability than men, have a more conventional vocabulary, and prefer dealing with practical problems. Men, on the other hand, have a more adventurous vocabulary and prefer abstract and general thought.²⁷

As the feminist movement gained momentum in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world in the 1960s and onwards, feminists started rejecting gender differences. They claimed that children are, in social and psychological terms, born gender-neutral, and that the family and society ‘socially engineer’ them into the stereotypical roles of males and females. Interestingly, just at the time that feminists and sexual liberals were propounding their views, the science of brain sex had started to emerge. As we shall see in this book, recent scientific discoveries have clearly demonstrated that the differences between men and women exist long before birth and that they have a deep

²⁷ Garai and Scheinfeld, “Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits,” 169-299.

biological basis. As the British scientist Anne Moir rightfully argued, for the past few decades, we have been trying to construct our society on the basis of the great biological lie that men and women are the same. Today, we know the truth.

What happened to the dream of gender equality?

Sylvia Hewlett is a notable British economist and an expert on gender issues at work. She laments that the dream of gender equality in job markets has turned into a nightmare:

The spirit of the decade was to pretend that there were no differences between men and women. Well, the results are in. More women than ever are working outside the home and at least some of them have broken into the previously closed ranks of executives and professionals. But despite all of this ‘progressive change’, most women are in worse economic shape than their mothers were.²⁸

Even in predominantly female professions, the highest positions are almost always occupied by men. According to one study, 96% of nurses are women, but those in charge of the hospitals are almost always men. Likewise, in the U.S., 83% of elementary school teachers are women, but 81% of school principals are men.²⁹ This is the paradox of gender inequality in the Western workforce. Something has clearly gone wrong in Western society to cause this wrinkle in the progress of female emancipation.

The fact is that men and women have different views of work, success and ambition. This means that women can progress further in separate-gender environments. Islam solves this by encouraging separation between the sexes, so the more aggressive segment of

²⁸ Hewlett, *A Lesser Life*.

²⁹ Strechert, *The Credibility Gap*.

society (men) will not be able to oppress and exploit the gentler group in it (women).

American anthropologist Lionel Tiger argues that our societies are essentially male-oriented and that women have to sacrifice their feminine nature in order to be successful. Hence, in the name of gender-equality, women suffer the most inequality. He explains:

At the moment, it is women who must accommodate themselves, and they are being asked to compete with men in male-oriented institutions. The net result of this is their continued deprivation and a recently increased resentment and anxiety.³⁰

In the same vein, Anne Moir argues that women are by far nature's best personnel managers because of their superior capabilities in any job involving attention to detail and a good memory. Interestingly, both of these qualities are essential to success in organizing the home. As Moir asserts, the male-dominated society wastes these important assets; most of the time, women end up clearing the way for their male bosses to climb the ladder of success, while they get nothing in return.³¹

Who suffers the most and who benefits the most from "women's liberation"?

Germaine Greer, a world-renowned feminist, published *The Whole Woman* in 1999, as a sequel to her notorious book *The Female Eunuch*, published thirty years earlier. In *The Whole Woman*, Greer discusses what she sees as a lack of fundamental progress in the feminist movement, and she criticizes some sections of the women's movement for illusions on that score. Greer further admits that the sexual liberation that came along with the gender revolution has

³⁰ Tiger, "The Possible Origins of Sexual Discrimination."

³¹ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

harm women more than men. She argues, “The sexuality that has been freed is male sexuality.”³²

Women continue to experience the huge consequences of pregnancy, while men largely escape them. Another end result of sexual liberation is the increased divorce rate and the rise of single parenthood. Again, it is women who end up taking on most of the burden. Greer states, “In 1971, one in twelve British families was headed by a single parent, in 1986 one in seven, and by 1992 one in five.”³³

Another consequence of the sexual revolution has been the pain of loneliness of women, who suffer more than men from this. Greer notes:

By the year 2020 a third of all British households will be occupied by a single individual, and the majority of those individuals will be female.³⁴

Single parenting has created a burden upon women that is one of the most brutal forms of oppression in the age of “women’s liberation”. There are trials and tribulations in marital life, just like there are tests in every lifestyle, but in most cases, the solution does not lie in seeking divorce. Phyllis Schlafly, America’s most articulate opponent of radical feminism, gave the following advice to her fellow women:

If you complain about servitude to a husband, servitude to a boss will be more intolerable. Everyone in the world has a boss of some kind. It is easier for most women to achieve a harmonious working relationship with a husband than with a foreman, supervisor or office manager.³⁵



³² Greer, *The Whole Woman*, 10.

³³ Greer, *The Whole Woman*, 213.

³⁴ Greer, *The Whole Woman*, 261.

³⁵ Schlafly, *Feminist Fantasies*.

CHAPTER 2

Exploitation of Women in the Modern Age

The purpose of the Islamic hijab is to protect the morality of both sexes by closing the door to all evils that come from the free mixing of men and women in the society. Islam liberates women from the exploitation of society, yet the flag bearers of Western civilization claim that they are the only liberators of women. A careful look reveals that the exploitation of women in Western society is unprecedented. In Western societies, sexual freedom and the sexual revolution have borne their bitter fruits in the form of the dissolution of barriers separating men and women and its resultant effects, which involve moral decay, a decrease in the rate of marriage, high divorce rates, disintegration of the family system, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Statistics on the increasing rates of pregnancy among school girls in the United States are also alarming.

One has to sincerely question what is being offered to women in Western societies in the name of liberation – is it liberation or libertinism? Libertinism refers to a lifestyle or a pattern of behaviour characterized by self-indulgence and lack of restraint, especially when it comes to sexual promiscuity and the rejection of religious or other moral authority. Promiscuous women featured on billboards, on the front covers of glossy magazines, in advertisements, in TV shows, and in movies enable us to see the plight of women in the Western society. When every inch of space is filled with the display of the

female body, this is not women's liberation. It is only libertinism, as we shall discuss in more detail throughout this chapter.

Problems faced by the liberated women of the modern age

Exploitation of women has not really changed from the past to the present; it is under a new guise with only the methods changed. Women in the West have surely not achieved any liberation. We now know that 75% of all rapes are committed by men who personally know their victims. At workplaces, men abuse their positions in order to exploit women. The most common reason for divorce is adultery, which occurs due to the free mixing of the sexes. A major reason behind teenage pregnancies and teens losing their virginity is the coeducational schooling system. The abortion rate in Western countries is unprecedented in human history.³⁶

Never in history has there been a society in which men and women mixed so freely, resulting in pornography being presented so copiously in the form of seductive art, through all forms of media. In this 'age of enlightenment,' the feminine body is exploited (or 'sexploited') and displayed to such an extent that it is extremely hard for any sane person to protect the chastity of his or her eyes.

Today, divorce has become the least of the problems faced by the liberated women of our modern age. From anorexia to date-rape, from teenage girls finding themselves miserably pregnant to single 'liberated' women in their forties longing for children, this culture has not been kind to women. Throughout her life, Greer rejected marriage and motherhood in favour of a career. After turning forty, she wrote in an article titled "My Battle for a Baby" in the May 2000 issue of the British magazine *Aura*:

³⁶ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

I was desperate for a baby and I have the medical bills to prove it. [Greer tried fertility treatments including artificial insemination.] I still have pregnancy dreams, waiting for something that will never happen.

This has been happening at the very same moment that it is claimed that the modern woman has been liberated, not just from her home but also from her family and her husband. The plight of the modern, liberated female is so bad that many staunch feminist intellectuals are admitting that modern women are more oppressed than ever before. Mary Pipher is an American psychologist and an avowed feminist. After hearing hundreds of stories and cases of self-mutilation from her adolescent-girl clients, psychologist Pipher concludes:

Girls are having more trouble now than they had thirty years ago, when I was a girl, and more trouble than even ten years ago... Girls today are much more oppressed. They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture... As they navigate a more dangerous world, girls are less protected.³⁷

This is because modern society has lost its respect for female modesty. In the words of Shariffa Carlo:

It is not oppression to protect yourself and society; it is oppression to voluntarily throw yourself into the quagmire while denying it is dirty.³⁸

Mohammad Alshareef, the Canadian founder of AlMaghrib Institute, rightfully asks the modernist thinkers of today:

Why is it that they want to liberate young beautiful women? Why don't they liberate the seniors? Why don't they liberate the indigenous? Why don't they liberate the inmates? Why is their

³⁷ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*.

³⁸ Shariffa Carlo, "When I Covered My Head, I Opened My Mind," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.islamicawakening.com/viewarticle.php?articleID=627&>.

target audience young and skinny and tall women (their definition of beauty) between the ages of 13 and 28? And why is their first call for you to take off your hijab?³⁹

Is it because we are attempting to construct an artificial society where gender roles are blurred between males and females – a society that does not take the nurturing role of a mother and the bread-winning role of a father into consideration? Today, modern science tells us that men and women are biologically and psychologically different from birth, and this difference does not change over the rest of their lives. This will be demonstrated throughout the next few chapters.

Women's liberation or women's degradation?

What is called “women's liberation” is not liberation but is in fact degradation, with a focus on media sexploitation. Women were oppressed in the ‘bad old days’, but has the ‘new woman’ of the modern age overcome that oppression? Has liberation achieved real emancipation from injustice? The fact is that the oppression of women is still present. However, it is under a new guise that is backed up by the media and the catchy slogans of women's liberation and feminism.

Nowadays, instead of killing innocent girls at birth, people use modern technology to abort the baby under the banner ‘pro-choice’, as opposed to ‘pro-life’. Women with children are still abandoned, as was common in the previous centuries, but now this phenomenon is given an attractive label: ‘single-parent families’. In the modern age, instead of being sold in the market as slave-girls, women sell their bodies to the capitalists and to the mass media under the guise of being models, singers and actresses. In any society, the words used

³⁹ Mohammad Alshareef, “How a Pearl Protects Itself,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.igotitcovered.org/2009/07/26/how-a-pearl-protects-itself/>.

by the people have a moral power over them and have the ability to arouse feelings of shame or guilt in the people. The modern secular and nihilistic culture is quite aware of this fact. In Western society, such terms create feelings of shame or guilt among the public. Thus, they are very skilfully eliminated and replaced by words that sound sweet and do not carry any negative moral connotations.

The biggest institution contributing to the degradation of women under the guise of liberation is pornography. Women are encouraged to do whatever they want with their bodies. The pornography industry is opposed by most feminists as objectification and dehumanization of women; however, this has not resulted in its decline. Greer admits that "...after thirty years of feminism there is vastly more pornography, disseminated more widely than ever before."⁴⁰ Greer and other feminist thinkers pinpoint the fashion industry as a major contributor to the contemporary enslavement of women. Although it is claimed that the fashion industry exists for the gratification of women, in reality, as Greer rightfully points out, it is heavily controlled by men who persuade women to denude or adorn themselves to add to a public display that is created mainly for men.

The consequences of these new pressures on women are unparalleled in human history. Old school feminists may tell us that the liberated women of today lead richer lives, but modern feminists also accept the fact that the women of today are under much more pressure and lead sadder lives than before. Greer explains:

Since 1955 there has been a five-fold increase in depressive illness in the US. For reasons that are anything but clear women are more likely to suffer than men.... [for example] 17 percent of British women will try to kill themselves before their twenty-fifth birthday.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Greer, *The Whole Woman*.

⁴¹ Greer, *The Whole Woman*.

In order to fight depression and sadness, modern women resort to antidepressants; this again goes in favour of the capitalists, who own the pharmaceutical companies. Prozac is increasingly being prescribed to women; it is the same antidepressant that is regularly given to zoo animals to help them overcome their sense of futility and entrapment. So the question becomes: Is this women's liberation or women's entrapment?

Depiction of women as sex objects in the media and its psychological effects

It seems quite strange that in Western societies, where non-marital sex is freely available, rape is a more serious problem than in Muslim societies. There are psychological reasons for this. There is no doubt that widespread depiction of women in pornography increases the incidences of rape in a society. Feminists and women's liberation movement leaders have long argued that men and women are exactly alike and that women can do anything, go anywhere, say anything, and wear anything without having to face any undesirable consequences. In addition, they have attempted to destroy the traditional family system in which women had the protection of their fathers and their brothers. The results of such futile attempts to change basic human nature have been terrible.⁴²

In a society where pornographic material is widely available and where there is widespread exposure to women depicted as sex objects, an abnormal strain is placed on male sexuality, leading men to become preoccupied with sexual performance. In Western society, women are often depicted as being always ready and eager for sex, and sometimes even shown as enjoying rape, physical torture, and

⁴² Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*.

humiliation.⁴³ Consequently, male viewers and readers in such an environment begin to perceive acts of sexual violence and coercion as normal, everyday practices. Combined with the natural aggressiveness of men, these factors lead to unfortunate incidents of rape.⁴⁴

Even under normal circumstances, when the bodies of women become uncovered in society, this has far-reaching and devastating psychological effects on men. According to a research study by psychologist Douglas Kenrick, men who were shown pictures of *Playboy* models later described themselves as less in love with their wives than did men who had not seen these images.

Psychologist Kenrick and his associates at Arizona State University studied the effects of exposure of opposite-sex erotica on male and female subjects. According to the researchers, “exposure to the unusually attractive and well-proportioned beauties in magazines” may skew an ordinary person’s perception of beauty. Such a twisted perception “could lead to invidious comparisons between media beauties and ‘real world’ lovers, who are, on average, less attractive than models in *Playboy* or *Playgirl*.”⁴⁵

Interestingly, the researchers also observed that lower ratings for a person’s spouse were found only for males, not for females. This finding can easily be understood in light of the fact that males are generally more promiscuous and more interested in new partners. Moreover, physical attractiveness appears to be a more central criterion for male sexual responses than it is for those of females.

These findings tell us that when the body of a woman is exposed as a sex commodity in society, it undermines the value of a wife in particular and the institution of the family in general. Through

⁴³ Brod, “Pornography and the Alienation of Male Sexuality.”

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Erotic Communications*.

⁴⁵ Kenrick, Gutierrez and Goldberg, “Influence of Popular Erotica,” 159-167.

the media depiction of women as sex objects, men are negatively conditioned to judge their own wives based on socially acceptable standards of feminine beauty.

Another reason – one that has not been pointed out by researchers – why these men rate their wives lower is that when women are depicted as models in the media, they are stripped of their worth as human beings; instead, they are depicted as sexual commodities that can be bought and sold. After all, these men purchase magazines that contain pictures of beautiful models. Consequently, they begin to think of their wives as sex objects and not as their cherished life partners.

On the other hand, in an Islamic society, where female bodies are not openly displayed, women retain their actual worth, and men think of them as fellow human beings rather than as objects to be displayed. In other words, when a woman is covered in a society, there is more protection for her. Wendy Shalit points out in *A Return to Modesty*:

We depend, in other words, on male respect for the fact that we probably want to be more sexually discriminating than they. A respect for female modesty was a woman's natural bodyguard, invisible and free of charge. Thanks to the attack on modesty, and the attack on male respect for it, now only rich or famous women can feel safe.⁴⁶

The beauty and the beast of the media

In modern societies, men are the ones who establish the criterion of beauty, and they keep on devaluing this 'currency' so quickly that it is not possible for women to catch up with these man-made standards.

Ismael Adam Patel explains that there is no universal criterion of beauty. Media personnel in the West have created an artificial

⁴⁶ Shalit, *A Return to Modesty*.

idol, which they are continuously changing based on their whimsical desires, hence making it impossible for any woman to reach it. Women's beauty is not about women; it is an artificial construct created by male institutions.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Patel notes:

As the white middle-class women threw away their aprons and marched out of their front doors in pursuit of liberation, they fell straight into the trap of the capitalist beauty parlour.⁴⁸

Due to the influence of the capitalist market, women spend over \$33 billion a year on weight loss products, \$20 billion on cosmetic products, and \$300 million on cosmetic surgery operations.⁴⁹

The myth of women's beauty is created by the joint alliance of the capitalist fashion industry and the media. The survival of the fashion and advertisement industries depends upon the exploitation of women's flesh. The fashion industry brainwashes women to believe that nudity and low body weight are an expression of liberation. Similarly, the Western media has made female bodies public property, and "female fat is the subject of intense public debate."⁵⁰ Women who gain weight feel guilty because they are conditioned from an early age to believe that the beauty of their bodies needs to be exposed, as if their bodies do not belong to them but to the society at large.

The beast of the media plays a major role in creating an inferiority complex in women of all ages about their physical appearance. Female celebrities have their photographs in magazines and on billboards, but these images are glamorized by the process of 'retouching' or 'computer imaging' in such a way that a 50-year-old woman is made to look like she is 30. Bob Ciano, an art director at *Life* magazine, admits:

⁴⁷ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

⁴⁸ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

⁴⁹ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

⁵⁰ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

No picture of a woman goes unretouched... Even a well known older woman who doesn't want to be retouched... We still persist in trying to make her look like she's in her fifties.⁵¹

What are the effects of such censorship and manipulation of images? According to photography expert Heyn:

By now readers have no idea what a real woman's 60-year-old face looks like in print because it's made to look 45. Worse, 60-year-old readers look in the mirror and think they look too old, because they are comparing themselves to some retouched face smiling back at them from a magazine. Women's culture is an adulterated, inhibited medium.⁵²

This is not a superficial issue. All of this shows how the media uses its seductive force to instil an inferiority complex in the minds of unsuspecting women. By displaying retouched images of women, the media portrays idealized, unattainable types of women on the screen and hence keeps the society in a state of emotional thirst.

As Patel noted, when we depict women in the media as having slim and curvaceous bodies, in reality, we are eradicating their real value and actual worth. This can be considered the worst type of oppression, and Western women are becoming increasingly aware of it. This is precisely why young and educated Western women are embracing the religion and teachings of Islam.⁵³

When beauty becomes a social problem: effects of media on male judgements

Various behavioural and psychological studies have shown that men are visually aroused while women are not. Men can be easily aroused

⁵¹ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

⁵² Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

⁵³ Patel, *Islam: The Choice of Thinking Women*.

by looking at beautiful females; thus, men show greater agreement among themselves in ranking the beauty of females. Women, on the other hand, are not generally aroused when they look at handsome males. The criterion used by women in the selection of mates gives more weight to socio-economic status than to mere looks.

One of the destructive effects of the free mixing of men and women, especially when partnered with the media's exploitation of women, is the complete distortion of the concept of female beauty in the eyes of men. In the realm of social scientific research, there is ample evidence to show that when men are exposed to beautiful females in the media, they develop very idealistic concepts of female beauty.

Douglas T. Kenrick of Montana State University and Sara E. Gutierrez of Arizona State University conducted a few studies that were later published in the 1980 issue of *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.⁵⁴ In one of the studies, 81 male dormitory residents at Montana State University were asked to judge a potential blind date for a fellow dormitory resident. One group of subjects were students who were watching a popular TV programme with strikingly beautiful female lead characters. The control group consisted of male residents in the same dormitory who were not watching this show at the time that the study was done. When asked to rate a photo of an average female (described as a potential blind date for another dorm resident), the male students who were watching the TV show rated the target female as significantly less attractive than the males in the control group did.

In a second study by the same scientists, the judges were 48 male undergraduate students at Montana State University. In this experiment, a black and white slide of an attractive female model in

⁵⁴ Kenrick and Gutierrez, "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness," 131-140.

a magazine advertisement was shown to one group of males, while the control group of males was not shown anything. Then all the subjects were shown a slide of a female of average attractiveness and were given a 'personality rating' sheet to fill out. The ratings indicated that she was seen as significantly less beautiful by the subjects who had been exposed to the attractive female model in the advertisement. In discussing the results of this study, Kenrick and Gutierrez write:

The present results support the suggestion that our initial impressions of potential romantic partners will be adversely affected if we happen to have been recently exposed to posters, magazines, television, or movies showing highly attractive individuals [or if such stimuli are concurrently present].⁵⁵

A study conducted by social psychologists at Arizona State University investigated the influence of exposure to centrefold erotica on judgements regarding sexual attraction. Again, it was found that physical attractiveness appeared to be a more central criterion for the sexual responses of males than of females. The researchers concluded, "Looking at gorgeous opposite sex centrefolds seems to have made attractiveness more salient as a criterion for mate satisfaction, but for male subjects only."⁵⁶

The fact is that the females depicted in the media do not represent average females in the society because "media females are indeed selected from a highly skewed distribution with regard to physical attractiveness."⁵⁷ On top of that, the women wear makeup applied

⁵⁵ Kenrick and Gutierrez, "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness," 131-140.

⁵⁶ Kenrick and Gutierrez, "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness," 159-167.

⁵⁷ Kenrick and Gutierrez, "Contrast Effects and Judgments of Physical Attractiveness," 131-140.

by professionals, and the images go through an extensive process of retouching before they are presented to the public. Not only does the average woman develop an inferiority complex in regard to her facial beauty when compared to the artificially-constructed ‘female media beauty,’ but the result is equally devastating for the males who are exposed to those images.

In light of this research, we can easily understand the situation of a Muslim youth – who is always exposed to movies, TV dramas, glossy magazines, and the Internet – when he has a hard time accepting the bride of his parents’ choice in arranged marriages, just because she is not as beautiful as the media female. Similarly, married men who continuously expose themselves to the onslaughts of the media, not lowering their gaze when women are shown, may eventually lose interest in their wives and engage in forbidden activities, which can lead to adultery.



CHAPTER 3

Boys and Girls Grow Up Differently: Scientific Evidence

The bottom line is that the brain is just organized differently in females and males. The tired argument about which sex is more intelligent or which sex has the “better” brain is about as meaningful as arguing about which utensil is “better,” a knife or a spoon. The only correct answer to such a question is, “Better for what?” A knife is better than a spoon if you want to cut through a piece of meat, while a spoon is better if you’re facing a bowl of chicken broth.⁵⁸

Feminists are fond of proclaiming that men and women are largely the same and that gender roles in a society are the product of social conditioning. If we can re-engineer the process of social engineering, the argument goes, then we will be able to reverse the gender roles. However, a social engineering experiment has to be done correctly, because the one conducted on a kibbutz (Jewish settlement) failed (as will be described later on). Furthermore, scientific evidence points to gender differences at the DNA level. Feminist women leaders of the 1960s in the U.S. and Europe were raising the slogans of gender equality at a time when modern science was still unequipped to look at the subtler aspects of gender differences. By now, modern

⁵⁸ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

techniques of genetic examination, DNA discoveries, and the emerging science of brain sex have conclusively shown that boys and girls are different from the time the male's sperm penetrates the female's egg. Consequently, after birth, boys and girls grow up differently.

The brains of boys and girls develop differently

Science has shown that long before the birth of the child, the sex hormones released in the mother's womb induce specific, permanent, and different developmental effects on the growing male and female brains. For example, during pregnancy, in the womb of his mother, the testicles of a developing baby boy release as much testosterone as those of a young adult. These sex hormones bind to the brain tissue of the foetus and permanently and irreversibly transform his brain. In a paper published by the medical journal *Prenatal Diagnosis*, researchers showed that the brain of an unborn baby girl can be distinguished from a male brain during regular ultrasound exams of women who are only 26 weeks pregnant.⁵⁹

Similarly, when a group of scientists compared the brain tissues of infant children, they found significant differences between the brains of boys and the brains of girls. So striking were the differences in the photomicrographs of male and female brain tissue that they were easily visible to the naked eye. Interestingly, this research, published in the journal *Developmental Brain Research* in 2000, was headed by a female research scientist, Dr. Maria Cordero.⁶⁰

A few decades ago, U.S. psychologist Herbert Lansdell, from the U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke,

⁵⁹ Achiron, Achiron and Lipitz, "Sex-related Differences in the Development of the Human Fetal Corpus Callosum," 116-120.

⁶⁰ Cordero, Valenzuela, Torres and Rodriguez, "Sexual Dimorphism," 43-52.

discovered that men and women were affected quite differently when damage occurred to the same area of the brain. Many studies by later scientists confirmed his findings, which proved that men's brains are more specialized, whereas the division of functions in women's brains is not.

Men have much better spatial abilities (picturing the position, geography and shape of objects in three-dimensional space in their minds' eyes); these are needed to cope with the outside world and hence to provide for the family. Women, on the other hand, have superior verbal abilities and face-reading skills. Women need these precious skills to properly nurture and care for their children.

Boys and girls play differently

Feminist educators usually argue that the reason why boys and girls behave differently is that we raise boys and girls differently. They insist that if we just raise girls to play with trucks and raise boys to play with dolls, then most of the differences in the behaviour of boys and girls will disappear. However, this argument cannot explain why we consistently see differences in the behaviour of males and females among animals as well. Laboratory animals do not play with trucks and Barbie dolls, so it is hard to use this argument to explain gender differences. The fact is that the male and female brains are different, and this difference is reflected even in the games of children.

Child psychologist Capucine La Motte has demonstrated that from the age of three, most children prefer to play with children of their own gender. Boys' games are more competitive and often aggressive, whereas girls' games are shared and involve conversations. This contention was further supported by the findings of child psychologist Janet Lever, who noted that the games

played by boys have rules in 65% of the cases, while the games played by girls are more informal, with only 35% of their games having rules.⁶¹

If we look carefully at children's games, we see that risk-taking is an important ingredient in boys' games, whereas girls' games are characterized by friendship. This pattern continues throughout life. We consistently see that risky sports and activities attract more men than women. Gambling, motor racing, boxing, wrestling and bungee-jumping are predominantly male activities. Compared to girls, more than twice as many boys die while playing risky and dangerous games.

This trend is not limited to humans; it crosses over to the animal kingdom as well. For example, anthropologists Linda Marie Fedigan and Sandra Zohar wanted to find out why there are so many more females than males among adult Japanese macaque monkeys. The ratio of female to male monkeys born is 1:1, but by the time they are adults, there are five female monkeys for every surviving male. After investigating the data from 20 years of research, Fedigan and Zohar found out that "males are mainly lost to the population because of their risk-taking behaviours." Just like teenage boys, male monkeys engage in risky acts. For instance, Fedigan and Zohar found out that male monkeys try to cross the highway and end up being crushed by incoming cars or trucks. In contrast, female monkeys do not engage in risk-taking behaviours and tend to avoid the highways.⁶² These gender differences appear to be inborn, and they are ingrained in both sexes, whether they are humans or animals.

⁶¹ Abdal Hakim Murad, "Boys Will Be Boys: Gender Identity Issues," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/boys.htm>.

⁶² Fedigan and Zohar, "Sex Differences in Mortality of Japanese Macaques," 161-175.

Hormonal influence on male and female behaviour

The foundations of gender behaviour are laid down as soon as the foetus starts life in the womb of his or her mother. Studies have shown that sex hormones released by the foetus exert immense influence on its gender behaviour.

An example is the case of the genetic problem known as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH). As we know, male and female foetuses start their life in the womb with males having XY chromosomes and females having XX chromosomes. The role of the Y chromosome is to release male sex hormones (mainly testosterone), which begin the development of male sexual organs. The effects of sex hormones include more than just shaping the male and female sexual organs, though. Their effects penetrate deep into the brain of the foetus.

In the case of CAH, an abnormal secretion of androgens in an XX (genetically female) foetus affects perhaps one in every 20,000 births. Children with this disorder are frequently born with both male and female reproductive organs, and the male organs are usually removed by surgery. Although those affected look like normal females, they display some typical male behaviour patterns because of the high levels of male hormones they were exposed to before birth.⁶³ Various scientific papers published on this disease affirm that CAH females are much more aggressive than other females; they like to play formal games with rules, they are more comfortable playing with boys, and they are willing to take more risks than girls who have been born without this disorder.

An opposite scenario plays out with boys who suffer from another genetic abnormality: an additional X chromosome. Although such XXY boys are physically male, their behaviour is:

⁶³ Kimura, "Are Men's and Women's Brains Really Different?" 133-147.

...typically feminine, lacking competitive and risk-taking impulses, and showing a preference for play with girls in cooperative and non-aggressive games.⁶⁴

CAH and XXY studies are used as scientific evidence to prove the massive influence of hormones on gender behaviour.

Various studies have shown that girls who are exposed to male hormones as foetuses can develop totally male childhood patterns as a result. Likewise, studies have shown that boys' brains are masculinised while they are in the womb; they are more aggressive, career-oriented, and curious because of the way they are born, not because of the way they are raised. On the other hand, female hormones tend to make women more romantic, caring, nurturing, shy and sensitive.⁶⁵ The reason for these gender differences in talent and performance is the subtle interplay between the way the brain is formed during the foetal life and the way sex hormones act on the brain for the rest of one's life.

Different emotional processing in males and females

People often say, "Women are emotional; men are rational." This statement may be partly true because emotionally, there is always a lot more going on inside the female brain when compared to the male brain. Women feel more emotions and can express them better than men; this also means that women can easily be overwhelmed by their emotions. The two genders exhibit great differences in terms of expressing their emotions.

⁶⁴ Murad, "Boys Will Be Boys."

⁶⁵ Dalton, "Prenatal Progesterone and Educational Attainments," 438-442; Ehrhardt and Meyer-Bahlburg, "Effects of Prenatal Sex Hormones," 1312-1314.

A study conducted by a group of scientists from the Department of Psychiatry at Germany's University of Düsseldorf found that for boys, the centre of the brain that handles negative emotions remains stuck in the amygdale even after they have grown into manhood. In young women, though, the centre of brain activity linked to negative emotions is located in the cerebral cortex.⁶⁶

Various research investigations have been done in this regard, and one general finding is that emotions are processed in very specific areas in male brains, either in the left or the right hemisphere, but not in both. On the other hand, emotions are processed more globally in female brains, in both hemispheres at the same time. For this reason, it is harder for women to separate emotion from reason. However, this emotional nature of women is very much needed during the nurturing of children and while caring for them. A mother's emotional love and care for her children is the most important fact of life responsible for the advancement of the human species on this planet.

Testosterone: male hormone for sex and aggression

We now know that testosterone (the male hormone) increases aggression, competition and self-assertion, whereas estrogens (the female hormone) decreases those qualities.⁶⁷ In the case of a mixed-gender society, the aggressive and competitive segment of the society will try to oppress the less aggressive and less competitive segment. Knowing this, how can we promote free mixing?

Developmental psychologists have discovered that boys appear to be much more hostile to the weak and the disabled. Instead of developing empathy, they become annoyed when they hear cries of

⁶⁶ Schneider, "Gender Differences in Regional Cerebral Activity," 226-238.

⁶⁷ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

pain from a victim. Girls, on the other hand, tend to feel the pain of the victim and sympathize with the person.⁶⁸ According to one study of British youth, “fighting is part and parcel of male adolescent life.”⁶⁹ Crime statistics tell us that men are five times more likely than women to commit murder when in extreme anger, and they are twenty times more likely to engage in robbery.⁷⁰ The presence of high levels of testosterone makes men aggressive. In addition, the presence of the same hormone makes men much more promiscuous than women. Social scientist Alfred Kinsey states:

There seems to be no question but that the human male would be promiscuous in his choice of sexual partners throughout the whole of his life if there were no social restrictions... The human female is much less interested in a variety of partners.⁷¹

Moir comments about this statement, “Mothers have forever warned their daughters that men are after only one thing, and they are usually right.”⁷²

In light of these and other findings, we can see that men are very easily sexually excited due to their nature. Therefore, Islam forbids the free mixing of men and women. Aggressiveness and promiscuity among males makes it difficult for boys and girls to study and learn together in a co-educational environment, as we will discuss in the next chapter.



⁶⁸ Moyer, “The Biological Basis for Dominance and Aggression,” 1-34.

⁶⁹ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

⁷⁰ Garai and Scheinfeld, “Sex Differences in Mental and Behavioral Traits,” 169-299.

⁷¹ Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*.

⁷² Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

CHAPTER 4

Boys and Girls Learn Differently: The Case for Single-Sex Education

Co-education is an idea that is alien to Islamic society. The teaching method of the Prophet (ﷺ) did not include co-education; we learn from his Sunnah that he appointed a specific day for the education of female Companions. Moreover, ‘Ā’ishah, the Mother of the Believers, taught male students from behind a curtain. In fact, a cursory look through Islamic history shows that Islamic learning institutions up to the university level were separate for males and females.

If truth be told, co-education is a by-product of Western thought and the Western educational system. This system of education originated in the earlier part of the twentieth century in Scotland and was then taken up by several private and state-aided schools in England. Later, it was also adopted by schools and colleges in the U.S. In the 1960s, followers of the feminist movement started to propagate a broad-based idea of co-education that would allow women not only to work side-by-side with men but also to sit side-by-side with them in schools. Meanwhile, in the West, the continuous failures that have characterized its experimentation with co-education over the previous 30 years have prompted some Western intellectuals to seriously consider the option of single-sex education.

Islam is deeply aware of the differences between males and females with respect to psychological development. The Qur'an has clearly stated that males and females are not the same:

﴿...وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَىٰ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٣٦)

﴿...And the male is not like the female...﴾ (Qur'an 3: 36)⁷³

The difference noted in this verse is wide-ranging. Essentially, it refers to the biological, emotional and psychological differences between the two genders. There is no doubt that men and women have different biological traits, and this results in a number of differences in their respective developmental and learning patterns throughout their lives. The growth spurt of girls in the adolescent stage has been discovered to be faster than that of boys. Biological processes really do affect and influence psychological tendencies. Due to the inherent biological differences between males and females, variation in their psychological tendencies and dispositions is inevitable.

In this chapter, the negative effects of co-education and the benefits of single-sex education will be briefly presented in light of religion and modern science.

Psychological harms of co-education

Placing boys and girls in the same class can be disadvantageous and harmful for them both, psychologically as well as biologically. The

⁷³ In the historical context, this verse is talking about the incident of the birth of Jesus' mother, Mary (Maryam). The wife of 'Imrân devoted the foetus in her womb to the service of Allah. She had expected it to be a boy, but when the child turned out to be a girl (since service in the temple was exclusively for males), she made this comment:

﴿...And the male is not like the female...﴾ (Qur'an 3: 36)

She then named her Mary.

famous Islamic scholar and theologian Imam Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 CE) writes:

I would like to mention to you one thing in clear words that when a man feels that there are non-*maḥram* women [with whom it is permissible to get married] present who can listen to him, then he states things or commits actions which are unusual and strange; he also talks unnecessarily about things. Similarly, women commit such actions or say things when they feel that they are in the presence of non-*maḥram* men.⁷⁴

They might seem simplistic, but Ibn Ḥazm's observations and findings are supported, and have been elaborated upon, by modern scientific research.

In his book *Men and Marriage*, George Gilder notes that boys and girls attain puberty earlier when they are in a co-educational environment. Testosterone is produced up to 20 times the normal rate in male adolescents, and as a consequence, they suffer from severe mental and sexual agitation.

Similarly, female hormone production increases in adolescent girls, leading to lethargy and depression. At puberty, the limbic system (area of the brain) is stimulated by the surge of those sex hormones, which affect the behaviour of both sexes. In such conditions, the majority of these adolescents constantly think about the opposite sex. Gilder states:

First and most important, most of the boys and a good number of the girls are thinking about the opposite sex most of the time. If you do not believe this, you are a dreamer.⁷⁵

In the same vein, Dr. Bruce Cook, former headmaster of the Southport School (an all-boys boarding school on Australia's Gold

⁷⁴ Abu Zahrah, *Life of Imâm Ibn Ḥazm*.

⁷⁵ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

Coast) was quoted in “The Boys Who Will Be Gentlemen,” in the July 6, 2003 *Sydney Morning Herald*, as saying:

Boys in single sex schools don’t have the constant presence of girls reminding them of how they look. You know, ‘Am I looking OK for the girls?’

It is interesting to note that the feelings of men and women towards each other stay the same in colleges and universities. In learning institutions where co-education takes place, love affairs and courtships are common.

Boys and girls learn differently

Dr. Harriet Hanlan, a female scientist at Virginia Tech University in the U.S., analyzed male and female brain activity as part of research that she conducted on 284 boys and 224 girls ranging from the ages of six months to 16 years. This study, one of the largest and most carefully conducted of its type, showed that different regions of the brain develop in a different sequence for boys and girls.

Those regions of the brain that develop at different times, rates, and sequences in boys and girls include areas involved in language, spatial skills and motor coordination. Dr. Hanlan came to the conclusion that the brain centres that are related to language abilities are six years more advanced in girls than in boys. On the other hand, the spatial memory of boys is four years more advanced than that of girls.⁷⁶ It is for this reason that boys and girls learn languages, mathematics and geography differently.

Similarly, boys develop digital coordination of the hands nine months after girls because the nerves in the boys’ fingers develop

⁷⁶ Hanlon, Thatcher and Cline, “Gender Differences in the Development of EEG Coherence in Normal Children,” 479-506.

later. Digital coordination of the hands is important for activities like holding a pencil and handwriting.

The point is that these developmental differences often lead educators, such as teachers and parents, to unfairly sideline boys, labelling them as slow or dumb, and to plant in them – as early as the first grade – a seed of distaste for school. American philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers comments in *The War Against Boys*:

A review of the facts shows boys, not girls, on the weak side of an education gender gap. The typical boy is a year and a half behind the typical girl in reading and writing; he is less committed to school and less likely to go to college.⁷⁷

Consequently, such boys, who are discouraged at an early age regarding their education, develop negative feelings toward their schools. This may tarnish their point of view about education in general, and about school in particular, for the rest of their lives. Professor Deborah Stipek, dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, and her colleague Tricia Valeski have shown in their research that boys who fail to do well in kindergarten develop “negative perceptions of competence,” and that those negative attitudes are “difficult to reverse as they progress through school.”⁷⁸

The gulf of learning differences between boys and girls increases over time – more evidently so in an environment of co-education. Under such circumstances, one wonders how the two sexes could be placed in the same classroom for learning.

Boys and girls hear differently

In research studies carried out over the past 40 years, scientists have shown that, right from childhood, the female sense of hearing is about

⁷⁷ Sommers, *The War Against Boys*.

⁷⁸ Valeski and Stipek, “Young Children’s Feelings about School,” 1198-1213.

four times better than that of males. This finding has been affirmed in the research of two scientists Jane Cassidy and Karen Ditty, which was published in the *Journal of Music Therapy*. They conducted a study on 350 newborns and found that young girls have better hearing ability than boys of the same age.⁷⁹ This difference in the hearing capacities of males and females has deep implications during their education.

For example, in a mixed-gender classroom, if the teacher speaks in a gentle and low voice, boys will engage in acts of naughtiness because they cannot hear the teacher. Conversely, if the teacher speaks in a loud voice so that the boys can hear him, the girls sitting in the front rows will feel as if the teacher is drilling in their ears.

Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., founder and director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, author of *Why Gender Matters*, and a family doctor and psychologist, argues that due to the hard-wired differences between boys and girls, it can become impossible for both genders to successfully learn in the classroom together. In one interview, Dr. Sax noted that in co-ed classes, almost every choice made will benefit one gender and disadvantage the other. He further added that since girls hear better than boys, one of the reasons for boys' falling behind is simply that they cannot hear the teacher in the classroom.⁸⁰ Furthermore, in a paper reviewing various research studies on sex differences in hearing and their practical implications for teaching in the classroom, Dr. Sax notes:

...the average boy may need the teacher to speak more loudly – roughly 6 to 8 decibels more loudly – if the average boy is to hear the teacher as well as the average girl hears.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Cassidy and Ditty, "Gender Differences Among Newborns," 28-35.

⁸⁰ Jen Horsey, "Boys Continue to Struggle with Reading and Writing," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.singlesexschools.org/links-boysreadwrite.htm>.

⁸¹ Sax, "Sex Differences in Hearing," 13-21.

Needless to say, such problems do not exist in single-sex classrooms.

Their brains respond to stress differently

Recently, researcher Tracey Shores of Rutgers University (U.S.) and her associates conducted a study on male and female brains. After the study, they concluded that the nature of the male brain is such that its learning ability increases when it is under stress, whereas the learning ability of the female brain is impaired and reduced when it is exposed to stress.⁸²

Interestingly, in another study, Dr. Shores and her colleagues at Rutgers, Princeton and Rockefeller Universities showed that laboratory animals also exhibit gender differences in learning while they are under stressful situations. Their research showed that stress improves the learning capacity in male animals, whereas stress inhibits learning in female animals.⁸³

These findings suggest that boys need discipline and a separate-sex environment in order for their abilities to be sharpened. Conversely, girls require a lenient environment for studying. This is also due to the fact that females, whether children or adults, are adept at face-reading. In a research published in the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* (vol. 154), a group of researchers at Wellesley College conducted a study on young children and realized that 3½-year-old girls have the ability to interpret facial expressions better than 5-year-old boys. Obviously, this result indicates that girls can recognize the signs of anger and irritation on the teacher's face. Boys, on the other hand, score very poorly in this ability and, therefore, need admonishment.⁸⁴

⁸² Shores and Miesegaes, "Testosterone in Utero and at Birth," 13955-13960.

⁸³ Wood and Shores, "Stress Facilitates Classical Conditioning," 4066-4071.

⁸⁴ Boyatzis, Chazan and Ting, "Preschool Children's Decoding," 375-382.

Long-range poisonous effects of co-education

On May 25, 2003, *Business Week* printed a powerful article titled, “The New Gender Gap: From Kindergarten to Grad School, Boys are Becoming the Second Sex,” written by journalist Michelle Conlin. In it, Conlin noted the continuous decline in the education of men in the past 20 years. In Western countries, a wide section of boys do not make it to college after finishing high school. She explained that the reason lies in the fact that co-education provides an unnatural and often feminine educational environment, and as a result, many boys become disappointed and lose their focus on education. Some even react in negative ways as they try to show their manhood by committing crimes and resorting to violence. Furthermore, since 1970, as the number of co-educational schools has increased in the U.S., suicide rates amongst young boys have risen threefold.

To add insult to injury, when teachers in a co-educational environment observe that boys (in comparison to girls) usually have a hard time sitting in one place to learn, they commonly identify them as having a disease known as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), and some of these children end up taking drugs like Ritalin. About 80% of the Ritalin used in the entire world is given to children ‘diagnosed’ with ADD in the U.S. Another contributing factor is that the U.S. leads the world in the area of co-education. Ritalin usage has increased by 500% over the past decade, leading some to call it the new K-12 management tool.

According to Paul R. Wolpe, a psychiatry professor at the University of Pennsylvania, there are school districts where 20-25% of the boys are taking that drug. Conlin quotes Wolpe as saying, “Ritalin is a response to an artificial social context that we’ve created for children.” In my opinion, the children are not the ones who are

sick; it is the mixed-gender educational system that is sick and in need of treatment. What most of us are not aware of is the appalling situation of children with even worse psychological and emotional conditions in many developing countries that follow co-educational systems.

Because coeducational environments create similar cases of depression and lack of focus in these children, they show behaviour similar to that of the children in American schools; instead of getting Ritalin, though, they end up getting harsh physical punishment. Teachers assume that these children just do not like to learn or to respect the school's discipline. Hence, they punish them with increasing harshness in order to enforce discipline and change their behaviour.

A further question remains: when this system of education is forced upon children for their lifelong schooling, what is the extent of this harm, and at what expense is it inflicted? Before answering this question, there is much that parents and educators need to be made aware of – to learn and to reflect upon.

There are many limitations of co-ed schools. By their very nature, they short-change both boys and girls because, as we have shown, the two sexes learn differently. The various brain regions of boys and girls develop at different times and according to different sequences. It is not possible to develop a school which would satisfy the needs of one sex without putting the other sex at a disadvantage. Elizabeth Buie wrote "Today's Sexual Evolution," published in the *Herald Scotland* on November 21, 2000. In it, Andrew Hunter, a former teacher who had the opportunity to teach at co-ed schools as well as at single-sex schools, put it this way: "...Teaching in a co-ed classroom is like teaching two classes at once."

	Girls	Boys
1	Due to the nature of their brains, girls require a lenient and soft environment for studying.	Due to the make-up of their brains, boys need discipline and separate-sex environments to sharpen their abilities.
2	Girls as young as 3½ can easily recognize signs of anger and irritation on teachers' faces, due to their superior ability to interpret facial expressions.	Even at the age of five, boys have poor ability to judge the teachers' facial expressions, so boys need admonishment.
3	In girls, the brain centres related to language abilities are six years ahead of boys the same age.	Boys' spatial memory is four years more advanced than that of girls the same age.
4	From childhood, the hearing ability of girls is four times better than that of boys, so girls are more comfortable when teachers use gentle, soft voices.	Hearing ability of boys is about four times less than that of girls the same age, so teachers often need to use loud voices to discipline them.
5	Girls can easily sit calmly in the classroom without rigid policing or supervision, so they do not find it difficult to concentrate in class.	Due to their aggressiveness and agility, it is difficult for boys to sit and pay attention in class. Consequently, 20-25% of boys in the US are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and prescribed the drug Ritalin.

Table 1: Boys and Girls Learn Differently

Sexual harassment suffered by girls in co-ed schools

In May and June 2011, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) conducted a comprehensive survey on sexual harassment and published the report, “Crossing the Line: Sexual harassment at school,” on its website. The study, involving 1,002 girls and 963 boys in Grades 7-12, revealed that girls were much more likely than boys to suffer most forms of sexual harassment. Girls were more likely to experience unwelcome sexually suggestive remarks, jokes or gestures from boys (46% of girls versus 22% of boys). They were much more likely to be touched or fondled in an unwelcome sexual way (13% of girls versus 3% of boys). Likewise, girls were much more often forced by the opposite sex to do something sexual (4% of girls versus less than 1% of boys).

A natural consequence of such sexual harassment faced by girls in co-education educational institutes is their diminished interest in going to school altogether. After hearing many accounts of harassment from her adolescent-girl clients, Mary Pipher notes that she is seeing an increasing number of girls who are ‘school refusers.’ They “tell me they simply cannot face what happens to them at school.”⁸⁵

High rates of teenage pregnancies in co-ed schools

Putting together boys and girls who have reached the age of adolescence – with the surge of sex hormones that accompanies it – is definitely not a morally healthy idea. Dr. Sax notes that at every girls’ school he has ever visited, the teachers, administrators, counsellors, and especially the students have all agreed on one thing: the rate of

⁸⁵ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*.

unwanted teenage pregnancy is much lower at their all-girls' school than it is at any nearby co-ed school.

To elaborate on his point, Dr. Sax gives the example of James Lyng High School in Montreal. It used to be a co-ed school, but its principal, Wayne Commerford, converted it into a single-sex institution. Girls were assigned to girls-only classes, while boys were placed in boys-only classes. As a result, absenteeism dropped by two-thirds and scores on standardized tests improved by a large margin. In addition to such benefits, Commerford related another surprising fact to Dr. Sax: the rate of teenage pregnancy decreased dramatically – from about fifteen girls per year before the change to about two girls per year after the change.⁸⁶

Why is teenage pregnancy less likely when girls attend girls-only schools? Apart from the obvious reasons, there are deep psychological and social reasons. At a co-ed school, if a girl says no to sex with her boyfriend, this not only jeopardizes her relationship with her boyfriend, but it also endangers her social identity at school.⁸⁷

On the other hand, in single-sex schools, girls do not have the same kind of peer pressure to find a boyfriend, at least not during school hours. They have more control over their sexual decision-making, and it is easier for them to imagine life without a boyfriend. Hence, girls in single-sex schools are less likely to be involved in premarital sex and consequently less likely to become pregnant.

Can girls seek higher education from male teachers?

If there is adequate separation between the male teacher and the female student, then the answer to this question, from an Islamic viewpoint,

⁸⁶ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

⁸⁷ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

is yes. This can be done, for example, by using a veil or curtain so that the teacher cannot see the faces of the girls or by using video conferencing, as is done in the Saudi Arabian educational system. There is plenty of scientific evidence that establishes – beyond any shadow of a doubt – that there lies a great *fitnah* (temptation) in a situation where female students learn from male professors in a co-ed environment.

Social scientists have shown that physical attractiveness, in particular female facial attractiveness, plays an important role in human interactions within a society.⁸⁸ A study published in the journal *Sociometry* by Jerome E. Singer of Pennsylvania State University has shown that even college professors are swayed by a female student's beautiful face. In explaining the results of his study, Singer asserts that teachers give “the benefit of doubt in grades” to attractive girls, and many of the teachers acknowledge that “they can recall the names of the pretty girls in their classes.”⁸⁹ This may not apply to every single male professor teaching female students, but this research does tell us that there is a great deal of temptation when male teachers teach girls without veils.

Because of their sociable nature, girls like to establish friendly relations with their teachers. There is a major difference between the natures of boys and girls in this regard. Moir points out that because of their superior verbal abilities, girls are more interested in people and in establishing relationships with the teacher, whereas boys (due to their superiority in spatial skills) are less interested in people and more inclined to explore the world around them.⁹⁰

Leonard Sax maintains that most of the time, girls assume that the teacher is like a friend to them, while boys think otherwise. Thus, girls

⁸⁸ Adams, “Physical Attractiveness Research,” 217-239.

⁸⁹ Singer, “The Use of Manipulative Strategies,” 128-150.

⁹⁰ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

will frequently consult the teacher if they encounter any difficulties. Sax states:

...girls are much more likely than boys to ask a teacher for advice about personal matters, totally unrelated to the academic material.⁹¹

In view of this tendency, how can it be safe for a young girl to study with a male teacher and also discuss her personal matters with a person who is not her maḥram? It is well known that proximity is the most important predictor of love. Yes, there may be exceptions where a female student and a male teacher maintain a perfectly platonic relationship without letting any indecent thoughts cross their minds. However, the rulings of Islam are not for exceptions only. The Islamic approach to dealing with vice and corruption in the society is to nip any evil in the bud. This can be better understood by learning about the well-known principle of Islamic law called 'blocking or narrowing the ways that lead to sins'. According to this principle, if an act or event is likely to lead you to sin, you should avoid it, even if it is not a sin in itself. It is due to this principle that Islam always discourages the free-mixing of the sexes, which includes co-education as well as young girls studying in close proximity to male teachers. Imam Ibn Qayyim explains:

This Islamic principle... means that some of the permissible acts are sometimes forbidden lest they serve as back doors for commission of prohibited acts. For instance, exchanging gifts among Muslims is a recommended Sunnah act, but it is forbidden to present gifts to a government official for fear that it might lead to bribery and corruption. Also, to ogle the face of a woman [who is not one's maḥram] is prohibited because such intense staring is capable of sowing the germs of fornication in the heart.⁹²

⁹¹ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

⁹² Ibn Qayyim, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'een*.

The success of single-sex education: practical evidence

After experiencing the deleterious effects of co-education, many countries in the West have recently started experimenting with the single-sex educational system. An overwhelming majority of the people involved have indicated that seeing and experiencing the changes brought by applying the single-sex education system in their schools helped them to truly appreciate the idea and understand it better. Benjamin Wright, principal of Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Seattle, Washington, turned his previously co-ed school into one with separate-sex classrooms. Wright stated that with the co-education system, most of the teachers' time was wasted resolving issues arising from boys teasing the girls and vice versa. In contrast, with a separate-sex environment, they were actually able to teach the children effectively. Wright also noted that in the state-level exams (The Washington Assessment of Student Learning) in 2002, boys who were scoring 10% in the co-educational system had increased their scores to 73% because of the single-sex environment.

Testimonials from around the world

Single-sex schools have started to become quite popular in many Western countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Jamaica and Ireland. A few examples from those countries will be given below, along with one example from a Muslim country (Saudi Arabia) where education is successfully conducted using single-sex classrooms.

United States of America

In 2001, U.S. Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and Hillary Clinton⁹³ drafted new legislation legalizing single-sex education in American public schools. The U.S. Senate passed their statute by a unanimous vote and made it a law. The number of American schools offering single-sex education was 27 in the fall of 2001. By the fall of 2004, their number jumped to 140.⁹⁴

Even in U.S. public schools, several school districts have considered – or are currently considering – the expansion of single gender schools, especially high schools. In 2006, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools District opened two single gender schools: The Young Women’s Preparatory Academy and The Young Men’s Preparatory Academy. The two magnet schools, which accept students from all over the county, boast above-average test scores and attendance rates and have placed students on track to attend top-tier colleges such as Wellesley, North Carolina and Duke. Studies show that girls and boys are hard-wired differently and that their brains develop at different rates. “There is evidence that language skills develop faster in girls,” said University of Miami child psychologist, Monica Dowling, on Tampa Bay Online. She adds, “Also, we know that boys need to move around more. They don’t like to sit down and talk about feelings.” Hence, gender-separate schools are empowering for girls as well as for boys.⁹⁵

⁹³ Hillary Rodham Clinton was the First Lady of the U.S. from 1993-2001, the Senator from New York from 2001-2009, and the U.S. Secretary of State from 2009-2013. She earned her bachelor’s degree from Wellesley College, a prominent all-women’s liberal arts college. (Editor)

⁹⁴ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

⁹⁵ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

Jamaica

Single-sex education is quite common in Jamaica. In a large study of Jamaican schools, published in the *International Journal of Science Education*, it was shown that girls at single-sex high schools performed much better in mathematics and science as compared to girls who were studying at co-ed high schools. The study revealed that:

...the effects of sex stereotyping are more sharply apparent in the coeducational setting, for here there appears to be a stronger need to differentiate between the sexes. Thus, even if subjects such as mathematics and the sciences are technically available to girls in this type of [coeducational] school, they are more likely than their single-sex institutional counterparts to get the message that such subjects are unfeminine, and beyond their grasp intellectually.⁹⁶

Another very interesting study that confirms this contention was conducted in Britain by Lawrie and Brown, who surveyed 284 students between the ages of 14 and 15. The study findings, published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, produced results similar to the research mentioned above. Lawrie and Brown found that students at all-girls' schools reported enjoying math more and found it less difficult as compared to girls who attended co-ed schools. Girls at single-sex schools were more than twice as likely to say that they planned to take advanced math.⁹⁷

Canada

In "Boys Continue to Struggle with Reading and Writing," Jen Horsey of the Canadian Press describes another example of the success of single-sex education: the inner-city James Lyng High School in Montreal, Canada, which used to be a co-educational institution. After single-sex classrooms were introduced in the school, student

⁹⁶ Hamilton, "Performance Levels in Science and Other Subjects," 535-547.

⁹⁷ Lawrie and Brown, "Sex Stereotypes," 132-138.

absenteeism declined, test scores rose, and the number of students moving on to college nearly doubled. These are all blessings of single-sex education.

The Superior Educational Council of Quebec recommended that the Canadian government end co-education in its public schools and have them adopt the old system from the 1940s, when schools separated males from females and the school buildings even had separate entrances. The head of this educational council, Celine Saint-Pierre, was quoted by Yvonne Zacharias, in a *Montreal Gazette* article on October 14, 1999, as saying, “There is plenty of evidence that boys and girls learn differently.” She added that education should be separate because otherwise boys and girls would keep on getting weaker in their studies and Quebec’s society would suffer the bitter consequences in the future. In addition, the article reported the council as being very concerned about the state of education in the province, mentioning that “Quebec is headed for a social crisis, a situation where males won’t be able to get jobs in a knowledge-based economy.”

Australia

In July 2003, a conference of educational experts was held in Sydney, Australia, where several speakers presented evidence that boys who are educated in single-sex schools seem to do better in terms of maturity and social adjustment than those who attend co-educational schools. Dr. Cook of the Southport School narrated his experiences and his observation that boys educated in single-sex schools prove to be better husbands in the future because they do not have to adopt a ‘masculine’ attitude. He noted:

In co-ed, boys tend to adopt a quasi-masculine attitude because girls are there. They feel they have to demonstrate their emerging masculinity by gross macho over-reaction.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ West, “The Boys Who Will be Gentlemen.”

Hence, boys in single-sex schools “become more sensitive men.”⁹⁹

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is one of the few Muslim countries where a separate-sex educational system has remained intact even after the flood of European imperialism into the Muslim lands at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Saudi Arabia, the separate-sex educational system is implemented in accordance with the Islamic laws and injunctions. It is done in such an excellent way that it can serve as a model for other Westernized Muslim countries that have not yet realized the scientific and moral importance of single-sex education.

A salient feature of the educational system of Saudi Arabia is the segregation of sexes. One of the ways in which this is achieved is through the use of videoconferencing. This relieves females of the difficulties of travelling long distances and allows them to seek education in the comfort of their own homes or in an all-women’s classroom with other female students. This method of videoconferencing initially originated because of the shortage of female professors, but it became so successful that it is now widely practiced in the educational system in Saudi Arabia. This method allows instruction to take place without the teacher and the students ever having to meet face-to-face.¹⁰⁰ In a detailed article about videoconferencing at King Saud University, Abdussalam Nakshabandi states:

This phenomenon came into existence in the Saudi higher education system solely because it accommodates the reception by female students of televised lectures conducted by male instructors... [through the] live transmission of video and audio signals from specially equipped classes attended by male students to female classes.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ West, “The Boys Who Will be Gentlemen.”

¹⁰⁰ Mackey, *The Saudis*.

¹⁰¹ Nakshabandi, “Videoconferencing,” 127-136.

The way in which videoconferencing is structured in Saudi Arabia's single-sex educational system is: In each classroom attended by the male professor and his male students, there is a fixed, remote-controlled video camera and a receive-only telephone line, along with a microphone that is "linked by cable to studio sound-input."¹⁰² With such a setup, only the professor can hear his female students, and he is only able to contact them while being filmed.

The classroom at the women's facility contains several tables, each of which seats three or four students. There is a colour monitor and a one-way telephone line on each table; the women can contact the professor by lifting the receiver. Such a setup guarantees that the women can see the professor and start a conversation with him. Moreover, the women can hear each other's questions, but the male students cannot. If the professor wants to, he can repeat the question for his male students. The women's classrooms are supervised by a female teacher's aide, who tracks attendance and oversees the exams.¹⁰³

This method of videoconferencing has several advantages over mixed-gender classrooms. The advantages include eliminating the possibility of sexual harassment of female students by male teachers, providing the opportunity for female students to ask their male instructor a question over the phone (which a female may be too shy to do in person), and allowing less distraction (which is common in mixed-sex classrooms) for both male and female students.

Obviously, this method of videoconferencing is devised for those cases in which the teacher is male whereas the student body is female; otherwise, in all-girls' colleges, girls do have the opportunity to study face-to-face with female professors in a single-sex classroom setting.

In Saudi Arabia, more women than men study in universities. If we look at the graduation rates of Saudi students, the number of

¹⁰² Nakshabandi, "Videoconferencing," 127-136.

¹⁰³ Nakshabandi, "Videoconferencing," 127-136.

males graduating from universities rose from 795 in 1970 to 21,229 in 1999, while the number of female graduates during that same time rose from 13 to 21,721 – ending in a total that slightly exceeded the number of male graduates.¹⁰⁴ In fact, today women make up about 60% of university students in Saudi Arabia, as documented in the 2010 report “Women in Higher Education: Saudi Initiatives & Achievements,” accessed at the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education website. Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University is the largest women’s university in the world. According to information on its website as of February 2015, this university alone has 32 colleges across the Riyadh region, with an enrolment of over 52,000 students. The World Bank website includes a 2008 report titled “The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa,” which indicates that there are more female students enrolled in higher education in Saudi Arabia than in other Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza.

Personal testimonials

We conclude this discussion of the development and growth of the single-sex educational systems with some personal testimonials on the benefits of single-sex education.

The first anecdote tells of the personal experience of historian Dr. Steven Miles, who explains that attending a single-sex high school was the main reason his abilities flourished and that it led to his Ph.D. in history:

I began high school more shy than most adolescents. But I did take the enormous step of joining the speech team, and that opened a new world to me. It led me to other activities... I strongly believe that they made possible the development of interests and skills that led me to undertake a PhD in history. When I think back on

¹⁰⁴ Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century*.

the catalyst – joining the speech team – and I consider the fact that forensics in Illinois is dominated by girls, about 70/30, I cannot imagine that I would have joined the team in a co-ed school... I needed the chance to explore my own potential without worrying about looking foolish in front of the girls.¹⁰⁵

In an article titled “With No Boys to Ogle, We Had Time to Learn,” published in *Newsweek* on October 24, 2005, Christine Flowers wrote of her experiences as an undergraduate student at Bryn Mawr College, which is women-only at the undergraduate level. She was thrilled to be admitted there because it gave her the opportunity to extend her twelve years of single-sex education to sixteen. To Flowers, it is quite distracting to have a member of the opposite sex sitting in class right next to her. She described her female college mates at Bryn Mawr as talented, confident, independent and focused. Studying at a women’s college encouraged Flowers to concentrate on her studies, as she points out:

I immersed myself in French and Italian, history and philosophy, fencing and swimming. I never once worried about whether I was going to have a date on Friday night (I never once did), nor did I hesitate to contribute a comment in class because I felt intimidated by the attractive young man to my left...Bryn Mawr [college] helped me to understand that excellence has no gender preference.

Flowers further clarifies that females are not the only ones who benefit from single-sex education. Educating the two genders in separate classes is beneficial for boys as well, and her experience as a school teacher is a testimony to this fact, as she explains:

I used to teach at a boys’ school in suburban Philadelphia, and while I’m certain that my teenage scholars weren’t completely unaware of female charms, they did seem to focus admirably on

¹⁰⁵ “The Case for Single-Sex Education,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://haroonbaloch.blogspot.com/2008/01/case-for-single-sex-education.html>.

their schoolwork between the hours of 8 and 3...The ability to spend a few hours concentrating on developing their minds and not their social skills should take precedence over some misguided urge to integrate.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have briefly presented and discussed evidence – based on scientific research and empirical studies – to support the claim that single-sex educational systems are best suited to the human *fitrah* (the natural inclination instilled by Allah) and the function of education in human life. This chapter also points out the negative effects of co-education and the fact that it is an unnatural social construct with more harm than benefit.

Boys and girls need separate training to suit their distinct rates of physical, intellectual and emotional growth. Single-sex schools provide a better environment for young people, where they remain free from the pull of the opposite sex. The differences in their psychological make-up result in a huge difference in the way the two sexes learn in a class and in the way the members of the two genders influence the learning of one another while present in the same classroom.

Islam cares a great deal about the preservation of morals, modesty and chastity in a Muslim society. To achieve this goal, Islam requires the highest degree of caution when dealing with members of the opposite sex. Muslims are always asked to distance themselves from anything that stirs their sexual urges outside the bounds of marriage. Islam forbids free intermingling of the sexes in society, so that young men and women are allowed to maintain the purity of their sexual lives from the very beginning. Muslim adolescents are specifically asked to maintain a safe distance from the opposite sex – for their own good.

Islam is a religion that is in complete accord with human nature. It emphasizes the upbringing of children in an environment

that will preserve their fiṭrah. If children or youth attend mixed-gender classes, there are plenty of chances for them to be exposed to acts that may tarnish their whole worldview of sexual morality. They may even lose the ability to distinguish between modesty and indecency, morality and immorality, chastity and promiscuity.

In co-educational environments, students have more opportunities and temptations to go astray. They cannot maintain the right etiquette of intermingling – as prescribed by Sharia (Islamic law) – at all times during school hours. Students in co-educational schools might become more preoccupied with their appearance, or with how they present themselves to the opposite sex, than with their studies. Perhaps this is what many sociologists refer to on the subject of friendship between men and women: that it is difficult to have a pure friendship between the two because the more the friendship deepens, the more the instincts find their way to physical expression between the man and the woman.



CHAPTER 5

Motherhood and the Home Front: A Religious and Scientific Perspective

«All of you are shepherds, and each of you is responsible for his flock. An imam is a shepherd, and he is responsible for those under his care. A man is a shepherd in his family and is responsible for those under his care. The woman is a shepherd in her husband's house and is responsible for those under her care. The servant is a shepherd of his master's property and is responsible for what is under his care.»
(Bukhari)

Islam has placed the responsibility of social life in the hands of men, and the responsibility of future life in the hands of women. Nature has divided the upbringing of future generations into four stages: pregnancy, delivery, breastfeeding and education. Each of those four periods is so critical to the overall development of a child that any negligence in any of these stages could be destructive for the child.

Islam recognizes that motherhood is a career in itself. In practical life, as will be shown in this chapter, it has been observed that most women find the home and the family the most fulfilling and rewarding experience. Nature has assigned different duties to men and women. Nature is not sexist. By bestowing the ability to bear children, nature has clearly specified the sphere of activity for women. Furthermore,

by not having fathers shoulder the responsibilities of motherhood, nature has informed us about the duties of men. To perform their respective roles, men and women have been given different bodies, potential, attributes and psychologies.

In Western society, when a woman was not given due respect as a mother or a homemaker, she had to venture outside in search of prestige. Thus, she started to perform the duties of men. She had to act like a male in order to get respect from society. Islam, on the other hand, gave women a status equivalent to men – even a little higher when one considers the mother’s position in relation to the father’s.

No matter how ‘equally’ the modernists distribute the functions of child-rearing, men know very well that the woman’s role with her children is far more important than that of the father. There is no way for a man to feel the sense of fulfilment that a mother gets when she nurses her child. Men do not share the ‘mothering hormone’ (prolactin) that women secrete during pregnancy, childbirth and nursing.

Mother: the foundation of a family

A Muslim woman may pursue a career, but greater value is given to her role as a wife and a mother. Islam especially elevates the status of a mother due to her sacrifices during pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing. For instance, the Qur’an has mentioned:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا...﴾ (سورة

الأحقاف: ١٥)

﴿And We have enjoined upon people, to their parents, good treatment. Their mothers carried them with hardship and gave birth to them with hardship...﴾ (*Qur’an* 46: 15)

Similarly, in one hadith, it was noted:

«A man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: O Messenger of Allah! Who among the people is most worthy of my good companionship?

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Your mother.

The man asked: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) answered: Then your mother.

The man asked again: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) repeated: Then your mother.

The man queried: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Then your father.» (Bukhari)

When mothers left their homes to pursue careers in the industry or in the office, society lost its homemakers. Childrearing came to be thought of as a burden. Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev sheds some light on the results of their “sincere and justified desire to make women equal with men in everything:”

Women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home – housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a family atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems – in children’s and in young people’s behavior, in our morals, culture and in production – are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitude to family responsibilities.¹⁰⁶

Then Gorbachev poses the question, “What should we do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission?”¹⁰⁷

Islam provided the answer to this question and to other problems faced by much of Western society today. Islam elevated the status of women but assigned different spheres of activities for the sexes. For women, the most important task is to nurture and take care of their families. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) advised women:

«Take care of your home, for that is your jihad (striving in Allah’s cause).» (Recorded by Aḥmad with a weak chain of narration)

¹⁰⁶ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*.

¹⁰⁷ Gorbachev, *Perestroika*.

Jihad is the highest act of Islamic worship. To regard homemaking as jihad for women is to give it the highest possible ranking in the Islamic acts of worship.

At home, there is no substitute for a mother, who is the binding force of her family. She is the best person to read the face of her child; she understands the child's needs and turmoils in life. Every adult becomes what his or her mother shaped him or her to be during childhood. Women, by their very nature, are nurturing. Feminist writer Carol Gilligan states that "women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care."¹⁰⁸ Sociologists and anthropologists will tell us that everywhere in the pre-modern world, women were primarily involved in caring for the young.

Even though Allah (ﷻ) has assigned a very high status to both parents, He has elevated the status of the mother to the pinnacle of all human relationships. The womb of the mother is the connecting point between our journeys from non-existence to the eternal existence. Matching His two supreme attributes *ar-Raḥmân* (the All-Merciful) and *ar-Raḥeem* (the Most Merciful), Allah has given the name *raḥm* to the womb of the mother. Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Ties of kinship (*raḥm*) are derived from the All-Merciful (*ar-Raḥmân*).» (Bukhari)

Hence, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that *raḥmah* (mercy or loving compassion) is an attribute derived from the word *raḥm*, meaning a womb. In another hadith, he describes the high and noble status of a mother:

«On the day that He created the heavens and the earth, Allah created a hundred *raḥmahs* (mercies), each of which is as great as the space

¹⁰⁸ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*.

that lies between the heaven and the earth. He sent one raḥmah down to the earth, by which a mother has raḥmah for her child.» (Muslim)

This explains why Western anthropologists working in Islamic countries and societies report a kind of dual hierarchy that requires wives to be dutiful to their husbands, while the husbands must be dutiful to their mothers.¹⁰⁹ These are the fruits of the Islamic teachings regarding the status of parents. Even in the most Westernized Muslim countries, sons consider it to be an act of shame and disgrace to send their aging mothers to a nursing home. The pivotal position of Muslim mothers in their families has been nicely summed up by Khalid Baig in the following words:

In a way their role is like that of the archers in the battle of Uhud. It looked less important, but was the key to the fate of the entire army. If women hold on to their front, the entire army will succeed. If they leave it for “greater action” elsewhere, everyone will lose.¹¹⁰

The biological basis of our connection to our mothers

In the Qur’an, Allah has commanded:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهَنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصْلَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَىٰ الْمَصِيرِ﴾ (سورة لقمان: ١٤)

﴿And We have enjoined upon people [care] for their parents. Their mothers carried them, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and their weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination.﴾ (Qur’an 31: 14)

¹⁰⁹ Abdal Hakim Murad, “Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/gender.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Khalid Baig, “Motherhood,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.albalagh.net/women/Motherhood.shtml>.

These verses of the Qur'an specifically mention the periods of pregnancy and breastfeeding along with Allah's commandment to be dutiful and thankful to one's parents. This is an important point, which needs further clarification.

Ibn Qayyim mentions that the human soul has five kinds of connections to the body and that the first connection between the soul and body occurs in the mother's womb.¹¹¹ This has profound implications for later in life.

Recently, some interesting scientific research has emerged regarding the relationship between the pregnant mother and the foetus in her womb. We now know that the heart of the unborn child develops and starts pumping long before the brain comes into existence. Even though the actual factor that triggers the heartbeat of the unborn child is unknown, it is very likely that the mother's heartbeat triggers that of the unborn child in her womb.

In the 1940s, Lester Sontag, M.D., discovered that the mother's heartbeat affects the heartbeat of an unborn child in many ways.¹¹² The subconscious memory of the mother's heartbeat while the child was in the womb remains even after the birth of the child and for the rest of his or her life. Several scientific reports support this view. It was shown that when the sound of a heartbeat was played in a hospital nursery, it reduced the infants' crying. Thomas Verny, M.D., in his famous book *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, has argued that it is due to the subconscious memory of the mother's heartbeat that a newborn baby feels comforted when it is held close to someone's chest or that an adult goes to sleep while listening to the steady ticking of the clock. This could possibly be the reason why people in the office are rarely distracted by the rhythmic clacking of typewriters or similar

¹¹¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitâb ar-Rooḥ*.

¹¹² Bernard and Sontag, "Fetal Reactions to Sound," 209-210.

noises.¹¹³ Some people who suffer from insomnia use sound machines that actually mimic the sound of a heartbeat.

The mother's sacrifices for her child include not only the long and difficult pregnancy period but also the moment of delivery, which is intensely painful. Allah has mentioned:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا...﴾ (سورة

الأحقاف: ١٥)

﴿And We have enjoined upon people, to their parents, good treatment. Their mothers carried them with hardship and gave birth to them with hardship...﴾ (Qur'an 46: 15)

A woman who dies while pregnant or after childbirth is considered a martyr in the sight of Allah. Râshid ibn Ḥubaysh narrated that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«Being killed for the sake of Allah is martyrdom; the plague is martyrdom; drowning is martyrdom; stomach disease is martyrdom; and if a woman dies during the post-partum period, her child will drag her to paradise by his umbilical cord. (The umbilical cord is cut by the midwife when the child is born.)» (Recorded by Aḥmad with a sound chain of narration)¹¹⁴

‘Ubâdah ibn aṣ-Ṣâmit narrated that Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) also said:

«The one who is killed for the sake of Allah is a martyr; the one who dies of plague is a martyr; the one who dies of a stomach disease is a martyr; and the woman who dies with a child in her womb is a

¹¹³ Verny and Kelley, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*.

¹¹⁴ The chain of narration of this hadith was graded sound by Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. There is a corroborating report narrated by Mâlik in his *Muwaṭṭa’ Imâm Mâlik*, 1:233 and Abu Dâwood in his *Sunan Abi Dâwood*, 3:482.

martyr.» (Recorded by Aḥmad and Ibn Mâjah, and authenticated by Ibn Ḥibbân)¹¹⁵

As compared to all the animals, human beings are large-brained and large-skulled. Robert Bly comments, “The large head, as it is and has been, makes birth an intensely painful experience for the human female.”¹¹⁶ Again, this is a sacrifice the mother makes to bring her child into this world.

Biologists tell us that reproductive strategies are different in males and females. American sociologist and biologist Robert Trivers noted that the burden of “parental investment” is extraordinarily higher for females. What Trivers meant was that the human female makes a huge investment in a child, starting with nine months of metabolic commitment, which is then followed by a further period before the end of breastfeeding. On the other hand, the male’s “parental investment” is very little,¹¹⁷ and it is more indirect; he provides food and protection for the young.

When we look at the biology of the female hormonal pattern, we find that it is dominated by estrogens and oxytocin, two hormones that generate strong nurturing instincts in the mother. (In fact, oxytocin is known as the love hormone, due to its role in stimulating milk ejection during lactation and in bonding between mother and child.) The predominant hormones in males, on the other hand, are testosterone and adrenaline. These may be useful in competition as huntsmen and warriors but are of little significance in terms of caring for children. Therefore, mothers have a far greater investment to lose if they neglect their children. If a child dies due to a lack of care, this represents a greater potential failure for the mother than for the father.

¹¹⁵ According to Ibn Ḥibbân, the chain of narration of this hadith is sound.

¹¹⁶ Bly, *The Sibling Society*.

¹¹⁷ Trivers, “Parental investment and Sexual selection,” 136-179.

For this reason, in Islamic teachings, the status of the mother is far higher than that of the father. The secret of her importance lies in the tremendous burden and responsibility that is placed upon her and in the difficulties that she has to shoulder, which a man does not have to bear. This is why one of the most important obligations upon an individual is to express sincere gratitude, kindness and closeness to one's mother. This gives her precedence over and above the father.

The nurturing role of the mother

To the Communists, the role of men seemed so simple that it could be replaced by a few bureaucrats overseeing the machines of mass production. To the sexual liberals, the role of women is, similarly, so simple that it can be taken over by day-care centres. However, the reality is completely different from such wishful thinking. As George Gilder pointed out, a mother's role is filled with continuous challenges, far beyond her nurturing of infants. Raising several children is a project that needs constant attention. Due to its continual and varied demands, this is not a role that most men show serious interest in performing. If truth be told, most divorced men who gain custody of their children immediately hand them over to their girlfriends, new wives, female servants, or day-care centres.¹¹⁸

One of the effects of testosterone is that it enables the brain to focus while performing different tasks. As we discussed earlier, the male brain is already very compartmentalized with its different areas performing different functions. On top of this, testosterone also provides more focus to the brain, so when a man is engaged in a task, his brain is not easily distracted. This quality is important for someone doing a job in the outside world, but such a quality is not desirable when taking care of children – who need attention every moment at home even while the mother is engaged in other tasks. In fact, a

¹¹⁸ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

unifocal brain is a disaster when it comes to the care and nurturing of children. For this reason, no one is better-equipped for caring for children than a mother. Research has also proven that female hormones tend to make women romantic, caring, nurturing, and sensitive.¹¹⁹ In this context, we can easily understand the following hadith. Anas ibn Mâlik narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) advised:

«Marry women who are loving and prolific (in producing children), for I shall outnumber the (other) nations by you (on the Day of Judgement).» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood, an-Nasâ'i, and Ibn Hïbbân)¹²⁰

To sum up, the role of the mother can never be underestimated. Maintaining the home and nurturing the future generations are tasks that are as important as earning money to pay for food, clothing and education. A mother is a home executive who strives to manage her household with skill, thrift and thoughtfulness.

Breastfed is best-fed

Over fifty years ago, many mothers in Europe and America started to bottle-feed their children because they thought that it was 'backwards' to breastfeed. However, research has shown that breastfed infants are more intelligent than bottle-fed infants. The most well-known research in this area was done by Cambridge University's Alan Lucan, who compared premature babies who were fed either breast milk or infant formula. He found that at age eight, breast-fed children averaged 8.3 points higher on IQ tests.

Bottle-fed infants are about two to three times more likely to suffer from diarrheal diseases. An interesting reason that was

¹¹⁹ Dalton, "Prenatal Progesterone and Educational Attainments," 438-442; Ehrhardt and Meyer-Bahlburg, "Effects of Prenatal Sex Hormones," 1312-1314.

¹²⁰ This hadith has been graded sound al-Albâni in *Irwâ' al-Ghaleel*, hadith no. 1784.

discovered by the researchers is that the milk sugars found specifically in human milk can actually trick the bacteria. The shape of those human milk sugars resembles certain structures in the intestine that the bacteria attack to cause diarrhoea. Hence, when the bacteria bind to those milk sugars by mistake, they are easily excreted out of the body and thus fail to cause diarrhoea in the breast-fed infants.

Moreover, the action of sucking on the mother's breasts improves a newborn's ability to breathe. Medical studies have demonstrated that compared with breast-fed babies, those fed by bottle contracted "four times as many respiratory infections... twenty-one times more asthma, and twenty-seven times more hay fever." In fact, the researchers of the study concluded that vigorous sucking on a breast was actually necessary to promote good breathing habits in infants during the early days of their lives.¹²¹ There are a myriad of other obvious benefits of breastfeeding over bottle-feeding.¹²² In *Scientific American*, Jack Newman, M.D., emphasized the importance of breastfeeding in the following words:

And although it is not the norm in most industrial cultures, UNICEF and the World Health Organization both advise breast-feeding to "two years and beyond." Indeed, a child's immune response does not reach its full strength until age five or so.¹²³

It is interesting to note that the UNICEF and WHO have only now discovered the wisdom of breastfeeding for two years, which was revealed in the Qur'an about 1400 years ago:

¹²¹ Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of Skin*.

¹²² Blum, Deborah, "Is Mother's Milk Key to Child's Growth, Future?" *Sacramento Bee*, July 8, 1996.

¹²³ Newman, "How Breast Milk Protects Newborns."

﴿ وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُبْرِئَ الرِّضَاعَةَ ۗ ﴾

(سورة البقرة: ٢٣٣) ﴿﴾

﴿Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]...﴾ (*Qur'an* 2: 233)

Breastfeeding and socialization of a child

Breastfeeding has far-reaching consequences for the development of socialization skills in a child's later years. Prophet Muhammad's wet nurse was Haleemah Sa'diyah from the tribe of Banu Sa'd, whose members were notable among the Arabs for their eloquence. Hence, he was nursed by a woman from, and grew up among, the most eloquent tribe.¹²⁴ It might be for this reason that he was noted for his superb eloquence and fluency in Arabic. The Prophet (ﷺ) was an accurate, unpretending and straightforward speaker; he had the strength, clarity and eloquence of the Bedouin language. He once said:

«I have been given the keys of eloquent speech.» (Bukhari)

By breastfeeding, a mother passes more than just milk to the child. Biologist Yitzhak Koch, a nutrition professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science, notes:

The main point is that milk is not just a source of nutritional elements, some simple mixture of fats, sugars and salts. It has a causal effect on the infant. It's really a vehicle by which the mother transfers information to the child.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Kitâb at-Ṭabaqât al-Kabeer*, vol. 1, part 1.

Ibn Sa'd said that Muhammad ibn 'Umar informed us that Zakariyâ ibn Yahyâ ibn Yazeed as-Sa'di informed us on the authority of his father that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said (according to his biographers): «I am the most eloquent of you because I come from the tribe of the Quraysh and my speech is that of Banu Sa'd ibn Bakr.»

¹²⁵ Blum, "Is Mother's Milk Key to Child's Growth, Future?"

Barry Sanders is a former professor of the History of Ideas at Pitzer College (California). He explains in his book *A is for Ox* that during breastfeeding, all five senses in the infant are activated simultaneously, and the infant ingests not only milk but also the “metaphoric extensions of milk,” such as flexibility, rhythm and language. An infant learns by listening to the articulation of sounds. Being in close contact with the mother’s heart, the infant hears the most essential sound of the mother’s heartbeat. Her words and sentences enter her infant’s ears. Each time the mother utters something, the infant tries to imitate those sounds by moving the facial muscles.¹²⁶ In a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers Hoefler and Hardy concluded that infants who are “breast fed for four to nine months advance more quickly mentally, learning to talk and walk at an earlier age.”¹²⁷

Joseph Chilton Pearce, another expert in the area of child development, provides further evidence in this regard by citing the example of infants born to mothers who cannot speak or hear. It has been found that:

Infants born to deaf-mute mothers have no repertoire of muscular movements to speech, cannot develop speech until such a repertoire is established, and make no such movements until there is prolonged and close contact with a speaking person or persons.¹²⁸

According to psychologists, 75% of the child’s personality is shaped in the first three years of life. Bly, commenting on the brain development of human infants after birth, writes:

At birth, the rhesus monkey, for example, has a brain that is already 65 percent of its final size; the chimpanzee brain is 40.5 percent

¹²⁶ Sanders, *A is For Ox*.

¹²⁷ Hoefler and Hardy, “Later Development of Breast Fed and Artificially Fed Infants,” 615-619.

¹²⁸ Pearce, *Evolution’s End*.

of its final size; but the human baby's brain is only 23 percent. That means that three-quarters of the skull growth takes place after birth.¹²⁹

Normal development of the human brain cannot be accomplished without the help of parents. In fact, human infants live in the shadow of their parents. Research done by psychologists and other social scientists has shown that children's physical contact with their mother is extremely important for the child's mental development. One of the ways this mother-child body contact can be accomplished is through breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding and humanization of a child

Breastfeeding humanizes a child, whereas bottle-feeding tends to mechanize them. While nursing, a mother actually transfers to her child not only nutrients but also love. Researcher James W. Prescott, Ph.D., of the Institute of Humanistic Science, asserted that sensory stimulation is like a nutrient, essential for the normal growth, development, and functioning of the brain.¹³⁰ Serotonin, one of the brain's neuro-chemicals, has been shown to be significantly reduced when there is a lack of affectionate bonding between mother and child. Dr. Prescott also provides evidence documenting that depressed adults, violent individuals, and criminals – especially those with a history of suicidal and assaultive or homicidal behaviours – have a shortage of brain serotonin. It has not been understood that another chemical in our body, tryptophan (which is necessary for the development of serotonin in the brain) is abundantly present in colostrum and breast milk but is absent in formula milk. According to Dr. Prescott, millions

¹²⁹ Bly, *The Sibling Society*.

¹³⁰ James W. Prescott, "Breastfeeding: Brain Nutrients in Brain Development for Human Love and Peace," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.violence.de/prescott/ttf/article.html>.

of years of evolutionary biology have naturally kept a balance in the normal psycho-physiological growth of the infant through the process of breastfeeding (sensory stimulation by keeping the body contact of mother-child during breastfeeding and maintaining adequate levels of brain serotonin levels). He writes:

Only in the human mammal do we find the newborn separated from its mother at birth and the mother not breastfeeding its newborn and infant.¹³¹

The increasing emphasis in our industrialized societies on placing infants and children in day-care centres guarantees a lack of affectionate bonding between mothers and their infants or children. Based on his study of different ‘primitive’ cultures of the world where the weaning age is two and a half years or older, combined with his scientific findings about sensory deprivation in the case of bottle-feeding and deficits of brain serotonin levels in those with aberrant behaviour, Dr. Prescott challenges the criminal justice system with the following words:

For all of the above reasons (and others), it has been my challenge to the criminal justice system to find one murderer, rapist or drug addict in any correctional facility in America who has been breastfed for “two years and beyond”, as recommended by the World Health Organization. My proposed studies of adults who have been breastfed for “two years and beyond”, when conducted, would provide a strong data base to support the above stated relationships and to call for a national health policy that would support mothers being nurturant mothers that would include breastfeeding for “two years and beyond”. If such a national health policy were to be implemented, it would transform our culture of violence into a culture of peace.¹³²

¹³¹ Prescott, “Breastfeeding.”

¹³² Prescott, “Breastfeeding.”

Donald Woods Winnicott was a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst. During his career, he had the opportunity to treat psychically disturbed children and their mothers, upon whom he built his concepts of “holding environment” and “security blanket.” He reached the following conclusion regarding the mother’s role in society, which he summed up aptly in his book *Home is Where We Start from: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*:

In the last half century there has been a great increase in awareness of the value of the home. We know something of the reasons why this long and exacting task, the parents’ job of seeing their children through, is a job worth doing...

I am concerned with the mother’s relation to her baby just before the birth and in the first weeks and months after birth. I am trying to draw attention to the immense contribution to the individual and to society that the ordinary good mother with her husband in support makes at the beginning, and which she does simply through being devoted to her infant...

[We must strive] to give moral support to the ordinary good mother, educated or uneducated, clever or limited, rich or poor, and to protect her from everyone and everything that gets between her baby and herself.¹³³

The mother at home: the last bastion against immorality

It is the mother’s love for her children that nurtures humane qualities in her children.

«A man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked: O Messenger of God! Who among the people is most worthy of my good companionship?

¹³³ Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start from*.

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Your mother.

The man asked: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) answered: Then your mother.

The man asked again: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) repeated: Then your mother.

The man queried: Then who?

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Then your father.» (Bukhari)

The reason the Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized the importance of the mother much more than that of the father is that no human bond is stronger than that of the mother and child. Social scientists carried out experiments in which they asked fathers to be closer to the infants, right from their birth. Within a few weeks, in spite of the fathers' deep involvement in childcare, mothers had still become much closer to their babies.

In another experiment, social scientists exposed babies – soon after birth – to many different caregivers other than the mother. The results revealed that the babies were confused and wanted their natural mothers back.¹³⁴ When confused children grow up, they try to find comfort by indulging in the vices of society. It is the mother who assumes charge of the domestic values of the community, including its moral, social and religious concerns. In fact, a mother who is home with her child is the last fortress against the onslaughts of immorality that are prevalent in society.

Motherhood, orality and literacy

Mothers are the primary transmitters of oral culture to the next generations. Barry Sanders claims that the basis of every civilization is an oral book. People pass on the sacred oral traditions of that book

¹³⁴ Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," 1-32.

to the next generation, and it becomes the foundation of a literary civilization. For example, the source of Hindu civilization was the *Vedas*, the starting point of Jewish civilization was the Torah, the foundation of Greek civilization was Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and the origin of Christian civilization was the Bible. Similarly, the basis of the Islamic civilization is the Qur'an. The first book in the Arabic language was the Qur'an, and it has been rightly mentioned in the Qur'an itself that:

﴿ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢)

﴿This is the book about which there is no doubt...﴾ (*Qur'an* 2: 2)

The mother's lap is the child's first school. She transmits the sacred oral traditions of the culture to her children, and it is this orality that becomes the basis of literacy. Sanders laments that when women in Western countries left the home for the workplace, this departure spelled disaster for literacy. With the mothers absent from the home, a crucial tie connecting children to their development in literacy disintegrates.¹³⁵

It is the mother who binds the family, and a strong family is crucial in keeping orality and literacy for its members. Sanders accentuates this relationship with the following words:

Like all relationships, the one between family and literacy is reciprocal. Literacy has kept the family alive – through discussions, critical analysis, stories, arguments, and conversation. In so far as the computer has helped to erase the inner core of the human being – conspiring, that is, in the obliteration (ob-littera = 'the erasure of letters') of stories and storytelling – it has hastened the destruction of the family. The family wraps itself around the dynamic core of orality.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Sanders, *A is For Ox*.

¹³⁶ Sanders, *A is For Ox*.

Child day-care centres and old age homes: a direct proportionality

There is a profound relationship between nursing homes (for the elderly) and day-care centres (for children) in a society. This can be better understood by an age-old saying that can be considered as the “law of the circle of life.” It goes, “If you do good to your parents, your children will do good to you.”

The presence of day-care centres and the old-age nursing homes is an indicator that the balance of social duties in the society has been disturbed. The Qur’an has warned us:

﴿... وَلَا تَخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ﴾ (سورة الرحمن: ٩)

﴿...and do not make deficient the balance.﴾ (Qur’an 55: 9)

When children are raised devoid of parental love (especially motherly affection) and placed in day-care centres, they eventually vent their anger against their parents when they reach old age. In addition, social scientific studies of neutrally-reared children inform us that the artificial elimination of the mother-child bond cannot reduce sex differences in boys and girls. It only interferes with the healthy development of the child. This in turn confuses the child. Social scientist Alice Rossi notes, “Communally reared children, far from being liberated, are often neglected, joyless creatures.”¹³⁷

Listen to the advice of Sanders:

Every mother – from poor who need to work to survive, to rich mothers who work as a luxury – needs to return to the home, at least until their babies move out of infancy. Even after that they need to make their presence felt in the home. If healthy, these mothers need to breast-feed their infants... It also means that the

¹³⁷ Rossi, *Gender and Life Course*.

mother cannot live on the streets but must take up full residence in the home.¹³⁸

In 1998, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that nearly 60% of the residents in American old-age homes never receive a visitor. Owing to the fact that females have a longer life expectancy than males, women in Western countries, many of whom have spent their youthful years working outside the home, eventually may have to face:

...a decade of solitary confinement at the end, staring into television screens, recycling memories, and fingering months-old greetings cards from relatives who rarely if ever appear.¹³⁹

In his path-breaking book *Islam Between East and West*, contemporary Bosnian Muslim intellectual Alija Ali Izetbegovic (who in 1990 became the first Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina) aptly summarizes the relationship between child day-care centres and elderly homes:

Homes for the aged go together with children's homes. They belong to the same order of things, and are in fact, two states of the same solution. Children's homes and homes for the aged remind us of artificial birth and artificial death. Both are characterized by the presence of comfort and by the absence of love and warmth. Both are opposed to the family and are the result of the changed role of woman in human life. Their common feature is the elimination of parental relationships: in a nursery, children are without parents; in homes for the aged, parents are without children.¹⁴⁰



¹³⁸ Sanders, *A is For Ox*.

¹³⁹ Murad, "Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender."

¹⁴⁰ Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*.

CHAPTER 6

Career or Family: What do the Majority of Women Want?

There are two basic pictures of a woman's life. One is portrayed in the media in the form of Hollywood or Bollywood movies, as well as television dramas from every country in the world. The other picture is reality. Women from the world of virtual reality (TV, Internet, movies and magazines) are shown as overwhelmingly career-loving. However, when we carefully analyze what women all over the world really want and what they end up choosing, we see that it is very different from the image portrayed in movies and in dramas. A look at job statistics in some of the most advanced countries of the world makes it clear that the majority of the women would choose to stay home as homemakers and caregivers; work from home; or have part-time, but not full time, paid work outside.

The rights of women in the current Western society were not granted to them out of kindness. Modern women reached their present position by force and not through divine teachings. In addition, a shortage of manpower during wars, the pressure of economic needs, and the requirements of the Industrial Revolution all forced Western women to leave their homes to struggle for their livelihood and to appear as equal to men.

Islam is not against working women. In fact, Muslim women are much needed in medical professions like gynaecology, surgery, dentistry and nursing (to work with female patients) and in education,

to name but a few. There are also situations where women have no choice but to work, such as when they are widowed or divorced, or when the father's earnings are not enough to support the children. However, Islam is against degrading the role of the mother and dragging or tempting women out of their secure homes into the career market in the name of 'freedom' and the women's 'liberation' movement.

Islam is against making women career-oriented instead of being family-oriented because the latter is in complete accordance with human nature. By their nature, the majority of women in the world still prefer their families over their careers. Let us analyze in this chapter what the majority of women want: a career or family?

Women's participation in the workforce

In general, American women seem to prefer to stay home and concentrate on their families. They perform full-time work only when the situation forces them to do so due to, for instance, when they are abandoned, divorced or widowed, or when their husbands' earnings are insufficient.¹⁴¹

A recent analysis of government statistics has reported that the percentage of stay-at-home mothers rose to 29% in 2012, as compared to 23% in 1999. In "After Decades of Decline, A Rise in Stay-at-Home Mothers," published at the Pew Research Center website on April 8, 2014, researchers write about this statistically significant increase in the number of stay-at-home mothers:

This rise over the past dozen years represents the reversal of a long-term decline in 'stay-at-home' mothers that had persisted for the last three decades of the 20th century.

¹⁴¹ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

Although the group referred to as “stay-at-home mothers” includes married, cohabiting and single mothers, the largest portion consists of “traditional” married women with working husbands. In 2012, those married stay-at-home mothers made up about two-thirds of the nation’s 10.4 million stay-at-home mothers. More importantly, according to the census data, they were more likely than single or cohabiting stay-at-home mothers to mention that the reason they preferred to stay at home was to take care of their families (with 85% giving this reason).

A national survey conducted in 1982 by Louis Harris and Associates for General Mills found enough evidence to indicate that most women would prefer to stay home with their families and that full-time job participation was not their life’s goal. The results of the survey showed that 39% of women preferred to work only at home and that another 14% would prefer to do only volunteer work, making a total of 53% women who did not want to be in the job market outside the home at all. Another 32% wanted part-time work only, which means that only 12% of all American women wanted full-time employment in the labour force.¹⁴² This trend has not changed much since 1982. For instance, the 2007 Survey of Business Owners in the U.S. (available on the U.S. Census Bureau website) revealed that more women than men worked part-time (69.5% versus 49.7%).

Despite the attempts of a small but vocal minority of feminists to separate (or in their words, “liberate”) women from the family and children and to bring them into the workforce, the majority of women (because of their feminine intuition) know very well that when both parents work outside the home, it has detrimental effects on the well-being of their children. For this reason, the majority of women have goals and priorities that are different from those of men. Women do not look for income as the top priority in their work. For the very

¹⁴² Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

same reason, when they do have to work, they demand part-time jobs close to their homes. Women mostly prefer to take a central child care role in the family because they know that they are the ones keeping the whole family together.

Housewives in America: happy or unhappy?

When Betty Friedan's controversial book *The Feminine Mystique* was first published in the United States in 1963, feminists were ecstatic. Friedan defined women's unhappiness as "the problem that has no name," and then she launched into a detailed exploration of what she believed to be the cause of this problem. According to Friedan, women had been encouraged to confine themselves to the narrow roles of housewife and mother, forsaking education and career aspirations in the process. Friedan attempted to prove that the feminine mystique denied women the opportunity to develop their own identities, and this ultimately led to problems for women and their families. The formation of American suburbs moved the centres of American child care in single family dwellings.¹⁴³ Indeed, feminists like Friedan shed crocodile tears in public about the housewives who were isolated from the community, driven crazy by their babies, and victims of male oppression.

Was Friedan correct in her observations and conclusions? What is the underlying truth? Two American sociologists investigated the conditions of the type of housewives who were portrayed as victims by Friedan. One of the sociologists was Herbert J. Gans, who studied the typical American suburb of Levittown, New Jersey; the other was Helena Znaniecki Lopata, who personally interviewed 573 women in the Chicago suburbs. Both sociologists found that residents, especially

¹⁴³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

women, greatly enjoyed their suburban lifestyles and were amongst the happiest and least isolated of all Americans.

In their studies, both Lopata and Gans found a better quality of life for housewives as compared to working women. For example, Lopata discovered that suburban housewives were more likely than working women to use their education in their lives in various ways, such as teaching their children at home, reading books on various subjects, and being active in community affairs. They were also better able to maintain friendships. As a matter of fact, most of the working women interviewed were looking forward to quitting their jobs to take on the role of housewife. Lopata notes:

The role of the housewife provides her a base for rebuilding a many-faceted life, an opportunity few other vocational roles allow, because they are tied down to single organizational structures and goals.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, Gans discovered in his study that only 10% of suburban women reported frequent loneliness or boredom.¹⁴⁵ We can see here that the Friedan's cry about the housewife was only a myth.

A similar observation was made by anthropologist Margaret Mead when she noted in her book *Male and Female* that women are most satisfied not when they are granted "influence, power, and wealth," but when "the female role of wife and mother is exalted." Moreover, Mead argued that the devaluation of the creative role of the mother is what makes women unhappy in the home.¹⁴⁶

There are biological reasons to explain why men and women are good at different tasks. Most women do a good amount of work at home, while most men do a different type of work in factories or offices. In reality, neither type of work is better than the other. Just

¹⁴⁴ Lopata, *Occupation Housewife*.

¹⁴⁵ Gans, *The Levittowners*.

¹⁴⁶ Mead, *Male and Female*.

because men are paid for their work in the outside world, while women are not paid for their home management, this does not mean that the men's work is superior. After all, prostitutes are paid for their work, but this does not make their work superior to that of a stay-at-home mother.

For many women, compared to career excitement or earning a financial fortune or fame, there is much more thrill and satisfaction in having – and caring for – babies. This was aptly summed up by Anne Morrow Lindbergh when she defined her own priorities. Lindbergh (1906-2001) was a pioneering American aviator and author, the wife of fellow aviator Charles Lindbergh. Despite her adventures in aviation and her fame, Lindbergh described what gave her the most satisfaction:

The sheer fact of finding myself loved was unbelievable and changed my world, my feelings about life and myself. I was given confidence, strength, and almost a new character. The man I was to marry believed in me and what I could do, and consequently, I found I could do more than I realized, even in that mysterious outer world that fascinated me but seemed unattainable. He opened the door to “real life.” The first months of motherhood were totally normal, joyful, and satisfying and I would have been content to stay home and do nothing else but care for my baby. This was “real life” at its most basic level.¹⁴⁷

Psychological changes in women during menstrual cycles

Men and women differ in terms of their reproductive natures. Women, owing to their creative nature, have well-defined monthly reproductive cycles marked by the rise and fall of certain sex hormones. About

¹⁴⁷ Lindbergh, *Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead*.

a week before the woman begins to menstruate, the progesterone and estrogens fall to their lowest levels. There is suddenly less progesterone to soothe the mood and even fewer estrogens to promote feelings of comfort.¹⁴⁸ As a result of monthly hormonal changes during this time period, many women experience premenstrual syndrome (PMS), suffering from mood swings that include mild depression, irritability, aggressiveness, tearfulness and lethargy, as well as from physical changes including tiredness, dizziness, headache and sore throat. When PMS symptoms become severe, the condition is called premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), a condition characterized by extreme mood swings that can disrupt work and damage relationships. According to “What’s the Difference between Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder and Premenstrual Syndrome?” at the Mayo Clinic website, around 30% of women suffer from PMS symptoms, and up to 8% experience the symptoms of PMDD, which can be devastating. In fact, in the French penal code, PMS is placed under the category of temporary insanity.¹⁴⁹

In one study, it was discovered that about 50% of women’s acute psychiatric and medical admissions to the hospital are made during the pre-menstrual and menstrual periods.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, it has been discovered that 50% of female prisoners commit their crimes during their premenstrual or menstrual periods. Reports of suicide attempts can increase 17-fold among women during the premenstrual period. Furthermore, statistics show that plane crashes are much more common when the women pilots are in their premenstrual or menstrual periods.¹⁵¹ In an important study on this syndrome, researchers Melges and Hamburg mention:

¹⁴⁸ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

¹⁴⁹ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

¹⁵⁰ Stone, “Premenstrual Tension,” 317-343.

¹⁵¹ Dalton, “Premenstrual Tension.”

The psychological changes that occur during this phase of the menstrual cycle can have serious consequences for a susceptible woman and also for society at large, and should not be looked upon as a minor nuisance.¹⁵²

Islam takes into account the fact that there is a profound difference in the physiology of men and women. Since men do not suffer from the hormonal effects of the reproductive cycle, they are given the responsibility of dealing with the hostile outside world of strangers and of having to continuously earn a livelihood for their wives and children. Men do not suffer from biological breaks and hormonal disturbances every month as women do. Therefore, men are the financial caretakers for their family; it is their religious obligation. Women, who suffer from the hormonal effects before and during their menstrual periods every month, are encouraged to focus their energies on the more friendly environment of their homes. Compared to the outside world, at home, a woman's husband and her children will be more accommodating to her mood changes as well as the physical changes that take place during the monthly period.

Islam cares so much for women that in the Sharia, if a husband divorces his wife during her menstrual period, it will not be accepted.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Melges and Hamburg, "Psychological Effects of Hormonal Changes in Women."

¹⁵³ According to 'Abdullâh ibn 'Umar and some of the successors of the Companions as well as Islamic scholars such as Ibn Taymiyah, Ibn Qayyim and contemporary scholars such as Ibn Bâz and Ibn al-'Uthaymeen, the divorce of a menstruating woman does not count because Allah has mentioned:

﴿O Prophet, when you [Muslims] divorce women, divorce them for [the commencement of] their waiting period and keep count of the waiting period...﴾ (*Qur'an* 65: 1)

Further evidence on this issue comes from the hadith of 'Abdullâh ibn 'Umar, in which it has been related that he divorced his wife at the time of her menses.

An underlying wisdom in such a command could be that a wife might be more irritable during her menstrual period, as was shown in the aforementioned scientific research.

Men have been commanded to perform the five daily obligatory prayers in the mosque, whereas for women, as mentioned in many hadiths, it is preferable to perform the five prayers at home. Concerning women praying in the mosques, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Their houses are better for them.» (Narrated by Abu Dâwood and classed as sound by al-Albâni)

Women are also not required to attend the weekly Friday prayers. Ṭâriq ibn Shihâb reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The Friday prayer in congregation is an obligatory duty for every Muslim, with four exceptions: a slave, a woman, a boy (non-adult), and a sick person.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

All these concessions granted to women in the Islamic teachings show how much Islam cares for women and their physiology.

Both parents working full-time: effects on children's mental health

The previously mentioned Pew Research study “After Decades of Decline, A Rise in Stay-at-Home Mothers,” conducted in January and February 2014, analyzed public opinion regarding what is best for children with respect to working parents. In this survey, 60% of the respondents said that it is better for children when one parent

= «He told the Prophet (ﷺ) about that, and the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) became angry and said: Tell him to take her back and keep her until she has become pure, menstruated, and again become pure; then, if he wishes, he may keep her after that, and if he wishes, he may divorce her. Then the Prophet (ﷺ) said: That is the prescribed period at which Allah has commanded men to divorce women.» (Bukhari)

(typically the mother) stays home to focus on the family, while only 35% respondents said that children are just as well off when both parents work. This survey shows that Americans think it is best for a child to have a mother (or father) at home.

This preference has been viewed in practice in Sweden as well. Allan Carlson states that until 1965, Sweden rejected the feminist ideologies and followed a social pattern similar to the U.S., with only one-fourth of mothers with children entering the workforce, and more than half of them working only part-time. Then, over the next few years, the entire current agenda of feminism, including universal day-care, family-planning programmes and paternity leave, was finally implemented. In the words of Carlson:

With the homemaker declared to be a 'dying race,' legal changes removed the special protections afforded women in marriage [sic]. Changes in Swedish tax law essentially eliminated the joint return for a married couple, and have left all persons paying the same tax, whether alone, married but childless, or married with children... Swedish welfare policy was also altered to discourage maternal care of preschool children.¹⁵⁴

Such policies resulted in the destruction of the institution of marriage in Sweden. In a country that has the lowest death rate among children, where education is free at all levels, where there is no problem of population density, and where the per capita income of its residents is the one of the highest, the Swedish Parliament found it necessary to investigate the reasons for the rise in the number of mentally disturbed people. Renowned psychiatrist Hans Loman was appointed to investigate this problem. In a preliminary report, Dr. Loman stated that in Sweden, since most married women (about 70% of mothers with children up to the age of 17) are in the job market, the vital institution of the family has been seriously affected. Dr. Loman

¹⁵⁴ Carlson, "Toward 'The Working Family'."

notes, “We have managed to create for our children an extraordinarily cold, anti-children society.”¹⁵⁵

Commenting on the destruction of the family system in Sweden, Gilder affirms that the central lesson that we learn from the Swedish experience is that irreversible damage was inflicted on the entire society when the mothers of small children were driven out of their homes and into the workforce. In fact, women who stay at home are not performing some voluntary role that can be done more efficiently by the welfare state. Human resources are not ‘wasted’ when women stay at home. Women play an extremely important role in the socialization of both men and children. When mothers leave their children at home in search of a career, society has to pay the cost in the form of economic loss, population decline, crimes committed by children and by adults, drug addiction, divorce, and mental sicknesses. Gilder explains:

Full-time work by mothers of small children comes at a serious twofold cost: first, the loss of the immeasurable social benefit of the mother’s love and care for her child; second, the frequent loss of the husband’s full-time concentration on his career. The yield of the mother’s job to the economy or the man’s help in the home only rarely can offset these costs of her employment. The society will pay the costs one way or another... The alternative to traditional family roles is not a unisex family; it is sexual suicide.¹⁵⁶

Men are the protectors of women

The Qur’an has specified that men are the protectors of women:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ...﴾

(سورة النساء: ٣٤)

¹⁵⁵ Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*.

¹⁵⁶ Gilder, *Men and Marriage*.

﴿Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other...﴾ (*Qur'an 4: 34*)

Allah (ﷻ) has enabled and entrusted men to protect, take care of, and earn money for their families. To accomplish this task, He has granted men certain capabilities most suited for the sphere outside the home. Such qualities include risk-taking, the male sense of confidence, aggressiveness, spatial abilities and a quest for power. Whether he is a father, a brother or a husband, Islam has made it his duty to take care of his daughters, sisters, mother or wife. He needs to spend on them, providing them with a good education, food, clothing and shelter; protect them from anything that might harm them; accompany them on long distance travels; and never hesitate to put his life at stake for them if the need arises.

Allah (ﷻ) has granted men certain skills and abilities in which they are superior to women, and these include targeting, spatial building abilities, and superior navigation abilities. As stated earlier, researchers at Virginia Tech found that the areas of the brain involved in targeting and spatial memory mature about four years earlier in boys than in girls. Researchers in France looked at the gender differences in spatial abilities at an early age. They found that even at the age of 2, a boy is about three times more likely than a girl to be able to build a bridge out of blocks.¹⁵⁷ Such skills are much needed for someone who is working outside the home.

Similarly, there is a significant difference among men and women when it comes to following directions. Men can more frequently use compass directions when they travel, but women can often follow directions better when visible landmarks are given to them. Why is this so? German psychiatrist Georg Grön and his colleagues at the University of Ulm wanted to investigate the reason. They used a functional MRI to observe brain activation in male and female subjects

¹⁵⁷ Labarthe, "Are Boys Better Than Girls at Building a Tower or a Bridge at 2 Years of Age?" 140-144.

as they searched for the way out of a complex, three-dimensional, virtual-reality maze. The results of the study revealed that women use an advanced area of the brain (cerebral cortex) for determining driving directions. On the other hand, men use the hippocampus to determine directions, which is that primitive area of the brain that is specialized in spatial navigation.¹⁵⁸ Hence, men tend to be better in navigation and following a map.

In this context, the famous hadith of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) can also be better understood:

«A woman who believes in Allah and the hereafter shall not travel for (a period of) a day and a night unless accompanied by a maḥram of hers.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

This hadith, of course, is also based upon the additional wisdom that the company of a male will ensure protection should a danger arise.

The ability and confidence of men to manage affairs and act as the protectors of women can also be understood by studying the case of transgender individuals, who suffer from gender identity disorder. A medical diagnosis can be made if a person experiences discomfort as the result of a desire to be a member of the opposite sex or if a person experiences impaired functioning or distress as a result of that gender identification. As a scientist, Dr. Leonard Sax argued that the experiences of transsexual persons can offer true insight into the experience of womanhood and manhood. As an example, he presents the case study of a young boy named James Boylan, who always felt as if he were a girl confined in the body of a boy. Finally, at the age of 40, he had his sex-change surgery and started to receive oestrogen injections as therapy. He changed his name to Jennifer. Five years later, Boylan wrote about her feelings as a man and then her feelings as a woman. In an article titled “Altered State: Living over 40 Years

¹⁵⁸ Grön, “Human Brain Activation During Navigation,” 404-408.

as a Man, Then Becoming a Woman, Still Didn't Answer All the Questions about the Opposite Sex," published in *Allure* in September 2003, Boylan states:

The first thing I lost when I started taking estrogen was the sense of invulnerability and confidence I had always had as a man. As a guy, much of the turbulence of life just bounced off me, like a pebble hitting a windshield. As a woman, though, things tend to get under my skin. My sorrows and joys tend to lie very close to the surface now...

This account of Boylan, both as a man and then as a woman, tells us about the fundamental differences in the way men and women perceive the world. Men have been designated as the protectors of women, as mentioned in the Qur'an, precisely because of their risk-taking nature, their masculine confidence and their sense of invulnerability; these are the traits needed to cope with the outside world and to protect one's wife and children. There is no question about who is better and who is not. This is ingrained in the nature of the two sexes: in the selection of the future mate, women tend to focus mostly upon the socioeconomic status of men, whereas men tend to look for beauty in women. This is supported by many studies noted earlier in this book.

By their nature, women prefer men who are capable of protecting them and providing for them. This has even been admitted by some of the staunchest supporters of feminism. In her book *The Cinderella Complex*, feminist author Colette Dowling sorrowfully admitted that most women do have a secret desire to depend upon a husband who will support and defend his wife.¹⁵⁹

In the same vein, Dr. Townsend's book *What Women Want – What Men Want* focuses on in-depth interviews that he conducted with 50 medical students, both male and female. In those interviews, 85%

¹⁵⁹ Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex*.

of the men regarded physical attractiveness as the most important quality in their future soulmate, while only 10% of the women gave this response.¹⁶⁰ More importantly, not even one woman expressed an eagerness to marry a man who made less money than she did. As a matter of fact, one-third of the female medical college students stated that they wanted (to marry) a man who made them feel “protected” and “secure.” This is exactly what the Qur’an has explained:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ...﴾ (سورة النساء: ٣٤)

﴿Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth...﴾ (Qur’an 4: 34)

In Islamic teachings, a woman has the same rights over a man as a man has over his wife, except that a man, being the caretaker and protector of the affairs of women, has a degree over them, as Allah has specified:

﴿... وَاللِّرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٢٨)

﴿...But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]...﴾ (Qur’an 2: 228)

In Islam, the husband-wife relationship is complementary rather than competitive; the two spouses complete each other’s personality, skills and responsibilities.

A social engineering experiment on a Jewish settlement, and how it backfired

Those who wish to ‘liberate’ women in Muslim countries by making the roles of men and women interchangeable should learn a lesson

¹⁶⁰ Townsend, *What Women Want – What Men Want*.

from the first large-scale social engineering experiment conducted on a kibbutz founded in 1910 in Jewish-settled Palestine.¹⁶¹

The idea was to emancipate women by eliminating the socialized gender roles from the earliest stages of childhood. The kibbutzim were collective farms in which maternal care was totally eliminated. Instead of living with parents, children lived in special dormitories and were reared communally. There were community laundries and kitchens in order to save women from the daily household duties of cooking and doing laundry. In this way, it was expected that with the passing of several sexually neutral generations, men and women would become gender-neutral and participate equally in positions of power. In addition, to make sure that the socialization of children remained neutral, toys were kept in large baskets so that boys and girls could freely choose their own toys instead of being forced to play with gender-specific toys chosen by adults.

After 90 years of continuous social engineering, the results were very disturbing for the social engineers. Even after three to four generations, the children of the kibbutz still clung to their traditional roles. The children always chose gender-specific toys. Three-year-old boys consistently took cars and guns out of the toy baskets, while the girls preferred to play with dolls and tea sets.

The kibbutz administration imposed quotas to enforce female participation in leadership positions, but they were rarely met. Women and men ignored the unisex dress code. Tiger and Shepher, the authors of a study about women in the kibbutz, noted:

They have acted against the principles of their socialization and ideology, against the wishes of the men of their communities,

¹⁶¹ kibbutz: a unique type of rural or collective community. Traditionally they were based on agriculture, but in today's Israel, they involve various economic ventures such as industrial plants and high-tech enterprises. (Editor)

against the economic interest of the kibbutzim, in order to be able to devote more time and energy to private maternal activities rather than to economic and political public ones.¹⁶²

Hence, contrary to the expectations of the social engineers, the women in the kibbutz were actually returning to maternal roles. Nature does not change. This is the victory of the innate, divinely-ordained biology of women over the utopian gender-neutral vision created by humans. In the words of Abdal Hakim Murad:

In Israel today, the kibbutzim harbour sex-distinctions which are famous for being sharper than those observable in Israeli society at large. The experiment has not only failed, it seems to have backfired.¹⁶³

Men or women: who is a better home manager?

Because of their biological make-up, men and women differ in their worldviews. In the Qur'an, Allah (ﷻ) has commanded women to stay inside their homes:

﴿وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ...﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٣٣)

(٣٣)

﴿And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance...﴾ (Qur'an 33: 33)

Obviously, women are permitted to go outside whenever the need arises. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) permitted women to venture outside the house if there was a need:

«It is permissible for you (women) to go out for your needs.» (Bukhari)

¹⁶² Tiger and Shepherd, *Women in the Kibbutz*.

¹⁶³ Murad, "Boys Will Be Boys."

However, the commandment of Islam for women to stay in their homes tells us about the inherent nature of women and their superiority over men in the realm of the home. Indeed, evidence supports this assertion.

When it comes to the organization of the home, women tend to possess far more superior qualities than men. Most women still do the majority of the housework, even if they are employed. For every two hours a man spends in domestic chores, a woman spends five hours helping around the house and delegating the duties to children.¹⁶⁴ Whether they work outside the home or are stay-at-home mothers, women always find themselves in the position of managing the home, where they have to remind their husbands of their obligations.

Even in Scandinavian countries, where every attempt has been made to eliminate the traditional gender roles, the fact is that childcare, laundry, cleaning and preparing food for the family are done by the wives in 70% of the families, while husbands pay the bills and do the jobs outside the house.¹⁶⁵

As discussed previously, in the kibbutz experiment, despite every possible attempt to reverse the roles of men and women, it was discovered that women do most of the housecleaning, sometimes because they are not impressed by their husbands' ability in this field. One husband admitted, "I do what I can, but her [my wife's] standards for cleaning are too high. She states that if I did it, she'd just have to do it again."¹⁶⁶

The superiority of women over men in maintaining the home stems from the differing worldviews of the two genders. The world of the job market is essentially a male-dominated one, where the 'worthy' ones are those who prove that they possess the male qualities

¹⁶⁴ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

¹⁶⁵ Hoyenga and Hoyenga, *Sex Differences*.

¹⁶⁶ Tiger and Shepher, *Women in the Kibbutz*.

of competitiveness and aggression. To women, the most important values are compassion, love, relationship, and security – the values that exist more inside the home; hence, it is important to women that their houses are clean and have a friendly environment. For men, the office or the factory is as important as their homes, because they make a living there. Moir explains this difference in the worldview of the two sexes:

That ‘pervasive force’ lies in the very nature of the male and the female brain. Men do not, indeed, ‘see’ the dirty glass ... mostly because clean glasses have a relatively low priority in their view of the world. To a woman, where the home is less of a motel, and more the backdrop to the relationships that matter to her, the dirty glass stands as an implicit rebuke to her own values.¹⁶⁷



¹⁶⁷ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

CHAPTER 7

Why Separate-Sex Gatherings? Why not Mixed Gatherings?

Islam clearly distinguishes between public and private space. The private space is physically divided from the public space, and it is strongly protected against any intrusion, as commanded in Soorat an-Noor (verses 27-29). In addition, Islam protects whatever people do in their private spheres by implementing bans on speculation, gossip and spying. (See Soorat an-Noor 11-13 and Soorat al-Hujurat 11-12.)

Islam has given Muslims a superior and comprehensive social system in which there is no room for unnecessary and reckless mixed gatherings. Based on its realistic approach to human nature, Islam is perfectly aware of the fact that the free-mixing of men and women breeds moral vices that are significantly culpable in the destruction of the moral fabric of many societies, as past and present societal experiences have revealed. In the Qur'an, Allah has mentioned the following to the believing men and women:

﴿قُلِ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾ (٣٠) وَقُلِ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ ... ﴿٣١﴾ (سورة النور: ٣٠-٣١)

﴿Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce [some]

of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment... ﴿Qur'an 24: 30-31﴾

Following these verses, the details of the women's hijab are provided. Similarly, in Soorat al-Aḥzâb (verse 59), the commandments regarding a Muslim female's dress outside the home are given. Likewise, Allah has commanded:

﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾ (سورة الإسراء: ٣٢)

﴿And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way.﴾ (Qur'an 17: 32)

This clearly closes all the back doors to deviant human desires, illicit behaviour, and mixed gatherings.

Women are happier and more confident in separate-sex gatherings

Studies have shown that women are happier and more confident when they work in separate-gender settings. The behaviour of men and women at the workplace can be very different. In order to ease the stress of daily work, men often joke and tease, a habit that many women do not find funny or may even be hurtful to them. This irritates men, and then they may make comments like, "You know what her problem is? She has no sense of humour." The reality, however, is that there is no problem with women; they just perceive things differently than men.

Because their brains do not work in the same way, men and women usually do not laugh at the same things. Certain things may offend or disturb women, whereas they may be acceptable for men.¹⁶⁸ Scientific studies measuring worry and depression among men and women have demonstrated that "anxiety and neuroticism have different correlates

¹⁶⁸ McGhee, *Humor: Its Origin and Development*.

in males and females, thus they have different meanings.” In general, women become more worried and anxious compared to men.¹⁶⁹ This is because women are more caring, nurturing and emotional in their nature. Therefore, women like and feel confident about working with other women. On the other hand, men are less caring, more risk-taking and less emotional by nature. Consequently, men like to work independently.

More evidence comes from psychologist Shelley Taylor, a specialist in the study of gender differences from the University of California in Los Angeles, who explains:

Women maintain more same-sex close relationships than do men, they mobilize more social support in times of stress than do men, they turn to female friends more often, and they report more benefits from contact with their female friends and relatives.¹⁷⁰

Adolescent girls' choice of home as a safe haven

Men and women are created equally but differently. In all previous societies, the sphere of men used to be the outside world, whereas women used to stay at home and take care of the family. Modern secular society, in a joint effort between feminists and the mass media, is trying to drag women out of their homes to spend most of their time in public, whether for careers or sports or simply to uphold the myth of the liberated female. However, despite all the efforts of media and capitalists, women still prefer to stay at home.

An interesting study in this regard comes from Dr. Kandy James of Edith Cowan University in Australia. In her first study, Dr. James surveyed 10-year-old Australian girls and found that those girls rated

¹⁶⁹ Hoyenga and Hoyenga, *Sex Differences*.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, “Biobehavioral Responses to Stress in Females,” 411-429.

their bedrooms as the recreational space where they felt least self-conscious; the bedroom was the space they chose to be in the most.¹⁷¹

This triggered Dr. James to carry out an in-depth follow-up study on the same girls when they turned 16, exploring the reasons for this attitude towards their bedrooms. Dr. James noted that even though boys spend some of their spare time in their bedrooms, it appears that bedrooms are not as important to their identity as they are to the girls.¹⁷²

The original survey was conducted on 276 adolescent girls. After the data analysis for this experiment, Dr. James discussed the findings of her study by looking at different factors related to the girls' responses. One factor was the situational body image: the impact of an audience and situation on a girl's overall body image at a specific place. When questioned about the meaning of their bedroom to them, most of the girls mentioned that their bedroom provided them seclusion from potentially critical audiences. Leonie gave a typical response, which was shared by many other girls; that her bedroom meant "privacy. It's a room where I can go, where I know that people won't be following me and looking at everything I do and watching me."¹⁷³

Another notable factor was the fear of ridicule of emotions, and the bedroom was a very useful place to hide such public displays of emotion. Many girls revealed this sentiment in the survey, that they used their rooms when they did not want others to watch them being upset.

Among the physical factors studied was the need for having a secure and safe place. Most of the girls chose to spend their time in their rooms because of the secure environment. For instance, Fazia regarded her room as her secure place, while Joy said, "It is the one

¹⁷¹ James, "Deterrents to Active Recreation Participation," 183-189.

¹⁷² James, "I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!" 71-90.

¹⁷³ James, "I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!" 71-90.

place that I can feel safe.” There are other girls in this study who regarded their rooms as “my haven,” “my refuge” and “my little world.”¹⁷⁴

Another physical factor that contributed towards the emotional attachment of girls to their rooms was their memorabilia, which provided them with a sense of security. One participant of the study, Kaye, said, “I spend basically all my time at home in my bedroom... I’m surrounded by all my favourite things... that are *me* basically and that’s the place I like to be,” while Fazia said about her memorabilia, “It’s *your* place, where you just feel safest, the most comfortable, with all *your* stuff around.”¹⁷⁵ It seems that women have emotional attachment and memories associated with their homes. Men rarely develop such emotional attachments with their homes because they are created to be hunters and gatherers who spend most of their time outside the home. For this reason, the girls in the survey also showed a desire to control their own space. Dr. James says:

The bedroom was a secure base from which they [girls] could advance and retreat between girlhood and womanhood according to the demands placed on them.¹⁷⁶

Remember that these were all Western Australian adolescent girls who exercised their free choice and chose their homes, and not public places, as their leisure sites. While discussing the results of this study, Dr. James makes a deep observation:

Girls were concerned about how their actions might appear to others. They reported enjoying being in their bedrooms because they could ‘be themselves’. This implies that many girls portray a ‘self’ that is not their real self when in public.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ James, “I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!” 71-90.

¹⁷⁵ James, “I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!” 71-90.

¹⁷⁶ James, “I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!” 71-90.

¹⁷⁷ James, “I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!” 71-90.

Girls become conscious when non-maḥram men are watching them, so they try to portray themselves artificially in public. Islam saves women from this headache. When a woman wears full hijab and burqa and goes out to the public spaces, she does not have to portray herself artificially because no man can enjoy her beauty. A woman in burqa does not have to worry about her body image in public, nor does she have to worry about the public display of her emotions. Her face as well as her body will be covered. Thus, home provides the security and seclusion which women cherish and enjoy, while the burqa provides women with a means of portable seclusion, as Hanna Papanek points out in her research on the burqa.

The blessings of single-sex gatherings: examples from Muslim societies

Luce Irigaray laments about our present societies:

Our societies are built upon men-among-themselves (l'entre-hommes). According to this order, women remain dispersed and exiled atoms.¹⁷⁸

In reality, this is human nature. Throughout history, there have always been different spheres for men and women in society. Commenting on the statement of Irigaray, Abdal Hakim Murad observes:

Traditionally, the Islamic public space is constructed and subjectivised primarily by 'l'entre-hommes', the men in white. The women in black signal a kind of absence even when they are present, by assuming a respected guest status. But Islamic society, rooted in primordial and specifically shariatic kinship patterns, emphatically refuses to reduce them to the status of 'dispersed and exiled atoms'. There is a parallel space of the entre-femmes,

¹⁷⁸ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.

a realm of alternative meaning and fulfillment, where men are the guests, which intersects in formal ways with the *entre-hommes* but which creates a sociality between women.¹⁷⁹

Indeed, several Western anthropologists have explored the Islamic *entre-femmes*. Chantal Lobato studied Afghan refugee women during her fieldwork. She severely criticizes the Western stereotypes about the separate-sex gatherings of Muslim women and admires the affection and sisterly richness in the lives of those women.

She notes that the spaces reserved for women are created primarily by women, through their customs, tales and narratives, and that they overlap with the male traditions through marriage.¹⁸⁰

It has been shown elsewhere in this book that the male gaze is a universal phenomenon and that, generally, women feel embarrassed when non-mahram men stare at them. It has been observed by many anthropologists that women tend to be very relaxed and enjoy the time spent with their female companions in all-women gatherings. Feminist writer Carla Makhoulf writes about a single-sex gathering in Sanaa:

In a society marked by strict seclusion and rigidly defined sex roles, one would expect to find that the behavior of women is extremely constrained. In fact, one of the most striking features of female society in Yemen is the atmosphere of relaxation which seems to prevail during work and leisure time...

Women have a separate sphere over which men have little control, which may constitute a source of support and even of power... In fact, for the outsider expecting constrained and repressed female types as a result of seclusion, it is a most agreeable surprise to find that San'ani women do not seem nearly as tense or inhibited as women in some other cultures. Almost always the atmosphere at women's gatherings is pleasant and relaxing... They are wearing

¹⁷⁹ Murad, "Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender."

¹⁸⁰ Murad, "Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender."

their best clothes, rich velvets and brocades, talking, eating, dancing...¹⁸¹

Veronica Doubleday observed Muslim women in Herat, Afghanistan, and she was surprised to see them dressing up, keeping up with fashions, wearing makeup, and “showing themselves off to one another.” Doubleday notes that this behaviour of Afghan women in all-women gatherings would appear very “strange” to us.¹⁸² She was wondering why Afghan women would dress up when there were only women around and no men to see them? However, that is the whole idea of the Islamic hijab: that Muslim women dress up for themselves, for their immediate family members, and for their husbands. Muslim women do not dress up and display their beauty in public for the sake of the male gaze.

All these examples accentuate the point that just because Muslim women cover themselves in public or in front of men, this does not mean that they have no avenues to display themselves or to have fun. A Muslim woman enjoys her beauty and femininity in her home, in women’s gatherings, and especially with her husband. A Muslim woman’s beauty and femininity is something special; it is not something cheap, for public display.

Men’s misperceptions of women’s interpersonal behaviours and sexual harassment

Islam considers men and women to be equal but different simply because, at the mental level, the two sexes have very different psychologies, emotions and perceptions about each other. Islam forbids free-mixing of men and women in the society if it provides even the remotest possibility of temptation. Today, psychologists have

¹⁸¹ Makhlof, *Changing Veils*.

¹⁸² Doubleday, *Three Women of Herat*.

shown that in mixed-gender environments, men view male-female interactions as more sexual than women do. Men often mistakenly presume the slightest hint of friendship from women as a sexual invitation. The Qur'an has provided a solution to this problem in the form of separate-sex gatherings, and if there is a necessity for unrelated men and women to talk, the Qur'an has advised women to talk to men in a straightforward way, so as to ensure that the men will not misconstrue it as a sexual invitation.

Psychologists have studied this aspect of the male mentality and have noticed that such behaviours are more normative and acceptable in the workplace. For instance, in one study by Frank E. Saal and his associates at Kansas State University, it was found that men perceive mixed-sex interactions in more sexual terms than women do. In this study, men viewed three different interactions in much more sexual terms than women did:

- 1- informal 'get-acquainted' discussions between a female student and a male student,
- 2- a male manager training a female cashier, and
- 3- a male professor discussing with a female student an extension of her project's deadline.

The study found that men thought that the female actor or target was trying to be more seductive, promiscuous and flirtatious, whereas the women did not have the same impression.¹⁸³ Hence, compared to women, men are much more likely to misperceive other women's behaviours and intentions.

Psychologists Catherine B. Johnson, Margaret S. Stockdale, and Frank E. Saal conducted another laboratory experiment in which 187 female and 165 male undergraduate students participated. This study examined whether gender differences in sexually-based perceptions of social interactions persist when traditional male-female power

¹⁸³ Saal, Johnson and Weber, "Friendly or Sexy?" 263-276.

roles are reversed. The subjects of the study viewed a five-minute videotape. The psychologists created twelve versions of a scenario depicting a professor interacting with a student of the opposite sex while the gender of the power holder, level of harassment, and response to harassment were changed for different scenarios. The results of this study only confirmed the previous results of men misperceiving women's behaviour, regardless of the woman's status. They concluded:

To summarize, this study adds to the generality and robustness of the finding that men are more likely than women to misperceive women's interpersonal behavior. The ratings of men and women differ not only when a female is subordinate in a relationship, but also when she is superior. Furthermore, men's misperceptions of women's behavior persist over increasing levels of harassment with few exceptions. Perhaps most importantly, men's misperceptions persist regardless of whether the student accepts or rejects the professor's advances.¹⁸⁴

It is very common in mixed-gender environments, such as co-educational schools, workplaces and other social interactions, that men misread a woman's behaviour in a particular social setting. They then try to respond to her based on that misperception, only to learn that she had not the slightest interest in pursuing a more intimate personal relationship. Similarly, in environments with free-mixing, many women experience situations in which their expressions of interest and friendliness are misconstrued by men as signs of sexual interest or availability. The study mentioned above showed that even after the women clarified their intentions, men did not want to leave their imaginary world of misperception.

With this context, the Islamic commandment of hijab can easily be understood. It is men's psychology that harms women in case

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, Stockdale and Saal, "Persistence of Men's Misperceptions of Friendly Cues," 463-475.

of free-mixing in society. For this reason, Islam took the approach of nipping the evil in the bud. Islam is aware of this deficiency and defect in men's psychology. Therefore, Islam does not want to give any chance for men to mix freely with unrelated women and then misperceive the behaviour of innocent and chaste women.

Hijab and the Islamic concept of privacy

If we look at the social structure of an Islamic society, a great value is placed on the privacy of its individuals. In fact, a concise translation of the Arabic word *hayâ* (modesty or shyness) is 'keeping private what should be private'. Islamic injunctions have clearly made a distinction between public space and private space, placing a screen (like the hijab) between them.¹⁸⁵ Private space is physically divided from public space and is clearly protected against any incursion. What people do in their private space has also been protected and veiled. This is demonstrated by the Islamic commandments that strictly prohibit speculation, gossip and spying. Hence, what is private should be kept private – not only by the physical protection of walls but also by the conduct of the Muslims in refraining from talking or speculating about it. The same concept applies to one's body; what does not need to be displayed should be covered. Allah (ﷻ) has commanded:

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضَضْنَ مِنْ أَنْصُرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا...﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

﴿And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof...﴾ (*Qur'an* 24: 31)

¹⁸⁵ al-Muhajabah, "Why Wear Niqab?" accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.muhababah.com/whyniqab.htm>.

Moreover, in the private space of the home and the family, the Islamic rules of modest dress are relaxed; family members may visit freely (Soorat an-Noor, verse 61) and feel at ease in terms of dress. On the other hand, in the public sphere, rules are stricter. These rules encompass not only modest dress but also one's conduct. Physical contact must be avoided; there must not be any flirtation while conversing with the opposite sex. Situations in which an unrelated man and woman are alone together must also be avoided. Hence, in the dress, speech and behaviour of the Muslim, there has to be a screen that separates the public and the private.¹⁸⁶ From this, it becomes clear that the hijab and niqab are "a screen of privacy" and an act of ḥayâ'.¹⁸⁷ Islam teaches us to protect the privacy of others and also to protect our own privacy by taking extra steps to wear modest dress. The best manifestation of this is hijab and niqab (face-veil).

From an anthropological perspective as well, the niqab is a symbol of privacy and social distance. American anthropologist Robert F. Murphy studied the Tuareg people of the Sahara in Africa. In research published in *American Anthropologist*, he noted that the face-veil is a symbol of social distance as well as of social prestige and status in a society. In addition, "the veil is connected with privacy and withdrawal."¹⁸⁸



¹⁸⁶ However, if some abuse occurred in a private space, then the victim should seek help from the justice system as Allah has mentioned:

﴿Allah does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged...﴾ (*Qur'an 4: 148*)

¹⁸⁷ al-Muhajabah, "Why Wear Niqab?"

¹⁸⁸ Murphy, "Social Distance and the Veil," 1257-1274.

CHAPTER 8

The Niqab in Light of the Sharia

The debate about whether the hijab should be worn with or without niqab has gained momentum in the current era, especially after the niqab was forcefully removed by colonial masters. Before that, the niqab had always been considered an integral part of the hijab. Furthermore, in the modern era, the woman's face is the most important marketing and advertisement tool in the media industry. The whole advertisement and media industry complex in the Muslim countries would crumble to dust if they accepted the Islamic injunction that Muslim women should cover their faces in front of non-mahram men. Today, there is widespread misunderstanding and confusion among the Muslims regarding the dress code of Muslim women. One of the purposes of writing this book is to put a seal on this heated debate.

In order to approach this issue, we will first look at the evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah regarding the niqab. Next, we will look at the verdicts of the Prophet's Companions and determine how they understood the commandments of the Qur'an. We will also look at the position of Islamic scholars on this issue. Before we begin the discussion, it is important for us to understand that the ultimate authority for Muslims is the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Allah, the Most Exalted, has mentioned:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٣٦)

«It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should [thereafter] have any choice about their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error.» (Qur'an 33: 36)

﴿... فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾ (سورة النور: ٦٣)

«...So let those beware who dissent from the Prophet's order, lest fitnah strike them or a painful punishment.» (Qur'an 24: 63)

These verses of the Qur'an instruct us to follow the commandments of Allah (ﷻ) and His Messenger (ﷺ). We should not search for loopholes in those commandments by propounding our opinions or by rationalizing our judgements just because we are not used to seeing those commandments as the norm in our society. When we look around us, we see Muslim women with uncovered faces (wearing only headscarves) walking in the streets, shopping in the markets, and being the centre of attention in the media. However, the fact that most Muslim women do not wear the niqab cannot be used as a justification to make it permissible. The Qur'an has informed us:

﴿وَأِنْ تَطَعُوا أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١١٦)

«And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but falsifying.» (Qur'an 6: 116)

The word 'hijab' comes from the Arabic word *hajaba*, meaning 'to hide from view or to conceal, cover, screen, shelter, seclude (from), hide, obscure (from sight), make imperceptible or invisible, disguise or mask, flee from sight, veil or conceal, cover up, and become hidden'. In the context of Islamic teachings, the hijab refers to the modest covering of a Muslim woman. So the questions are:

- What is the extent of the covering?
- Does hijab include niqab as well?

To answer these questions, we have to look at the evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, along with the positions taken by the Companions.

The Qur'anic position regarding hijab with niqab

First verse from the Qur'an

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِمَ تَرَوُنَّكَ وَإِنَّا كُنَّا مِنَ الْمَدِينَةِ مُؤْمِنِينَ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِكْرَاهٌ أَنْ يُقْبِلُوا عَلَيْكَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ۗ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْكَبِيرِ ۗ﴾ (سورة الاحزاب: ٥٩)

﴿O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down [adná] over themselves [part] of their outer garments [jilbâb]. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.﴾ (Qur'an 33: 59)

There are two Arabic words in this verse that need explanation: *jilbâb* (jilbab) and *adná*. Regarding the jilbab, Ibn Katheer explains:

Jilbab refers to the cloak that is worn above the *khimâr* [head covering]. 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ood, 'Ubaydah, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri, Sa'eed ibn Jubayr, Ibrâheem an-Nakha'i, 'Atâ' al-Khorâsâni, all of them considered this to be the meaning of jilbab.¹⁸⁹

Al-Qurṭubi, a commentator on the Qur'an, states:

The word *jalâbeeb* is the plural of jilbab, and that garment is bigger than a *khimâr*. The correct view is that it is a cloth that covers the entire body.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*.

¹⁹⁰ al-Qurṭubi, *al-Jâmi' li Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, 243-244.

Al-Âloosi, another well-known commentator of the Qur'an, explains:

The garment should be wrapped from the top, covering the forehead, then bringing one side of the sheet to cover the face below the eyes, so that most of the face and the upper body is covered. This will leave both eyes uncovered.¹⁹¹

The famous Arabic grammarian Ibn Mandhooor describes it:

The jilbab is an outer garment or covering which a woman wraps around herself over her [inner] garments so that she may be covered from head to toe. It completely conceals her body.¹⁹²

Regarding the word *adnâ*, when it is mentioned as *adnâ jilbâb*, all the commentators who are proficient in Arabic and the Qur'an agree that it means 'to cover the face'. *Adnâ* means to draw close and wrap up, but when this word is used with the associating particle '*alâ*', it gives the meaning of letting something down from above.¹⁹³ Some modernist Islamic scholars and translators, influenced by Western culture, have translated this word to mean 'to wrap up' in order to avoid the command about covering the face.

If Allah had meant what those modernists want to construe, He would have said *yudneena ilay-hinna* and not *yudneena 'alay-hinna*. Furthermore, the words *min jalâbeebi-hinna* do not leave any room for the meanings intended by the modernists. It is obvious that here the preposition *min* indicates a part of a sheet, but wrapping up is done by means of the whole sheet and not merely a part of it. The verse, therefore, clearly means that women should wrap themselves up well in their sheets and should let down a part of the sheet in front of their face.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ al-Âloosi, *Rooḥ al-Ma'âni*, 89.

¹⁹² Ibn Mandhooor, *Lisân al-'Arab*, 273.

¹⁹³ Mawdoodi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 142-144.

¹⁹⁴ Mawdoodi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, 144.

Ibn Katheer provides a commentary of this verse from Ibn ‘Abbâs, who was a cousin and Companion of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and an expert in commentary on the Qur’an:

Allah commanded the believing women to cover their faces from over their heads, with jalâbeeb, and to expose [only] one eye, whenever they come out of their homes for a necessity.¹⁹⁵

It has been narrated by Imam al-Baghawi, in *Tafseer al-Baghawi*, about this verse:

Ibn ‘Abbâs and ‘Ubaydah have said that Allah has commanded Muslim women to cover their heads and faces, except for one eye.¹⁹⁶

In reality, all the great commentators after the period of the Companions and their immediate followers have given the same meaning to this verse. Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jareer aṭ-Ṭabari states:

Respectable women should not look like slave girls in the way they dress when they move out of their houses, with uncovered faces and loose hair; they should, rather, draw and let down over them a part of their sheets or outer garments so that no evil person may dare to molest them.¹⁹⁷

Similarly, the commentary of ‘adnâ jilbâb’ in *Tafseer al-Kash-shâf* says, “They draw their cloaks over their bodies and cover their faces.”¹⁹⁸

Abu Bakr al-Jaṣṣâs ar-Râzi explains:

In this verse is evidence that a young woman is commanded to:

- 1- cover her face in front of non-maḥram men,
- 2- remain covered, and

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, 298.

¹⁹⁶ al-Baghawi, *Tafseer al-Baghawi*, 160.

¹⁹⁷ aṭ-Ṭabari, *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân*, 33.

¹⁹⁸ az-Zamakhshari, *Tafseer al-Kash-shâf*.

- 3- refrain from going out [without it], so that the people will not place any doubt upon her.¹⁹⁹

Fakhr ad-Deen ar-Râzi states:

What is meant in this verse is that [women should cover up] so that the people would realize that they are not promiscuous women. For the woman who covers her face, though the face is not included in the 'awrah [that which needs to be covered] cannot be expected to uncover her 'awrah, which is obligatory to cover before the other men. Thus, everyone will know that they are modest and virtuous women who cannot be expected to do anything indecent.²⁰⁰

Second verse from the Qur'an

﴿ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِمَخْمَرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَاءِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

﴿And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts [from illegal sexual acts]²⁰¹ and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof, and

¹⁹⁹ ar-Râzi, *Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, 371-372.

²⁰⁰ ar-Râzi, *at-Tafseer al-Kabeer*.

²⁰¹ Note that the verse before this one (*Qur'an* 24: 31) orders men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and to protect their private parts. Islam is balanced in its dealings with both genders and does not put the burden of chastity entirely on women.

to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed. ﴿Qur'an 24: 31﴾

The word *khumur* used in this verse is the plural of *khimâr*, which is used to cover the head and the face. Imam Muhammad ibn Is-hâq ibn Khuzaymah states, "The *khimâr* refers to the cloth with which a woman covers her face."²⁰²

Someone may argue that a *khimâr* is primarily used to cover the hair, neck and chest and is not primarily the face-covering. In terms of its linguistic meaning, that may be true; nevertheless, we can see in the books of Hadith that women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used the *khimâr* to cover their faces, even if it involved simply pulling up their head cover to cover their face.

In the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, women used to wear a head cover that was tied in a knot at the back of the head. The slit of their shirts remained partly open in the front, exposing the front of their neck and the upper part of their bosom. There was nothing except the shirt to cover the breasts, and the hair was worn in two plaits hanging behind like tails.²⁰³

‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها) described how the Muslim women responded to this command:

May Allah have mercy on the first emigrant women. When Allah revealed:

²⁰² Ibn Khuzaymah, *Ṣaḥeeḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*.

²⁰³ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, 298.

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ... وَلَيَضْرِبْنَ بِحُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ...﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

﴿And tell the believing women to... wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests...﴾ (Qur'an 24: 31),

they tore off their aprons or waist sheets and used them as head covers. (Bukhari)

Ibn Hajar explains:

Her saying “used them as khimaars” means we covered our faces with them. The manner of doing this is by placing the khimaar over the head and then letting it fling from the right side to the left shoulder. This is known as taqannu (enwrapping). In the Days of Ignorance, the women would let the khimaar hang from (the top of her head down) behind her, and so she would expose what was in front of it (i.e. the face and neck). That’s why she was commanded to veil.²⁰⁴

Muhammad al-Ameen ash-Shanqeeti also comments:

This authentic hadith clearly proves that the female Companions mentioned in it understood that the meaning of Allah’s saying:

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ... وَلَيَضْرِبْنَ بِحُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ...﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

﴿And tell the believing women to... wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests...﴾ (Qur'an 24: 31)

necessitated the veiling of their faces. That is why they tore off part of their dresses and “used them as khimârs,” which means that they covered their faces with them, obeying Allah’s command in (Qur'an 24: 31), which mandates the veiling of their faces.

It is well-known that they could not have gotten their understanding – that Allah’s saying:

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ... وَلَيَضْرِبْنَ بِحُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ...﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

²⁰⁴ Bin Baaz et al., *Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling*, 102-104.

﴿And tell the believing women to... wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests...﴾ (*Qur'an* 24: 31)

– meant to veil the face, except from the Prophet (ﷺ), since he was present at that time. They would ask him about the things with which they had difficulty in their religion. Allah has stated:

﴿يَا بَيِّنَاتِ وَالزَّيْرُ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْفَكُرُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٤٤)

﴿[We sent them] with clear proofs and written ordinances. And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought.﴾ (*Qur'an* 16: 44)

It was not possible for them to come up with an understanding of this verse by themselves.²⁰⁵

Fâtimah bint al-Mundhir narrated, “We used to veil our faces when we were in *iḥrâm* (the state of consecration for Hajj or ‘umrah) in the company of Asmâ’ bint Abi Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddeeq.”²⁰⁶ This is further proof that Muslim women at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) used khimâr to cover their faces.

Shaykh al-Albâni explains that the khimâr is sometimes used to cover the face. He first quotes this piece of poetry:

You should tell Maleeḥah [the name of the woman with whom the poet fell in love]: You have destroyed the piety and holiness of my brother because of your golden-coloured khimâr. There is a radiance of your khimâr, and then there is also radiance of your cheeks beneath the khimâr. I am surprised at your face; [with so much luminosity,] why is it still not blazing?²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ ash-Shanqeeti, *Tafseer Aḥwâ' al-Bayân*, 595.

²⁰⁶ Mâlik ibn Anas, *Muwatta'at Imâm Mâlik*.

²⁰⁷ al-Albâni, *Hijâb al-Mar'at al-Muslimah*.

Then he comments, “The poet has mentioned the attribute of his beloved – that the khimâr [cloak] was on her face.”²⁰⁸

The point to note here is that the Arab poet is talking about the face underneath the khimâr: “...radiance of your khimâr, and then there is also radiance of your cheeks beneath the khimâr.”

Third verse from the Qur’an

﴿وَالْقَوَاعِدُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ الَّتِي لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجَاتٍ بِزِينَتٍ وَأَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرْنَ خَيْرٌ لَّهُنَّ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾
(سورة النور: ٦٠)

﴿And women of post-menstrual age who have no desire for marriage – there is no blame upon them for putting aside their outer garments [thiyâb] [but] not displaying adornment. But to modestly refrain [from that] is better for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.﴾ (Qur’an 24: 60)

In this verse of the Qur’an, permission has been granted to older women to remove their outer garments if they are past the age of childbearing and are no longer sexually attractive. The other condition is that those women cannot exploit this permission by putting on adornments such as makeup. If they are not wearing makeup, they are allowed to be seen by non-maḥram men without their faces covered.

In this verse, the word *thiyâb* means outer clothing such as loose cloaks, face-veils or robes. All the commentators of the Qur’an have adopted the translation of *thiyâb* to mean ‘loose cloaks’. Aṭ-Ṭabari explains this verse:

There is no sin upon these [old] women if they remove their [thiyâb], meaning their jilbab, which is the face covering [*qinâ*] that is worn over the khimâr, and also the cloak [*ridâ*] that is worn above the clothes [thiyâb]. There is no sin for such women if they

²⁰⁸ al-Albâni, *Hijâb al-Mar’at al-Muslimah*.

remove this in front of related and non-related males, as long as these women do not show their adornment.²⁰⁹

Similarly, Imam al-Baghawi comments:

It means that they discard some of their outer clothing, and the latter refers to that cloak and outer covering that is worn over the clothes or the niqab that is worn over the head covering. As far as the head covering is concerned, removing it is not allowed [in front of non-maḥram men].²¹⁰

Although this verse is addressing older women, there is evidence for the face-covering of younger women in this verse. Islamic scholar Ḥâfidh Muhammad Zubayr explains:

In this verse, “*al-qawâ'id*” or old women have been given the permission not to observe hijab and the opposite meaning [*mafhoom mukhâlif*] of this injunction is that those women who are not past the age of childbearing and who are young, if they do not cover their faces in front of non-maḥram men then they will be committing a sin. The wordings of the verse “*fa laisa alayhinna junâhun*” [that there is no sin on those old women] is alluding to the fact that there are other women on whom there is a sin and those are the women who are not old but they are young. To bring the evidence in this way is known as *mafhoom mukhâlif* among the jurists.²¹¹

Evidence from the Hadith regarding hijab with niqab

The following are a few hadiths that are either sound or reliable in terms of their authenticity and the chain of narrators:

²⁰⁹ at-Ṭabari, *Jâmi' al-Bayân*, 348.

²¹⁰ al-Baghawi, *Tafseer al-Baghawi*, 499.

²¹¹ Zubayr, *Face-veil*.

Hadith # 1

«‘Â’ishah (the Mother of the Believers) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to offer the dawn prayer, and some believing women, covered with their veiling sheets, used to attend the dawn prayer with him; then they would return to their homes unrecognized because of the darkness of the night.» (Bukhari)

Islamic scholars have shed light on the specific wording of this hadith:

«...unrecognized because of the darkness of the night.»

Al-Ḥâfidh Ibn Ḥajar explains:

According to ad-Dâwoodi, these words mean that due to the darkness, it was hard for any observer to recognize if they were women or men; they would just appear as human shapes.²¹²

Imam an-Nawawi has also given preference to this meaning:

Al-Ghalas means the darkness of the night that still remains [before dawn]. Ad-Dâwoodi states that it means that it was difficult for the observer to recognize if they were women or men. There is another explanation according to which those women’s identity was not recognized. This is a weak [argument] because a woman’s identity is unrecognizable even during the day if she is *mutalaffi’ah* [wrapped up in a veiling sheet]. Hence, there is no use [in this latter explanation].²¹³

Shaykh Ibn al-‘Uthaymeen explains:

This hadeeth makes it clear that the Islamic dress is concealing of the entire body as explained in this hadeeth. Only with the complete cover including the face and the hands can a woman not be recognized. This was the understanding and practice of the Sahabah [Companions] and they were the best of group [sic], the

²¹² Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalâni, *Fath al-Bâri*.

²¹³ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjâj, *Sahih Muslim*.

noblest in the sight of Allah with the most complete Ieman [faith] and noblest of characters. So if the practice of the women of the sahabah was to wear the complete veil then how can we deviate from their path?²¹⁴

Hadith # 2

«Muhammad ibn Maslamah narrated that he sent a marriage proposal to a woman and would try to see her secretly until one day, when the woman went to her garden, he was able to see her (while she was unaware of it).

He said: People said to me: You are a Companion of the Messenger of Allah and still you are doing this?

I told them that I heard from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): When a man intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her.» (Recorded by Ibn Mâjah; classed as sound by al-Albâni)

A similar hadith has also been reported in *Musnad Aḥmad*. Abu Ḥumayd reported that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«When one of you intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, as long as his looking at her is only for the purpose of the intention of marriage. This is even if she is unaware of it.» (Recorded by Aḥmad and authenticated by al-Albâni)²¹⁵

The phrase «There is no sin in looking at her» is a definitive proof that if a suitor looks at a woman for the purpose of marriage, then he is free from sin. This proves that anyone other than the man intending marriage is sinning when he looks at a non-maḥram woman.

²¹⁴ al-‘Uthaimin, *A Treatise on Hijab*.

²¹⁵ It has been mentioned in the book *Majma‘ az-Zawâ‘id* by al-Haythami that all the narrators of its chain are sound. Shaykh al-Albâni authenticated it in his *aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, no. 97, where he said, “Its chain of narration is authentic. Its narrators are all reliable according to the standard of Imam Muslim.”

Furthermore, Muhammad ibn Maslamah had to struggle hard to see her, which shows that women used to cover their faces. If that woman had not been covering her face when going out, then there would have been no need for him to look at her in secret.

Hadith # 3

«'Ā'ishah, the Mother of the Believers, narrated that on one occasion, a woman made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).

The Prophet (ﷺ) closed his hand, saying: I do not know whether this is a man's or a woman's hand.

She responded: It is a woman's hand.

He said: If you are a woman, you should make a difference to your nails, meaning (colour them) with henna.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood and graded as reliable by al-Albâni)

The fact that the woman gave the letter to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from behind the veil bears testimony to the fact that women used to go to the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ) and talk to him from behind a curtain.

Hadith # 4

«A woman should not look at or meet another woman and later describe her to her husband so that it was as if he was actually looking at her.» (Bukhari)

The phrase «...as if he was actually looking at her» is yet another proof that women used to wear niqab during the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Otherwise, if women were going out in front of non-maḥram men with faces uncovered, then men would not have any need for their wives to describe the beauty of other women to them, since they would have been able to see the faces of those women themselves.

Hadith # 5

«All of a woman is ‘awrah. When she leaves her home, Satan looks at her.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Ḥibbân and aṭ-Ṭabarâni)²¹⁶

Explaining the meaning of ‘awrah, al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan aṭ-Ṭabarsi comments:

‘Awrah refers to anything that can be easily harmed, for example, a bare or exposed place. Therefore, it becomes clear that the body of a woman is referred to as vulnerable because it is like a house that contains no walls, can easily be harmed, and must be covered with appropriate clothing.²¹⁷

Hadith # 6

«When you (women) have a slave who has enough money to make a contract of emancipation with you (in return for a payment), then you must now cover yourself in front of him.» (An acceptable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood; graded weak by al-Albâni)²¹⁸

²¹⁶ This narration is reliable in terms of its chain. Shaykh al-Albâni has classified it as sound. This hadith has also been recorded by Ibn Ḥibbân and aṭ-Ṭabarâni. In explaining this hadith, Shaykh Salih Al-Munajjid states that this hadith narrated by at-Tirmidhi has a sound chain and that there is a clear commandment in this hadith that a woman must cover everything, including her face, in front of unrelated men. See “Hijab in the Light of Qur’an and Sunnah,” accessed January 8, 2015, http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_701_750/hijab_in_the_light_of_the_qur’an.htm.

²¹⁷ aṭ-Ṭabarsi, *Majma‘ al-Bayân*.

²¹⁸ Imam Abu Dâwood has quoted this hadith in his *Sunan Abi Dâwood*, and he remained silent about it, which implies that this hadith is authentic. This is so because Imam Abu Dâwood clarified in his book *Risâlatuhu li Ahl al-Makkah* (Letters to the People of Makkah):

I have explained every hadith in my book that contains a severe weakness; these include hadiths that do not have an authentic chain of narration. The hadiths about which I did not mention anything (‘remained silent’) can be classed as authentic.

This informs us that a woman may leave her face uncovered in front of her slave. However, this permission is only as long as he is her slave. As soon as he gains his freedom, he becomes a non-maḥram, and she then has to wear the hijab in front of him.

Hadith # 7

«Mugheerah ibn Shu‘bah narrates: I came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and told him about a woman whom I was intending to marry.

The Prophet (ﷺ) told me: You should go and look at her first, for it is the best means of establishing love between the two of you.

Hence, I went to visit her when she was with her parents. While she was in her room, I told her parents of my intention to marry her and informed them about the Prophet’s saying (to me that I should look at her).

The girl’s parents did not seem at ease with this. The girl was standing behind the curtain, and she overheard my conversation with her parents. She said to me from behind the curtain: If Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) has ordered you to see me, then do so. If that is not the case, then I swear by Allah, do not do this to me.

Thus, that woman gave a high regard to the command of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ). I looked at her, and then I married her.» (Recorded by Ibn Mâjah and authenticated by al-Albâni)

Again, this hadith provides evidence that women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to cover their faces in front of unrelated men.

Hadith # 8

«Narrated by the Mother of the Believers, ‘Â’ishah: The riders used to pass us while we were with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in iḥrâm. When they got close to us, we would draw our outer cloak (jilbab)

from our heads over our faces. When they passed by, we would uncover our faces.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood; graded weak by al-Albâni)²¹⁹

In this hadith, ‘Â’ishah (ﷺ) is saying that she and other women accompanying the Prophet (ﷺ) to Hajj would cover their faces when the riders of the caravan got close to them. This hadith does not refer specifically to the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ); it is a general commandment.

Hadith # 9

Asmâ’ bint Abi Bakr (ﷺ) narrated, “In the state of ihrâm, we used to veil our faces from (non-maḥram) men, and we would also comb our hair.”²²⁰

Asmâ’ bint Abi Bakr was the sister of ‘Â’ishah (ﷺ) and was one of the female Companions, but she was not a wife of the Prophet (ﷺ). Asmâ’ mentioned that she and other female Companions used to veil their faces in front of non-maḥram men; this is a definitive proof that the commandment of covering the face was not just for the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) but for all Muslim women.

These hadiths also provide strong evidence that women should cover their faces in the state of ihrâm during Hajj whenever non-maḥram men are in close proximity.

Hadith # 10

«Narrated by Umm ‘Aṭiyah: We were ordered by Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) to bring out our menstruating women and those in seclusion

²¹⁹ In *Hijâb al-Mar’at al-Muslimah*, 58, Shaykh al-Albâni states that this is reliable due to corroborating evidence.

²²⁰ al-Ḥâkim an-Naysâboori, *al-Mustadrak*, 1:458. This narration is sound. In his book *Hijâb al-Mar’at al-Muslimah*, 50, Shaykh al-Albâni states that it is sound due to corroborating evidence.

(*dhawât al-khudoor*)²²¹ for the religious gatherings and invocations of Muslims on the two Eid festivals. These menstruating women were to keep away from their prayer mats.

A woman asked: O Allah’s Messenger! What about one who does not have a jilbab?

He said: Let her share the jilbab of her companion.» (Bukhari)

Shaykh Ibn al-‘Uthaymeen explains:

This hadeeth proves that the general norm amongst the women of the Sahaba [Companions] was that no woman would go out of her home without a cloak, fully concealed and if she did not possess a veil, then it was not possible for her to go out. It was for this reason that when Rasool Allah (peace be upon him) ordered them to go to the Place for Eid Salah, they mentioned this hindrance. As a result, Rasool Allah (peace be upon him) said that someone should lend her a veil, but did not say they could go out without it. If Rasool Allah (peace be upon him) did not allow women to go to a place like the Eid Salah, which has been ordered by Shari’ah for women and men alike, then how can people let women go out to market places and shopping centers where there is open intermingling of the sexes, without a veil.²²²

Hadith # 11

‘Â’ishah (رضي الله عنها) used to say:

May Allah have mercy on the first emigrant women. When Allah revealed:

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ... وَلَيَصْرَيْنَ إِحْشَامًا عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ...﴾ (سورة النور: ٣١)

²²¹ *khudoor* (sg. *khidr*): in general, the inner apartments of women; in particular, the curtains behind which a woman might retire so as to not be seen by non-mahram men.

²²² al-‘Uthaymeen, *A Treatise on Hijab*, 11.

﴿And tell the believing women to... wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests...﴾ (*Qur'an 24: 31*),

they tore off their aprons or waist sheets and used them as khimârs (head covers). (Bukhari)

Ibn Hajar states that the phrase "...used them as khimârs..." means that they "covered their faces."²²³

Position of the Prophet's Companions (ﷺ)

In the preceding section, we saw that the covering of the face was a normal practice during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). Before that, we gave the verdicts of various Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) in the commentary of the verses of Soorat al-Ahẓâb and Soorat an-Noor. Here, we will give the statements of a few more Companions in this regard.

Fâtîmah bint al-Mundhir (ﷺ)

It was narrated by Fâtîmah bint al-Mundhir, "We used to veil our faces when we were in iḥrâm in the company of Asmâ' bint Abi Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddeeq."²²⁴

'Â'ishah bint Abi Bakr (ﷺ)

Ibn 'Uyaynah narrated: Ismâ'eel ibn Khâlid said that his mother and his sister reported to him that the two of them went to 'Â'ishah (the Mother of the Believers) and asked her how a woman could cover her face (*tukhammiru wajhahâ*). 'Â'ishah took the lower portion of her khimâr and covered her face with it.²²⁵

²²³ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalâni, *Fath al-Bâri*, 490.

²²⁴ Mâlik ibn Anas, *Muwatta' Imâm Mâlik*.

²²⁵ Ibn 'Abdul-Barr, *al-Istadhkâr*, 48.

Umm Ismâ'eel ibn Abu Khâlid

We [women] used to visit 'Â'ishah [Mother of the Believers] on the 8th of Dhul-Ḥijjah. I told her: O Mother of the Believers, we have a woman here who refuses to cover her face in the state of ihrâm.

'Â'ishah took the lower portion of her khimâr from her chest and veiled her face with it.²²⁶

'Ubaydah Salmâni

'Ubaydah Salmâni is another well-known Companion of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Imam Muhammad ibn Seereen ('Ubaydah's student and a well-known scholar in his own right) states:

When I asked 'Ubaydah how the jilbab was to be worn, he demonstrated it to me by pulling a sheet of cloth over his head to cover his entire body, leaving the left eye uncovered. This was also the explanation of the word 'alay-hinna in this verse (33:59).²²⁷

Position of Islamic scholars regarding the niqab

The verdicts of foremost scholars in Islamic history, from all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, will be given below. In the Ḥanafi school of thought, Imams Ibn 'Âbideen ad-Dimashqi, Zayn ad-Deen ibn Najeem al-Ḥanafi and Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Ḥaşfaki are considered the top scholars. Here are their positions regarding the niqab:

²²⁶ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalâni, *at-Talkhees al-Ḥabeer*, 272.

²²⁷ at-Ṭabari, *Jâmi' al-Bayân*, 458.

Ismâ'eel ibn Katheer

Allah commanded that when the believing women come out of their homes for a necessity, they cover their faces from over their heads, with the jilbab, and expose one eye [only].²²⁸

Ibn 'Âbideen ad-Dimashqi

(d. 1252 AH/1836 CE)

Young women will be prohibited from uncovering their faces in front of unrelated men. It is not because the face is considered to be 'awrah, but out of fear of fitnah.²²⁹

Zayn ad-Deen ibn Najeem al-Ḥanafi

(d. 970 AH/1563 CE)

Our scholars have issued this ruling, that a young woman will be prohibited from uncovering her face in front of non-maḥram men in our time, due to the fear of fitnah.²³⁰

Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn

Muhammad al-Ḥaşfaki (d. 1677 CE)

Therefore, women will be prohibited from covering their faces in front of non-maḥram men for [fear of] fitnah.²³¹

'Abdur-Raḥmân ibn al-Jawzi

(d. 597 AH/1201 CE)

Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal clarified that *az-zeenah adh-dhâhirah* [the apparent adornment, as referred to in the Qur'anic verse 24: 31] refers to clothes [thiyâb], and a woman's whole body

²²⁸ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, 298.

²²⁹ Ibn 'Abdul-'Azeez and Ibn 'Âbideen, *Radd al-Muḥtâr*, 72.

²³⁰ al-Ḥanafi, *Baḥr ar-Râ'iq*, 284.

²³¹ al-Ḥaşfaki, *ad-Durr al-Muntaqâ*, 121.

as 'awrah; this includes even her nails. This tells us that it is not permissible to cast a glance at a non-maḥram woman without any lawful reason. If it is for some lawful reason, for instance, a marriage proposal or testimony in the court, then it is permissible to look only at a woman's face. However, in the absence of any valid reason, it is not permissible to glance at the face of a woman, and in this issue, the commandment is the same for the face, the two hands and the rest of the body.²³²

Taqi ad-Deen Aḥmad ibn Taymiyah (d. 728 AH/1328 CE)

In his commentary of verse 59 of Soorat al-Aḥzâb, Ibn Taymiyah clarifies:

Abu 'Ubaydah and others have pointed out that a woman should draw down [her jilbab] from above her head and should not expose any part of her body except her eye. The niqab is included in this category [of covering]. Women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to wear the niqab [in public, which we know] because it has been mentioned in a sound hadith that women should not wear niqab or gloves in the state of iḥrâm. Women were commanded to wear jilbab so that «they will be known and not abused». This pertains to covering the face. It is for this reason that the face and both hands are included in that type of zeenah [ornament] that the women are commanded to cover in front of non-maḥram men.²³³

Aḥmad ibn Muhammad Abul-Barakât ad-Dardeer (d. 1201 AH)

A woman's 'awrah in front of non-maḥram men is her whole body except her face and her two palms. These two areas are not her

²³² Ibn al-Jawzi, *Zâd al-Maseer*.

²³³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmoo' al-Fatâwâ*, 110-111.

‘awrah, but due to the fear of fitnah [temptation], it is obligatory [for her] to cover the face and the hands as well.²³⁴

Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abu Bakr al-Qurṭubi (d. 1273 CE)

Imam al-Qurṭubi, a famous commentator of the Qur’an and a Mâlîki scholar, has explained the following verse of Soorat al-Aḥzâb:

﴿... فَسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ۗ...﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٥٣)

﴿...ask them from behind a partition [hijab]...﴾ (*Qur’an* 33: 53)

He writes:

This verse provides evidence that Allah permitted [men] to ask for help or religious guidance from the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ), from behind a curtain [hijab]. This injunction encompasses all Muslim women because it is a principle of Islamic law that the whole body of a woman is ‘awrah, including even her body and her voice...²³⁵ Hence, it is not permissible to expose those parts unless there is a [genuine] need, such as giving evidence or in case there is a disease in any part of her body [which needs to be shown to a male physician].²³⁶

Imam al-Ghazâli and Ibn Ḥajar are considered amongst the greatest of scholars, not just in the Shâfi‘i *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), but among all the Muslims. ‘Abdul-Ḥameed ash-Sharwan is also a prominent Shâfi‘i scholar. Here are their verdicts on the niqab:

²³⁴ ad-Dardeer, *ash-Sharḥ aṣ-Ṣagheer*, 400-401.

²³⁵ It must be noted that there is a difference of opinion among the scholars over whether or not a woman’s face and hands (and her voice) are considered ‘awrah.

²³⁶ al-Qurṭubi, *al-Jâmi‘ li Aḥkâm al-Qur’ân*, 227.

Abu Ḥâmid al-Ghazâlî (d. 505 AH/1111 CE)

We do not say that a man's face is 'awrah [what needs to be covered] for a woman in the same way that the face of a woman is 'awrah for a man. Instead, it [the man's face] is like the face of a beardless boy for a [grown] man; in this case, looking is forbidden only if there is fear of sexual attraction [fitnah]. If there is no fitnah, then there is no prohibition. This is because men in every age [in Islamic history] go out with their faces uncovered, whereas women go out wearing the niqab. If men were similar to women in this case, then either men would have been commanded to wear the niqab or women would have been prohibited from going outside their homes.²³⁷

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalâni (d. 852 AH/1448 CE)

Another evidence that supports the permissibility of women looking at men is the fact that right from the first era of Islam, women were permitted to go out to the mosques, to marketplaces and for travel, [as long as they wore the] niqab on their faces, whereas men were never commanded to wear the niqab in order to prevent women from seeing them. Hence, it is a proof that the Islamic command is different for men and for women in this regard.²³⁸

Abu Ḥayyân al-Andalusi (d. 745 AH/1344 CE)

The great Spanish-Arab Islamic scholar Abu Ḥayyân commented on as-Suddi's explanation ("She should cover one of her eyes, her

²³⁷ al-Ghazâlî, *Iḥyâ 'Uloom ad-Deen*, 82.

²³⁸ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalâni, *Fath al-Bâri*, 337.

forehead, and the other [lower] portion of her face, except (for) one eye”) of the verse of Soorat al-Aḥzâb:

This is the custom of the women in the country of Andalus [the Islamic empire of Spain] today – nothing is visible from a woman’s body except for one eye.... The words ‘alay-hinna [over themselves] refer to their entire bodies, or it could just mean their faces, since in the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, the part of themselves that the women used to expose was the face.²³⁹

Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Juzay al-Kalbi al-Mâliki (d. 741 AH)

Arab women used to expose their faces like the slave women did. This invited men to look at them, so Allah commanded them to cast their jilbabs over themselves so that they might cover their faces with them.²⁴⁰

Qâḍi ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar al-Bayḍâwi (d. 685 AH/1286 CE)

To “let down over them a part of their outer garments” means that they should draw a part of their outer garment in front of their face and cover themselves.²⁴¹

Shaykh ‘Abdul-‘Azeez Ibn Bâz (d. 1999 CE)

We previously mentioned Allah’s statement: “And when you ask them (i.e. the Prophet’s wives) for something then ask them from behind a veil”, where He makes no exceptions (i.e. face or hands).

²³⁹ al-Andalusi, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥeet*, 250.

²⁴⁰ al-Mâliki, *at-Tas-heel li ‘Uloom at-Tanzeel*, 144.

²⁴¹ al-Bayḍâwi, *Tafseer al-Bayḍâwi*, 168.

This is a clear ayah, so it is obligatory to accept it and rely on it. The ruling found in this ayah applies generally to the Prophet's wives as well as all other believing women....

So fear Allah O Muslims! And take hold of the hands of your women and prevent them from doing what Allah has forbidden, such as unveiling, showing off their adornment, exposing their features, and imitating the enemies of Allah. And know that remaining silent with them (when your women commit these evil deeds) is the same as participating with them in their sin and in receiving Allah's anger and punishment.²⁴²

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Şâlih al-'Uthaymeen (d. 2001 CE)

Know, O Muslim, that a woman's wearing Hijab and veiling her face in the presence of non-maḥram males is obligatory. What directs us towards its obligation is the Book of your Lord, may He be Exalted, the Sunnah of your Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the correct (scholarly) opinions, and general analogy.²⁴³

Shaykh Nâşir ad-Deen al-Albâni (d. 1999 CE)

Even though Shaykh al-Albâni took the position that covering the face in front of non-maḥram men was recommended and not obligatory, he gave the following sincere advice as a true Islamic scholar:

Thus, we have clearly stated what is obligatory for women and what is highly recommended. For those who have grasped tightly what is obligatory, this will be sufficient for them and also better

²⁴² Bin Baaz et al., *Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling*, 20-21.

²⁴³ Bin Baaz et al., *Four Essays on the Obligation of Veiling*, 27-28.

for them. For those who have understood and implemented the better, this will be better. This [face-veil] is exactly the one which my own wife observes, and I hope that Allah may grant me the guidance regarding my daughters [to observe this face-veil] when they come of age.²⁴⁴

He also notes:

Whoever has covered both of these, the face and hands, this is what we regard as highly recommended, and this is what we invite all women to.²⁴⁵

Shaykh Şâlih al-Fawzân

A woman's whole body is 'awrah. The evidence comes from the narration of at-Tirmidhi which states that the whole [body] of the woman is 'awrah... This as well as other similar texts from the Qur'an and the Sunnah testify that the whole body of a woman is 'awrah in front of non-maḥram men.²⁴⁶

Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943 CE)

A famous Ḥanafī scholar and a prolific writer from the Indian subcontinent, Ashraf Ali Thanvi, explains:

It is not permissible for a young woman to expose her face in the presence of non-maḥram men, nor should she stand in a place from where she could be observed. We learn from this that the custom of exposing the bride's face in public, where all the men can observe her, is also not permissible. To do this is a major sin.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ al-Albâni, *Ḥijâb al-Mar'at al-Muslimah*, 7.

²⁴⁵ al-Albâni, *Ḥijâb al-Mar'at al-Muslimah*, 8.

²⁴⁶ al-Fawzân, *al-Mulakhaṣṣ al-Fiqhi*, 42-43.

²⁴⁷ Thanvi, *Bahishti Zaywar*.

Syed Abul-A'la Mawdoodi (d. 1979 CE)

A person who carefully considers the wordings of the Qur'anic verses, their well-known and generally accepted meaning, and the practice during the time of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) cannot dare deny the fact that the Islamic Sharia enjoins on the woman to hide her face from other people, and this has been the practice of the Muslim women ever since the time of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) himself.²⁴⁸

Muhammad al-Ameen ash-Shanqeeti (d. 1973 CE)

It is quite strange to find those who claim to have knowledge saying that there is nothing in the Qur'an and the Sunnah to indicate that a woman must veil her face in front of non-mahram men even though the female Companions practiced it, enacting Allah's Commandment in His Book and having faith in His Revelation. The fact of the matter is that this understanding is established in the sound [Hadith] collections.²⁴⁹

Obligatory conditions for an Islamic hijab

The Islamic rulings on hijab refer to the set of rules and regulations about attitudes, dress, manners and modes of conduct and behaviour of the sexes, including rules for women to properly cover their bodies when they go out. The Islamic concept of hijab is logical and, if practiced in its true sense, highly successful in closing the doors to a number of social evils.

²⁴⁸ Mawdoodi, *al-Hijab*.

²⁴⁹ ash-Shanqeeti, *Tafseer Aḍwâ' al-Bayân*, 595.

Islam commands that a woman's body should be covered by loose-fitting, opaque clothing so that the shape of her body remains concealed. The hijab hides the beauty of the woman's form. According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the following are the obligatory criteria for a woman's hijab:

The hijab must cover the entire body

The hijab should cover the whole body of the woman. When women go out or are in front of non-mahram men, this includes the face, as discussed earlier.

The hijab must not be transparent

The purpose of wearing the hijab must be achieved. In order for the hijab to be a cover, it must not be made of transparent material, which only ensures that the woman is covered in name; in reality she is naked. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«In the later part of my Ummah (nation), there will be women who are naked in spite of being dressed, and they have their hair high like the humps of the *bukht* camel (hybrid camels with large humps). Curse them, for they are cursed. They will not enter paradise and will not even perceive its scent, although its fragrance can be perceived from a distance of 500 years travelling by camel.» (Muslim and Aḥmad)

This indicates that a woman would fall into a grave and destructive sin if she wore a garment that was thin and transparent and clearly revealed her physical features. Women must not wear clothes that are tight-fitting, which would reveal the shapeliness of their bodies.

The hijab must be loose, not tight

The hijab is a safeguard against temptation. If it is tight, it will reveal the woman's body. This violates and defeats the whole purpose of the hijab. A tight-fitting garment outlines the body and reveals it in

front of non-mahram males. Thus, wearing tight jeans is forbidden for Muslim women.

There is one misconception among some modernist Muslims regarding Shaykh al-Albâni's position regarding the wearing of pants by women. These modernists claim that it is okay to wear tight pants as long as their hair is covered with a scarf because al-Albâni said so. The truth is that Shaykh al-Albâni said something different:

These pants that women wear, particularly nowadays, outline the shape of the thighs and the buttocks, and sometimes even more than that! Who states that it is permissible to wear this? No Muslim would say this at all. When a woman appears in these tight clothes, they outline her 'awrah. Even if we go by its [famous] definition that contradicts the Qur'an and the Sunnah, which is that the awrah is between the navel and the knees, it still exposes it. The thighs are 'awrah. Thus, if they are outlined by these tightly-shaped pants, this may cause more temptation than the temptation caused by a woman's natural body appearance. For example, a woman may have a skin colour that is not so enticing, but yet the colour of her [tight] clothes may be enticing. This only increases temptation upon temptation.²⁵⁰

The hijab should not resemble the clothing of a man

Islam respects gender differences among men and women, so it is disliked for men and women to wear clothes that blur these differences. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Allah curses those men who imitate women, and He curses those women who imitate men.» (Bukhari)

²⁵⁰ Transcribed and translated into English from the audio tape “‘Awrat al-Mar’at lil-Muslimah” by Shaykh Nâsir ad-Deen al-Albâni.

The hijab must not resemble the garments of non-Muslim nations

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) warned us against the imitation of non-Muslims in terms of dress as well as of manners:

«Whoever imitates a people (nation) is one of them.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood and authenticated by al-Albâni)²⁵¹

It must be noted here that Muslim men should also dress modestly; therefore, some of the principles discussed above apply to men's dress as well.

Conclusion: hijab with niqab or without niqab?

We have looked at the evidence from the Qur'an proving that for women, the hijab is obligatory with the niqab. Then we presented authentic hadiths that explained these Qur'anic injunctions about the hijab and also shed light on the practice of female Companions at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), and how they used to veil their faces when they left their homes or encountered non-mahram men. This indicates that wearing the face-veil was a common practice during the time of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and not – as some people claim – a cultural practice that appeared years later.

We have also looked at the position taken by the Companions as well as our great imams and other Islamic scholars regarding the issue of the niqab. From these, it can be concluded that many respected scholars agree that the face and hands of the woman must be covered because they consider the face a part of the woman's 'awrah; some other scholars consider it obligatory because of the principle of closing

²⁵¹ This hadith has been graded as sound by Shaykh al-Albâni in his *Ṣaḥeḥ al-Jâmi'*, 2:1058.

the doors to likely temptation. For instance, if the woman is young and beautiful, or the society around her is a corrupt one in which men do not lower their gaze, then it is prohibited for her to uncover her face and her hands. Even the small minority of Islamic scholars who consider the face-veil only recommended, rather than obligatory, hold the opinion that because modern times are particularly full of mischief, women should go as far as to cover their faces because even the face may attract indecent glances from men.

The purpose of the niqab is to consummate perfection for a woman. It is more virtuous for her and is also closer to the aims of the Sharia in preventing temptation. The niqab severs the path of those who follow their lusts. To sum up, based on Islamic teachings, covering the face with a niqab is a general rule for women when they encounter non-maḥram men or when they go out in public, while uncovering the face is the exception.



CHAPTER 9

Niqab in the Light of Modern Scientific Research

The human face is a fascinating system that consists of 44 separate muscles. Out of those 44 muscles, only four are devoted to chewing, while 40 are used for facial expressions. One group of muscles becomes active in response to positive feelings, while another group of muscles is influenced by negative feelings. Our facial muscles respond naturally, without our conscious choice.²⁵² The human face is amazing – a fact that has been noted in the Qur'an, strengthening our faith and inspiring us to be grateful to Allah (ﷻ):

﴿الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ﴿٨﴾ وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ ﴿٩﴾﴾ (سورة البلد: ٨-٩)

«Have We not made for him two eyes? And a tongue and two lips?»
(Qur'an 90: 8-9)

The face is the most honoured part of the human body. It is for this reason that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) forbade striking or slapping the face of any human being:

«When one of you fights with his brother, he should avoid striking the face.» (Muslim)

Imam an-Nawawi explains this hadith as follows:

²⁵² HeartMath, *The Inside Story*.

The scholars have said that this is an indication and directive to avoid hitting the face because the face holds and displays the beauty and its parts are precious.²⁵³

There is no doubt that the beauty of human beings lies in their faces. It is the embodiment of a person's beauty. The face is the most stable indicator of beauty. From the legend of Cleopatra's beauty to the supermodels in today's advertisement industry, the face has always been seen as a source of sexual attraction and an icon of fame. In a world of six billion faces, each of our faces is unique.

The face is perhaps the busiest part of the body, used extensively in communication. The face of a person plays an important role in his or her interaction with other members of society. Research has shown that a person's face is a key determinant of the impressions formed by other people.²⁵⁴ This means that the impressions formed when a person meets other members of society are heavily influenced by that person's facial features. People judge others based on their facial expressions. The face reveals our feelings and what is really going on deep down inside of us.

It is also well known that women throughout the world spend millions of dollars on their facial beauty. Companies manufacturing 'beauty' products earn immense profits from their sale. In fact, the products used to beautify the face far exceed products for beautification of the rest of the body. This in itself proves that human beings are always concerned about their looks. Some women take great pride in spending a lot of time applying make-up and in spending large amounts of money on cosmetic products.

Because the face carries so much importance in defining human attraction – especially the beauty of women – Muslim women are required to hide their beauty. The veil is a part of this concealment. In

²⁵³ an-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim with Sharh Imam Nawawi*.

²⁵⁴ Berry and McArthur, "Perceiving Character in Faces," 3-18.

this chapter, the importance of the Islamic commandment of wearing the niqab will be discussed in the light of scientific research.

Modesty and the psychology of women

Regardless of the extent of social engineering recommended by feminists and others, it is not easy to change the nature of the two genders. U.S. psychologist Havelock Ellis explains the sense of modesty:

Modesty, which may be provisionally defined as an almost instinctive fear promoting to concealment and usually centering around the sexual processes, while common to both sexes is more peculiarly feminine, so that it may almost be regarded as the chief secondary sexual character of women on the psychical side.²⁵⁵

By nature, women tend to have a far stronger sense of modesty than men, and this manifests itself in every aspect of life, including sports. As a matter of fact, feminist writer Iris Young suggested in her essay “Throwing Like a Girl” that men’s superior “sporting efforts more often display bravado than genuine skill and co-ordination.” On the contrary, she noted that “women often approach a physical engagement with timidity, uncertainty and hesitancy.”²⁵⁶ She further argued that girls’ apparent lack of competence in activities such as throwing and hitting in games was due to the fact that girls tend not to extend their bodies fully when participating in physical activities. She clearly states:

A space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Ellis, “The Evolution of Modesty.”

²⁵⁶ Young, *Throwing Like a Girl*.

²⁵⁷ Young, *Throwing Like a Girl*.

What Young is referring to here is the inherent sense of shame and modesty in females that does not allow them “to extend their bodies fully when participating in physical activities” and which women feel they are “not free to move beyond.” For feminists, such a sense of modesty may be a hindrance and a deficiency among women, and they are fighting tooth-and-nail to eliminate it from the minds of women.

Islam, however, does not see such a sense of modesty as a deficiency. Islam considers modesty to be a woman’s most valuable asset. In fact, Islam recognizes that there is a “space which surrounds women in their imagination.” It protects it and makes it noble by commanding the Muslim women to wear a veil and loose-fitting clothing in public spaces. Islam praises this feminine sense of modesty. Modesty is so important that in one hadith, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) described ‘modesty and inhibition’ as the salient feature of the Islamic culture: «Every religion has a characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty and inhibition (ḥayâ’).» (A reliable hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi and Mâlik)

Purpose of the face-veil: an anthropological perspective

In discussing the objective behind the face-veil, Columbia University anthropologist Robert F. Murphy notes that when people in a society – of either sex – cover their faces “so completely that only areas around the eyes and nose may be seen,” then in doing so “they are symbolically introducing a form of distance between their selves and their social others.”²⁵⁸ Murphy also states:

The veil, though providing neither isolation nor anonymity, bestows facelessness and the idiom of privacy upon its wearer

²⁵⁸ Murphy, “Social Distance and the Veil.”

and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction while remaining a part of it.²⁵⁹

Likewise, the social benefits of the face-veil have not escaped the notice of Muslim social scientists. Mawdoodi notes the significance of the niqab from an anthropological perspective:

The face is the most impressive thing in the human body. It is the index of the natural human charm, the most attractive part of the body, and the possessor of great sexual appeal for others. In order to appreciate this, one does not require any extensive knowledge of psychology. If one searches one's own heart, asks for the verdict of one's own eyes, and analyzes one's own inner experiences, one will have to admit [as long as one is not hypocritical] that of all the adornments of the body, the natural charm placed by the Creator in the structure of the face has the greatest sexual appeal. That is the reason why if one has to marry a girl, one desires to see her face, if nothing else. If one is shown the whole figure of a girl but not her face, one is not satisfied. This proves that the beauty of the face is by far the most important point in the human body. Now that this fact has been confirmed, let us proceed further. If it is not intended to prevent sexual anarchy and emotional dispersion in the society, then the female should have the freedom to expose the breasts, the arms, the shins and the thighs, besides the face, as in the modern Western civilization. In this case, all those restrictions and limits which have been imposed by the Islamic law of hijab will be out of the question. But if, on the other hand, the object is to curb indecency and obscenity in the society, then nothing can be more unreasonable than to close all the minor ways to indecency but to fling the main gate wide open.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Murphy, "Social Distance and the Veil."

²⁶⁰ Mawdoodi, *al-Hijab*.

The human face: the most important determinant of physical attractiveness

The physical attractiveness of a human being is composed of various components such as the face, shape of the body, clothes, hairstyle and colour. Social scientists have studied the determinants of physical attractiveness. One study, reported in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, assessed whether facial or bodily attractiveness contributed more to the overall attractiveness of an individual. University of Illinois (Chicago) psychologist Kim T. Mueser and other participating scientists used 21 male subjects from the university to evaluate pictures of 15 fair-skinned female students. The male judges were divided randomly into three groups of seven each. They were asked to rate the physical attractiveness of the women based on photos of the face only, the body only, or the whole person (depending on which of the three groups they were in). Slides of the female subjects were projected one at a time, for 15 seconds each, onto a screen in the front of the room. The ratings of physical attractiveness were made according to a 10-point Likert scale.²⁶¹

The results of Mueser's study revealed that the face was more important than the body in predicting overall attractiveness.²⁶² Hence, it is the human face that plays the most important role in interpersonal attraction and interaction in society. If the female face is veiled from the visual access of men, then this will create a social distance between men and women in society, and it will be harder for men to exploit women, both physically as well as visually. Based on this research, the wisdom of the Islamic commandment of face-veiling for women in front of non-mahram men can easily be understood.

The relationship of the human face to physical attractiveness (especially in the case of females) can also be understood from the

²⁶¹ Mueser et al., "You're Only as Pretty as You Feel."

²⁶² Mueser et al., "You're Only as Pretty as You Feel."

research cited by Monahan in her book *Women in Crime*, which showed that when women were accused of crimes, beautiful women were less likely to be convicted than were women with average-looking faces.²⁶³

The human face is also the most important determinant of perceived age and perceived physical attractiveness. An important study in this context, published in *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, was conducted by psychologists Kathleen M. Korthase and Irene Trenholme of Elmhurst College of Illinois. The main purpose of this study was to determine if there is an inverse relationship between perceived age and physical attractiveness. In other words, do people perceive older faces as less attractive?²⁶⁴

In this study, four groups of 15 subjects were studied: adult males and females aged 31-38 and adolescent males and females aged 14-16. When they were asked to rank two sets of photographs, of male and female faces, according to physical attractiveness, it was found that as the perceived age of the male or female in the photograph increased, their perceived physical attractiveness decreased. This observation was based purely on the attribution of beauty to a facial stimulus, which shows the importance of the human face in the determination of physical beauty. Hence, it is easy to understand why Islam has permitted elderly women to uncover their faces in front of non-mahram men. After all, as the person becomes older, their facial attractiveness diminishes.

Another important finding in this study was that all the subjects of the study (which included males) “showed greater agreement for what constitutes females’ physical attractiveness than for what constitutes males’ physical attractiveness.”²⁶⁵ This study by

²⁶³ Monahan, *Women in Crime*.

²⁶⁴ Korthase and Trenholme, “Perceived Age and Perceived Physical Attractiveness.”

²⁶⁵ Korthase and Trenholme, “Perceived Age and Perceived Physical Attractiveness.”

psychologists Korthase and Trenholme again supports our contention that in a society, the contribution of facial beauty towards physical attractiveness is greater in the case of women as compared to men. Hence, the Islamic commandment for women (and not men) to cover their faces when they go out in the society can easily be understood.

What women want; what men want

What is the criterion used by men and by women when selecting their potential mates? Several scientific research studies have shown that the criterion of mate preference used by men is very different than that used by women. In a study published in *Evolution & Human Behavior*, Robert Montgomerie and Deborah Hume from Queen's University in Ontario asked hundreds of volunteers to rate how attractive they found different faces of the opposite sex, all shown without jewellery or make-up and with the hair combed back. Men rated healthy and good-looking women most highly. However, for women, the most important factor in attractiveness was the perceived socio-economic status of men.²⁶⁶ Nancy Etoff, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, puts it more clearly, saying, "Men are evaluated by their income and professional status as harshly as women are evaluated by their looks."²⁶⁷

In 1989, psychologist David M. Buss of the University of Michigan, who authored *The Evolution of Desire*, conducted a comprehensive study in this regard. He analyzed the gender differences in mate preferences in 37 different cultures of the world, from 33 countries located on six continents and five islands. The countries in the study ranged from New Zealand to Germany, from Iran to Brazil, from China and India, from Japan to Nigeria, and from the U.S. to Canada. Involving more than 10,000 people, this

²⁶⁶ Hume and Montgomerie, "Facial Attractiveness."

²⁶⁷ Etoff, *Survival of the Prettiest*.

was the first study of its kind to examine human mate preferences across cultures on a broad scale.

The results of this comprehensive study revealed that men valued characteristics signalling reproductive capacity in their potential mates, whereas women gave more importance to resource acquisition in their potential mates. In other words, of all the listed characteristics, men appeared to give more value to the relative youth and physical attractiveness in women because of their links with fertility and reproductive value. Conversely, of all the characteristics listed in three different sections of this study (such as good looks, dependable character, sociability, chastity and intelligence), women gave more value to characteristics such as good earning capacity and financial prospects in their potential mates. This difference in mate selection criteria among men and women appears to be universal. In discussing the findings of this study, psychologist Buss notes:

Males value physical attractiveness and relative youth in potential mates more than do females – sex differences that show remarkable generality across cultures... Although cultural variations exist with respect to standards of beauty, these variations apparently do not override sex differences in the importance attached to physical attractiveness.²⁶⁸

Features of female physical appearance associated with youth include smooth facial skin, good muscle tone, lustrous hair, bright eyes, and full lips. These have been shown to be perceived as the strongest cues to female reproductive capacity, as was pointed out by anthropologist Donald Symons.²⁶⁹

In the same vein, John Marshall Townsend, Ph.D. and professor of anthropology at Syracuse University in New York, conducted an experiment where he staged photos of men dressed up in two

²⁶⁸ Buss, “Sex Differences in Human Mate Preferences.”

²⁶⁹ Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*.

costumes: 1) clothes indicating a high status, such as a white dress shirt, tie and blazer; or 2) the uniform of a fast-food chain employee. Then he showed these photos to young women and asked them whom they would rather meet for coffee.

In this experiment, women chose the ugly or average-face man in high-status dress over a very handsome man in the hamburger-chain uniform. On the other hand, in a similar experiment with women in uniform, men always chose the prettier girl and ignored the status signals. Clothes did not affect the ratings of men, who concentrated more on the woman's looks.²⁷⁰

Dr. Townsend's group also surveyed 160 law students using the costume experiment, but this time they added a written description. Again, as expected, the results showed that men were "more willing to have coffee and conversation with the prettiest model than with the less attractive model – whether in the high-status or low-status costume." Not a lot has changed since the days of Cinderella. Even though, in this study, the beauty of the models was based on their body along with their face and hair, we have already shown in the previous section that the human face is the most important determinant of physical attractiveness. Even if there was a contribution of body and hair in terms of attractiveness, the human face is still the most important determinant of prettiness. Furthermore, in this study, the researchers tried to control variables such as the body of men or women in the photographs; none of the men or women was very fat or very thin.

The above-mentioned research, as well as other research on the various cultures of the world, clearly shows that men in all cultures care more about the physical appearance of women. Here again, the wisdom of the Islamic commandment of the niqab can be understood, for Allah has mentioned to women:

²⁷⁰ Townsend, *What Women Want – What Men Want*.

﴿يَأْتِيهَا النَّيُّ قُلْ لَّا رَوْحِكَ وَبَنَانِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِيكَ عَلَيْنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ
ذَلِكَ أَذَىٌّ أَن يَعْرَفَنَ فَلَا يُوذِينَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٥٩﴾﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٥٩)

﴿O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.﴾ (Qur'an 33: 59)

Dr. Townsend conducted in-depth interviews with 50 medical students, both male and female. In those interviews:

Eighty-five percent of the men mentioned physical attractiveness as the trait most important to them in choosing a partner for serious relationships. Only 10 percent of the women gave this response.²⁷¹

Not a single woman expressed her eagerness to marry a man who made less money than she did. This is exactly what the Qur'an mentions when it talks about the two genders, keeping in mind the nature of women:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا
مِنَ أَمْوَالِهِمْ... ﴿٣٤﴾﴾ (سورة النساء: ٣٤)

﴿Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth...﴾ (Qur'an 4: 34)

“You can feel them looking at you.”

**Women, by their nature,
do not like men staring at them**

Modesty is ingrained in the very nature of women, to the extent that they do not like men to stare at them. Research has shown that many

²⁷¹ Townsend, *What Women Want – What Men Want*.

women say they feel “objectified” by the male gaze. Social scientist Kandy James of Edith Cowan University (Australia) attempted to measure girls’ attitudes to different public and private community recreation sites. Her study surveyed 276 15-year-old girls from ten socio-economically diverse Western Australian high schools over how they felt about 20 listed recreational spaces. The study found that the spaces where girls felt most self-conscious were, in rank order: school basketball courts, public swimming pools, health clubs, and beaches. One very interesting finding from the study was the girls’ ranking of recreational places that they would use more if boys were not around. Based on James’ investigation, the top four places listed by the girls were school basketball courts, public swimming pools, amusement halls, and school gyms.²⁷²

Another study, conducted by the Girls in Space Consortia, investigated young women’s relationships to public space in Brisbane (Australia) and found that girls in public places experienced fear and risk of victimization and that these feelings restricted their recreational activities in those spaces.²⁷³

In a follow-up study published in the *Journal of Leisure Research*, Dr. James investigated the feelings of girls at public swimming pools to see why they felt so uncomfortable and how they overcame their embarrassment. For many girls, a feeling of being watched by boys contributed to their discomfort. Krysta admitted that she felt strange at school swimming lessons:

²⁷² James, *Ownership of Space*; James, “Deterrents to Active Recreation Participation.”

²⁷³ Girls in Space Consortia, “A Project Investigating Young Women’s Relationships to Public Space in Brisbane.”

I felt like people are staring at me. I hate my bathers for a start. It feels like I'm naked when I'm in my bathers. I hate the fact that you have legs showing and arms showing and your body.²⁷⁴

Vanessa also found mixed-gender swimming classes at school very embarrassing. She admitted, "I hated going to the pool ... I felt really weird around [boys]." Another girl, Val, showed a concern for other girls about being watched by people that they did not know. She stated:

If you are down [at the pool] and you see a total stranger, then they just gawk at you and stare at you and you feel really weird.²⁷⁵

Although there were some girls, categorized as "achievers," who regarded themselves as "tomboys" and did not feel any embarrassment in the presence of boys at swimming pools, the majority of the girls were either "compromisers" (girls who tried to cover up their bodies in the presence of boys) or "avoiders" (girls who avoided the use of mixed-gender swimming pools altogether). The largest group (the compromisers) consisted of girls who felt embarrassed in the presence of boys; they developed "a strategy of covering themselves up until the last possible moment." What most of the girls did was to:

...wrap their towels around them and when they are about to jump in the pool they rip the towels off pretty quick[ly] and then jump in before anyone can have a chance to look at their body.²⁷⁶

The embarrassment that these girls felt in the presence of boys was so much that some of the girls were less concerned about drowning than about being watched by boys. Dr. Kandy mentions:

For most of the interviewees, it was actually seen as less threatening to be in water than to be exposed on the periphery.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ James, "You Can Feel Them Looking at You."

²⁷⁵ James, "You Can Feel Them Looking at You."

²⁷⁶ James, "You Can Feel Them Looking at You."

²⁷⁷ James, "You Can Feel Them Looking at You."

Another study conducted by Dr. James was published in *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal* under the title “I Feel Really Embarrassed in Front of the Guys! Adolescent Girls and Informal School Basketball” Its purpose was to determine why girls did not want to play basketball in the presence of boys. Nearly half of the girls in the original survey thought it would be a good idea for schools to have separate-sex areas for girls’ sports. Beth, one of the participants in the study, emphasized that she was in favour of the separation of boys and girls because she knows of girls:

...who really like basketball but... they don’t want to go and play with the guys... it would probably be good for them or even [for me] if I wanted to try it, to have just time on our own... maybe they [wouldn’t] feel as threatened.²⁷⁸

Kaye said she thought that separation of boys and girls would be good “if you wanted to seriously exercise... and get fit... and you don’t really want them all staring at you...”²⁷⁹

A study in the *Journal of Leisure Research*, about American adolescent girls’ attitudes towards outdoor recreation programmes, found an agreement among the participants that a single-sex programme would increase participation among girls:

If it was all girls and I saw some of them do it, I’d feel confident because they’re girls and I’m a girl and I’d be like, “I can do that,” versus if I saw boys do it, I wouldn’t feel confident that I could do it.²⁸⁰

It is true that the participants in the swimming pool study were wearing swimming suits when they did not like the males staring at them, but we also have to understand that this research was conducted in a Western secular country in which girls are classically conditioned

²⁷⁸ James, “I Feel Really Embarrassed in Front of the Guys!”

²⁷⁹ James, “I Feel Really Embarrassed in Front of the Guys!”

²⁸⁰ Culp, “Adolescent Girls and Outdoor Recreation.”

right from their childhood to lose any sense of modesty. Those girls are exposed to a sexually open atmosphere right from their early years. Still, we can see that the majority of the girls in these research studies did not like the mixed-gender environment. They did not like boys staring at their bodies. “You can feel them looking at you,” said one girl.²⁸¹ They preferred and even attempted to cover their bodies in front of boys. Hence, those girls tried to make themselves less visible to the audience by covering their bodies. That is the whole idea behind women covering their bodies with hijab in public places and when unrelated men are around.

Escape from the male gaze saves girls from inferiority complexes: social scientific evidence

Scientific research by social psychologists suggests that when women are in mixed-gender environments where they are not safe from the male gaze, they base their self-worth on how pretty they are. A good experimental model for a mixed-gender versus a single-sex environment is to look at co-ed versus single-sex schools.

Indeed, this is what researchers did in Northern Ireland. Two psychologists, Granleese and Stephen, conducted their study in some neighbourhoods in Belfast. They studied the self-esteem of girls at co-educational schools as well as in single-sex schools. There were no educational or socioeconomic differences between the two groups that were studied. They asked the girls at both types of schools various questions like: Are you a good student? Do you have a lot of friends? Are you good at sports? Do you think you are pretty? Do your parents have good jobs? Then each girl’s answers were correlated with that girl’s self-esteem, as measured by a separate inventory.

²⁸¹ James, “You Can Feel Them Looking at You,” 262-280.

The results of the study showed that girls in co-ed schools base their self-esteem primarily on how they look – are they pretty or not? It does not matter if they are getting straight A's in their classes or are failing, or whether or not they have lots of friends. For girls attending co-ed schools, the most important issue is how you look, not your conduct or behaviour or who you are. On the other hand, girls at single-sex schools do not base their self-esteem solely on whether or not they are pretty; rather, it is based on their conduct and behaviour, academic performance, family income, and other factors.²⁸² Hence, girls in mixed-gender environments become more conscious of their physical appearance and beauty; they are more likely to suffer from inferiority complexes about their personality because they base their self-esteem primarily on the way they look. Conversely, girls in separate-sex gatherings base their self-esteem on other, deeper aspects of their personality, such as behaviour and intelligence.

The study mentioned above is not the only evidence that a mixed-gender environment creates inferiority complexes and heightened awareness of appearance among girls; Johns Hopkins sociologist James Coleman made the same discovery in the 1960s. Interviewing students at many single-sex and co-ed high schools in the U.S., Coleman found that at co-ed schools, the biggest concern for students, especially the girls, was who was the best-looking and who was the most popular. When girls at co-ed schools were asked about their career aspirations, they mentioned becoming fashion models or actresses. On the other hand, girls at single-sex schools aspired to careers in business or the sciences.²⁸³

According to Coleman's research, in the free-mixing environment of co-ed schools, girls become self-conscious about their physical beauty – to the extent that they see it as the only basis on which

²⁸² Granleese and Stephen, "Self-perception Profile of Adolescent Girls."

²⁸³ Coleman, *The Adolescent Society*.

to excel. Such feelings among girls have profound effects on their psychology when they are the subject of the male gaze. They become less content with themselves and suffer from inferiority complexes, especially if they think that they are not as physically attractive as the other girls. Coleman notes:

The emphasis on popularity with the opposite sex has other effects on the girls, of which we have only the barest knowledge. One of the effects is on her feelings about herself. We may suppose that if a girl found herself in a situation where she was not successful in 'the things that count' [such as her physical appearance], she would be less happy with herself, and would want to change, to be someone different.²⁸⁴

Commenting on the results of his research, Coleman writes:

It is commonly assumed that it is 'better' for boys and girls to be in school together, if not better for their academic performance, then at least better for their social development and adjustment. But this may not be so. Coeducation may be inimical [harmful] to both academic achievement and social development... Just putting boys and girls together in the same school is not necessarily the 'normal, healthy' thing to do.²⁸⁵

Similarly, studies on school-age children have demonstrated that for girls, the criterion of success is to attain social success rather than achieve the best grades. Girls are frequently more concerned about what others think of them rather than their grades.²⁸⁶

This research not only proves the superiority of separate-sex education but also provides evidence that the Islamic commandment of the niqab in front of non-maḥram men boosts self-confidence

²⁸⁴ Coleman, *The Adolescent Society*.

²⁸⁵ Coleman, *The Adolescent Society*.

²⁸⁶ Hoyenga and Hoyenga, *Sex Differences*.

among girls. By hiding their beauty and charms through the niqab, Muslim women do not feel “objectified” by the male gaze. Hence, the hijab saves women from developing an inferiority complex. With the niqab on, Muslim women do not have to worry about what other people think of their looks.

Courtship, dating and ‘testing the waters’ before marriage

In Islamic teachings, all forms of premarital intimacy, including having a boyfriend or girlfriend, are prohibited (See Soorat an-Nisâ’, 4: 25). In Islam, there is no room for courtship and dating. A Muslim woman is commanded to cover her face in front of non-maḥram men. Only under certain exceptions (such as a marriage proposal or for medical treatment) are women allowed to display their faces in front of men. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«When one of you intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, as long as his looking at her is only for the purpose of the intention of marriage. This is even if she is unaware of it.» (Recorded by Aḥmad and authenticated by al-Albâni)²⁸⁷

According to Islamic law, a man and a woman are not maḥrams for each other until their marriage contract is signed. After that, the bride may leave her parents’ home for the home of her husband, but a mere betrothal ceremony cannot make the man and the woman maḥrams.

It has clearly been stated by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) regarding unrelated men and women:

²⁸⁷ It is mentioned in the book *Majma’ az-Zawâ’id* by al-Haythami that all the narrators of its chain are sound. Shaykh al-Albâni authenticated it in his *aṣ-Ṣaḥeeḥah*, no. 97, where he said, “Its chain of narration is authentic. Its narrators are all reliable according to the standard of Imam Muslim.”

«Whenever a man is alone with a woman, the devil makes a third.»
(Recorded by at-Tirmidhi and authenticated by al-Albâni)²⁸⁸

This means that an unrelated man and woman being alone together is a guaranteed invitation to the devil. It is well known that proximity is the most important predictor of love. When unrelated men and women are together in seclusion, temptations are greater and, consequently, human basic instincts and desires can be kindled and regrettable things can happen. Therefore, we must never be alone with a woman who is not mahram to us (even if she is our future wife).

In TV dramas and movies in Muslim countries, it is common to see that after a betrothal ceremony, but before their marriage, a man and a woman contact each other over the phone, meet in private, engage in romantic conversations, go on picnics in parks or along the river, travel without their guardians, and exchange romantic cards and chocolates on Valentine's Day. All these actions are completely forbidden for couples who are not yet married.²⁸⁹ Not only that, but celebrating innovated holidays like Valentine's Day falls under the category of prohibited imitation of non-Muslim customs. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«Whosoever imitates a people is one of them.» (Reported by Abu Dâwood and authenticated by al-Albâni)²⁹⁰

In another hadith, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) named modesty as the most important characteristic of Islamic culture:

²⁸⁸ Shaykh al-Albâni authenticated it in his *Ṣaḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmidhi*.

²⁸⁹ Different societies have different customs. In some communities, even after the marriage contract is signed, the husband and wife spend time getting to know one another before having a wedding party and moving in together; they are legally married during this time. (Editor)

²⁹⁰ This hadith has been graded as sound by Shaykh al-Albâni in his *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Jâmi'*, 2:1058.

«Every religion has a characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty and inhibition (ḥayâ’).» (A reliable hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi and Mâlik)

The word ḥayâ’ (modesty and inhibition) in the Arabic language shares the same root as ḥayât, which means ‘life’ or ‘existence’. This indicates a deep connection between the two words and means that the life of the Muslim nation lies in its modesty and inhibition. When shamelessness and immodesty prevail among the Muslims, it will result in the death of the Muslim nation. In another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) warned the believers:

«If you do not have modesty and shame (ḥayâ’), then do whatever you like.» (Bukhari)

Islam, as a religion, is in complete agreement with human nature. Islam does not permit men and women to have any relationship outside marriage. Part of the wisdom behind this commandment is the fact that during courtship or premarital love, the two only show the brighter aspects of their lives to each other. After marriage, neither of them can keep up with their artificial, romantic premarital roles, and the bitter realities of life start to appear.

In the modern culture of sexual revolution, it is believed that ‘testing the waters’ before marriage helps men and women in determining their compatibility. In *The Whole Woman*, Germaine Greer refutes this popular idea, stating, “Some of the briefest marriages are those that follow a long period of cohabitation.”²⁹¹ It is little wonder that the modern sexual revolution has brought with it rates of divorce that are unparalleled in human history.

There is enough scientific evidence by psychologists and sociologists to suggest that dating, courtship and premarital sex are detrimental to forming future, long-term marital relationships. Psychologists who study teenage dating tell us that during this

²⁹¹ Greer, *The Whole Woman*.

time period, romantic relationships form most often on the basis of rank order instead of personal characteristics. This means that when teenagers form romantic pairs, they do this less on the basis of personal qualities and more on the basis of how popular the teenager is in the teenagers' group. Hence, the most popular boy in the group 'goes out' with the most popular girl, the second-most popular boy goes out with the second-most popular girl, and so forth.²⁹²

Journalist Linda Perlstein spent a year living with middle school students in order to study the nature of romantic relationships among them. She observes that in schools, girls use the opinions of their peers, rather than their own judgement, in selecting guys for romantic relationships. She writes that girls would choose who they will "go out" with mostly:

...because the guy is someone her friends would approve of. It's mostly about the superficial stuff. He's got the right look, he's got the right clothes... The asking and dumping are done through intermediaries.²⁹³

In a study published in the *Journal of Biosocial Science*, researchers Neville Bruce and Katherine Sanders showed that the average high school romantic relationship lasts about eleven weeks.²⁹⁴ Such a romantic relationship may provide the worst preparation for a long-lasting, loving relationship and for a commitment of husband and wife to stay together throughout hard times during their marriage. Unfortunately, many parents believe that such romantic relationships in adolescence provide good practice for serious relationships in adult age. They think that practice makes perfect. Psychologists and sociologists who study romantic relationships in adolescents reach

²⁹² Brown, *The Development of Romantic Relationships*.

²⁹³ Perlstein, *Not Much Just Chillin'*.

²⁹⁴ Bruce and Sanders, "Incidence and Duration of Romantic Attraction in Students."

a different conclusion, though. Obviously, those adolescents are not practicing the right task.²⁹⁵

The research of psychologists Wyndol Furman and Elizabeth Wehner also supports this contention. They studied romantic relationships for years and found that for middle and high school students:

Adolescents are not very concerned with the fulfillment of attachment or care giving needs... Instead, their focus is on who they are, how attractive they are ... and *how it all looks to their peer group*.²⁹⁶

With the passage of time, Furman and Wehner clarify, “These individuals may become more skilful, but more skilful in developing the relationships they have come to expect.”

As a result of such romantic relationships, adolescents actually develop bad habits that may very well be carried through the rest of their marital lives. Explaining the findings by Furman and Wehner, Dr. Sax comments:

Adolescents often develop bad habits in their dating relationships. A boy may get in the habit of regarding his girlfriend as a source of sexual gratification without really connecting with her as a human being. A girl may get in the habit of seeing her romantic partner as a ‘trophy boyfriend’ without any idea of how to integrate him into her life.²⁹⁷

By the time those boys and girls enter into their practical adult life and it is time for a marriage that will hopefully last a lifetime, they have developed different types of bad habits that can potentially do great harm to marital relationships. It would have been much better if they had not gotten into those teenage relationships.

²⁹⁵ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

²⁹⁶ Furman and Wehner, “Adolescent Romantic Relationships.”

²⁹⁷ Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.

In most of the cultures around the world, there was a time in the past when boys and girls would not mingle until they were of a marriageable age. In many cultures today, there are still arranged marriages. As Joan Brumberg points out, in the U.S. before 1950, parents generally would not allow their children, especially their daughters, to have premarital sexual relations.²⁹⁸ However, with the onslaught of the media and the availability of contraceptives, the trend is changing, and the U.S. is taking the lead in terms of boys and girls having premarital relationships.

Men are visually aroused, but women are not

Women often complain that men see them as ‘objects.’ On the other hand, men complain that women are only interested in talking. Neither of them is wrong, because for men, sex is an action, whereas for women it has more to do with communication and intimacy. Moir alluded to this aspect of male psychology when she noted that the key perceptual sense in men is vision, which is why more men than women like making love with the lights on. Pornography, which is the photographic depiction of sex seen through the eye, is primarily a male industry. Moir observes:

Women rightly complain that men see them as sex objects... Preoccupied with shape and form from birth, it is in men’s nature that the beauty and shape of the opposite sex matters to them more than it does to women.²⁹⁹

In the same vein, American anthropologist Clellan Ford and psycho-biologist Frank Beach note the universality of human psychology across many cultures of the world:

²⁹⁸ Brumberg, *The Body Project*.

²⁹⁹ Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*.

In most societies the physical beauty of the female receives more explicit consideration than the handsomeness of the male. The attractiveness of the man usually depends predominantly upon his skills and prowess rather than upon his physical appearance.³⁰⁰

It also appears that men are much more promiscuous than women. Recently, a group of psychologists from all over the world published a survey of more than 16,000 people from 52 countries. When these psychologists looked at women and men across many cultures and continents, they found “universal” gender differences in their sexual interest and motivation. The researchers of this study concluded that, by their nature, men:

...desire larger number of sexual partners than women in every region of the world regardless of relationship status, sexual orientation, or whether the person is actively seeking [a partner].³⁰¹

Hence, there are psychological differences between males and females, and how men look at women is different from how women see men. This international research provides more proof of the importance of women covering their beauty in the presence of unrelated men.

Medical benefits of wearing the niqab

According to the Islamic scholar ‘Izz ad-Deen ibn ‘Abdus-Salâm, the purpose of every injunction of Islam is to remove harm and to benefit humanity. He writes:

Islamic law aims to serve the interests of people and prevent everything that adversely affects them. The achievement of what

³⁰⁰ Ford and Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behaviour*.

³⁰¹ Schmitt, “Universal Sex Differences in the Desire for Sexual Variety,” 85-104.

is beneficial is the pivot around which Islamic law turns; it either prevents what is harmful or enhances what is good.³⁰²

One of the commandments of Islam is for women to cover their faces when they go out in public places or otherwise encounter non-mahram men. There are, in fact, a number of medical benefits that wearing the veil can provide to women.

Medical face-mask or ‘medical niqab’

It is a well-known practice to wear a face-mask in order to prevent respiratory infections; this is the main way of cleaning air before breathing it. In this respect, the Islamic face-covering is quite similar to the medical face-mask or, better yet, the ‘medical niqab’. Similar to the face-mask, the niqab cleans the air before one breathes it. In addition, the niqab provides protection from dust particles as well as from car exhausts on the roads. When we are sitting in traffic and a car in front of us gives off terrible exhaust, we instinctively shield our mouths and noses with our hands and wish that we had a cloth to wrap around our face. The niqab filters out the pollutants from the air that we breathe.

These days, we are told by medical authorities to wear a face-mask in the wake of various epidemics, such as the swine flu pandemic. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states:

Facemasks help stop droplets from being spread by the person wearing them. They also keep splashes or sprays from reaching the mouth and nose of the person wearing the facemask.³⁰³

Although there is a scarcity of studies on the efficacy of face-masks, a recent study from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), published in the CDC journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, shows

³⁰² Ibn ‘Abdus-Salâm, *Qawâ'id al-Ahkâm*.

³⁰³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Interim Recommendations for Facemask and Respirator Use.”

that wearing face-masks can cut the odds of respiratory infection by as much as 75%. Researchers at UNSW, Sydney's Westmead Hospital, Imperial College (London), and the National Centre for Immunization Research studied more than 280 adults in 143 families in Sydney during the winter seasons of 2006 and 2007. The adults were randomly allocated masks when exposed to a sick child in the household.³⁰⁴ The lead author of the paper, Raina MacIntyre, is a professor of Infectious Diseases Epidemiology and head of the UNSW's School of Public Health and Community Medicine. In a press release by UNSW, Professor MacIntyre says:

We now have provided that evidence. Masks play an important role in reducing transmission if they are worn properly... There is no effective treatment for the 90 or so common cold viruses that make families sick each winter, but masks could provide simple and effective protection.³⁰⁵

Wearing a face-mask is an easy way to boost protection from severe respiratory illnesses such as influenza and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). Health care professionals in hospitals wear them for precisely this reason. As awareness about SARS and swine flu increases among the general public, more and more people are opting to wear the face-mask in public during the cold seasons. During the height of the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong (in April and May of 2003), 76% of the population wore a face-mask.³⁰⁶

Covering the face when outside the home also has many beneficial effects for the facial skin of women. There are several key differences in the facial skin properties of men and women. Of course, not all of these differences are necessarily applicable to every individual, but in general, women's skin is a lot more sensitive than men's, and

³⁰⁴ MacIntyre, Cauchemez and Dwyer, "Face Mask Use."

³⁰⁵ Lo, Tsang and Leung, "Respiratory Infections during SARS Outbreak."

³⁰⁶ Lo, Tsang and Leung, "Respiratory Infections during SARS Outbreak."

wearing a niqab protects the female face. Here are some of the main differences in the facial skin of men and women:

Skin thickness

Echo graphic studies have revealed that skin thickness is greater in men than in women. Ultrasound studies have also shown that between the ages of 5 and 90, the skin of males is thicker than that of females.³⁰⁷ The following table shows the skin thickness of foreheads, cheeks, and forearms, as measured in one study:³⁰⁸

Skin Thickness	Females	Males
Forehead	1.50 mm	1.85 mm
Cheek	1.45 mm	1.85 mm
Forearm	0.90 mm	1.15 mm

This data shows that the skin of the male forehead, cheek and forearm of males is significantly thicker than that of females. Consequently, women are more vulnerable to skin damage caused by the ultraviolet rays of the sun, and this is one of the main reasons why the female face suffers more from sun aging. Since a man's skin is of a harder texture, the UV rays and pollutants will not do half as much damage as they do to a woman. Thus, women's faces wrinkle faster and produce looser skin more quickly. Wearing a niqab protects women's smooth and gentle facial skin from the damaging effects of the sun and environmental pollutants.

³⁰⁷ Baran and Maibach, *Textbook of Cosmetic Dermatology*, 13.

³⁰⁸ Tsukahara et al., "Dermal Fluid Translocation," 590-596.

Skin aging

As skin ages, its properties change. A recent study has shown that women's skin actually starts to age faster than men's does. Using a new laser imaging technique, researchers looked at the deeper layers of the skin and measured the amount of damage from sun exposure and aging. The imaging of collagen and elastin in the skin revealed that as individuals get older, the amount of collagen in the skin decreases to a greater extent in women than in men. This is significant because when collagen and elastin degenerate, the skin loses smoothness and develops wrinkles.³⁰⁹

More importantly, this is why women look older than men of the same age who have had similar sun exposure over the years. Wearing a niqab outside the home prevents wrinkles caused by sun exposure on the face of a woman. The skin aging process of a niqab-wearing woman will be slower as compared to a woman whose facial skin is continuously exposed to the sun's rays.

Facial hair

One of the major differences between the skin of males and that of females is the fact that facial hair grows copiously on men's faces but not on women's faces. The beard offers protection to men in many ways. Growing the beard prevents a person from diseases of the throat and diseases of the gums. The beard also helps in treating chronic coughs, and it keeps a man's face warm in cold weather. Since the hair follicles on men's faces grow hair in more sebaceous glands than women, these glands are much smaller and do not absorb chemicals as quickly as women's glands do. Not only does men's facial hair protect them from harmful pollutants and dust, but also their facial skin does not absorb external chemicals as quickly as does women's.

³⁰⁹ Sara Goudarzi, "A Woman's Skin Ages Faster," accessed January 8, 2015, http://www.livescience.com/health/061003_women_skin.html.

Thus, men with beards do not have to protect their faces with a niqab when they go out because their beards already offer protection to their facial skin.

On the other hand, women's faces do not have protection from a beard, and their sebaceous glands absorb chemicals more quickly. Therefore, when women leave their homes and go out, wearing a niqab will offer protection to their faces from dust, pollution and the harmful effects of the weather.

Oily skin

Even though men's facial skin contains smaller oil glands than women's, their skin is generally oilier. For those aged 20 to over 69, sebaceous glands in men's skin produce a significantly higher amount of oil than those in women's skin.³¹⁰ This is primarily due to the presence of testosterone, which is responsible for the skin generating a higher amount of oil secretions. On the other hand, the presence of estrogens results in women's skin secreting less oil. It is very likely that the higher oil production in men's facial skin will result in more of the sun's rays falling on it being reflected. Women's dry facial skin, however, will be prone to absorbing more of the sun's rays. Wearing a face-veil solves this problem for women.

Nerve fibres

In one scientific study, it was demonstrated that women's skin is more sensitive to small temperature changes and to pain caused by either heat or cold.³¹¹ In another study, the pricking pain sensation resulting from heat projected from a lamp on the skin was measured among men

³¹⁰ Pochi and Strauss, "Endocrinologic Control of the Development and Activity of the Human Sebaceous Gland," 191-201.

³¹¹ Meh and Denislic, "Quantitative Assessment of Thermal and Pain Sensitivity," 164-169.

and women.³¹² The results revealed that compared to men, women's skin is more sensitive and feels more pain. A possible explanation for the gender differences in pain perception could be that women's skin contains more nerve fibres and is less thick than that of men. Indeed, some research has indicated that men's skin contains about 50% fewer nerve fibres than that of women. According to a report in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, women feel pain more intensely than men because they have more nerve receptors. This study, conducted by Bradon J. Wilhelmi, M.D. and colleagues at the Plastic Surgery Institute of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, found that, on average, women have 34 nerve fibres per square centimetre of facial skin, whereas men average just 17 nerve fibres.³¹³ This might explain why females seem to have greater sensitivity to skin pain. This means that women's faces experience more pain when exposed to the heat of the sun, to warm winds during hot summer days, or to cold winds during the winter season. Because of the fragility and sensitivity of women's facial skin, Islam (which is a mercy to humankind) has prescribed the face-veil for women when they leave their homes.

To sum up, covering the face with the niqab when outside the home has many medically beneficial effects on the female face. With the niqab, there is protection and perfection for Muslim women.



³¹² Procacci et al., "The Cutaneous Pricking Pain Threshold in Old Age."

³¹³ Mowlavi, Cooney and Febus, "Increased Cutaneous Nerve Fibers in Female Specimens."

CHAPTER 10

Niqab in Muslim Societies before Colonization

When a water fountain emerges out of a mountain, its water is crystal-clear. However, on its way down to the ground, if someone changes the colour of the water by adding dust and impurities to it, then the people living downstream will think that this fountain water was originally coloured. This analogy is as true for the veil of the Muslim woman as it is true for a polluted water fountain. When the fountain of Islam emerged from the mountains of Makkah and then spread to the East and the West, the majority of Muslim women used to wear a face-veil when they went out of their homes.

However, with the advent of Western imperialism in the Muslim countries, starting about 200 years ago, the veil worn by Muslim women became the primary target of the colonialists. Then came the Western sexual revolution backed by the print and electronic media, which eventually had its impact on Muslim societies. As a result, first the face-veil disappeared from the faces of Muslim women; then the hijab vanished from the heads of Muslim women; lastly, with the advent of jeans, loose clothing was kissed goodbye by Muslim women who wanted to imitate and adopt the Western materialistic lifestyle.

Today some modernist Muslim writers, used to looking at things superficially, do not believe that, historically, the majority of women

in Muslim societies used to wear the face-veil. They think that the pure, colourless fountain of Islam was always muddy and coloured. However, there is plenty of historical evidence that shows that the majority of Muslim women used to cover their faces in public until the eighteenth century. This evidence comes from the diaries and travelogues of non-Muslim visitors to Muslim countries about two centuries ago, as will be demonstrated in the next section.

Colonialism and Muslim women's veil

Until the European imperialists invaded Muslim countries and the Muslims started mixing with the non-believers, Muslim women walked with great respect and dignity in this world. The Europeans found it very difficult to come anywhere near the border of our Muslim sisters' purity. The niqab not only protected Muslim women from the lascivious gaze of imperialists but also gave them freedom and independence from being misused by them. The non-believers planned to destroy this barrier by removing the niqab; unfortunately, many of our sisters, without realizing what shame and destruction they were bringing upon themselves, removed their niqabs and exposed themselves.

In *Conscientious Objections*, American social critic Neil Postman sheds light on the methodology of Western colonization:

Every age has its own special forms of imperialism. And so does each conqueror. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the British mastered the art, their method of invasion was to send their navy, then their army, then their administrators, and finally their educational system.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Postman, *Conscientious Objections*.

When the imperialists invaded Muslim societies, they encountered Muslim women who would cover their faces when they went out on the streets. By the careful use of persuasion, and helped by modernist scholars such as Qasim Amin and Mohammad Abduh, the Europeans were able to remove the niqabs from the faces of Muslim women. In addition, the colonialist British, with the help of the secular government of Egypt, managed to transform al-Azhar University of Egypt into a modernist and apologetic institution. This was achieved by appointing modernist Muslim scholars to key positions at the university – a situation that exists to date. Such ‘Azhari’ scholars would shave their beards, publicly admire music (many of them consider it to be almost a fashion to admit that they listen to the legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthoom), and permit free-mixing of sexes by nullifying the Islamic commandment of the niqab and substituting a tight head scarf, which they called hijab. It must be pointed out here that not all the scholars from Al-Azhar University are modernists. Some of them follow the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to the letter; they are obviously not the object of discussion here.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the face-veil was observed by Muslim women of all Muslim countries. The niqab was not limited to any one region. For instance, the great Muslim scholar Abu Ḥayyân al-Andalusi writes about the hijab of Muslim women in the Islamic empire in Spain:

This is the custom of the women in the country of Andalus [the Islamic empire of Spain], today – nothing is visible from a woman’s body except for one eye....³¹⁵

This chapter will discuss the evidence of the ubiquitous presence of the face-veil in Muslim societies before colonization.

³¹⁵ al-Andalusi, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥeet*, 250.

Evidence of Muslim women's veil, from European visitors and tourists

About two centuries ago, European visitors used to feel very frustrated upon their arrival in the Middle East because almost all of the Muslim women covered their faces with veils. Veiled Muslim women did not present themselves as exhibits for tourists. Moreover, the houses of Muslims or places of public gatherings (which were completely segregated at that time) did not offer any opportunities for the European visitors to look at the famed beauties of the Orient. It was a severe blow to the popular European myths about Muslim women. For example, French author Leon Michel explains:

The European man thinks that in Africa he will find beautiful palaces with a balcony over the door to the street, where a charismatic prisoner [Muslim woman] will be waiting for a brave French knight in shining body armor to rescue her. They forget that the harems are well guarded and that the *moushrabias* [screens] at the windows make it impossible to talk or even to exchange glances.³¹⁶

Canadian researcher Katherine Bullock points out that European women lost their value because of their uncovered faces. However, because of her niqab:

The Muslim woman was preserved as a spectacle, an object by those viewing her... The veil, and the women who wore it, became the metaphor for the entire East, and all that was both alluring and fearsome about it.³¹⁷

Since the niqab prevented people from seeing the faces of Muslim women, some of the European travellers attacked that object which prevented them from satisfying their lustful eyes. Francis Bradley

³¹⁶ Michel, *Tunis [1883]*.

³¹⁷ Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*.

Bradley-Birt (d. 1963 CE) vented his anger on the Persian niqab by stating that it was:

...the most unpicturesque, ungraceful costume that the most jealous of the husbands could devise. No stranger may look upon the Persian woman and see the beauty that many a poem and romance would lead one to believe lies behind those close-drawn veils.³¹⁸

European traveller Charles Doughty (d. 1926 CE) disliked the niqab because it prevented him from seeing “the women’s faces, which God created for the cheerfulness of the human world.”³¹⁹

Frustrated at being denied a look at Muslim women without their veils, some of the European travellers used various tricks to sneak a glance at them. For example, Mr. Dieulafoy and his wife Jane Dieulafoy travelled to Iran in the 1880s. Jane describes in her travelogue how she and her husband solved that problem:

In the centre of a courtyard the head of the household was chatting with two young women, doubtless his relatives. Unaware that they were being observed, they had left their faces uncovered... [I hid] behind part of the wall, asked my husband to pass me the cameras, and set them up as quickly as possible, delighted to have captured such a charming interior and one so jealously guarded in Persian circles.³²⁰

Robert Burton (1821-1890) was an eminent British explorer whose most famous work is the account of his penetration into Makkah and Madinah, the two holy cities of Muslims, by masking himself as a Muslim. Burton did an ethnographic study of Muslims in that region, which did not hide his personal prejudices against

³¹⁸ Bradley-Birt, *Through Persia – From the Gulf to the Caspian*.

³¹⁹ Pastner, “Englishmen in Arabia: Encounters with Middle Eastern Women.”

³²⁰ Graham-Brown, *Images of Women*.

Islam.³²¹ Since Muslim women in the Middle East used to observe the niqab, and there used to be complete segregation of the sexes in public places, Burton had to disguise himself as a Muslim dispenser of medicine about to set out for Hajj from Cairo, where his account begins. Burton disguised himself as a Muslim doctor because this role would guarantee that Burton would meet some Muslim women, who would be allowed to see male doctors owing to their illness. Although Burton's whole account is filled with cynical comments about veiled Muslim women, he really had a hard time taking a look at the face of Muslim women. For example, in Madinah, Burton resided in the home of a local *shaykh* (teacher, mentor or scholar), but he admitted that he never had the opportunity to see the women of the household.³²²

Charles Doughty (1843-1926), another Englishman, made a two-year sojourn among the Bedouins of Arabia and recorded his observations in *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. In order to gain access to Muslim women, who were always veiled in public places, Doughty adopted the Arabic name 'Khalil' and took on the role of a Muslim dispenser of medicine, just as his compatriot Burton had done about 27 years earlier.

Doughty hated face-veiling and the institution of female segregation in the society. At various places in his travelogue, he makes vicious remarks about the Islamic commandment of face-veiling. A resident of one Arabian town took Doughty to examine the eyes of his mother. The old woman would not remove the veil from her face until her son convinced her that Doughty was a doctor. Doughty mockingly regarded this as the initial timidity of an elderly woman in the presence of a stranger.³²³ Similarly, Doughty encountered a veiled woman and sarcastically remarked that her:

³²¹ Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage*.

³²² Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage*.

³²³ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.

...feminine face was blotted out by the sordid veil-clout; in our eyes, a heathenish Asiatic villany! And the gently blooded Arabian race, in the matter of the harem, are becoming churls... the women's faces, which God created for the cheerfulness of the human world, are turned to this jealous horror.³²⁴

Commenting on the sarcastic remarks of Doughty and his predecessor Burton, University of Vermont anthropologist Carroll Pastner explains that Doughty and Burton:

...both fail to consider that one of the primary functions of the veil is to limit interaction between males and females to the immediate kin unit and to protect women from the gaze of the strangers.³²⁵

William Rae Wilson, LL.D., the popular British traveller whose narratives of travelling in foreign countries gained much acclaim across Europe, had an account of his journey to the Middle East published in London in 1823 under the title *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land*. He wrote that women in Egypt were:

...allowed to see no other persons at home than their families or relations, and when they do appear in the streets, their faces are completely veiled.³²⁶

Similarly, Margot Badran, in writing the introduction to Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawi's autobiography, noted, "When [the women] went out they veiled their faces, thus taking their seclusion with them."³²⁷

What can we conclude from all these reports and travelogues? These accounts of European visitors and tourists (male and female) bear testimony to the fact that about two centuries ago, almost all Muslim women in Muslim societies used to cover their faces.

³²⁴ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.

³²⁵ Pastner, "Englishmen in Arabia," 309-323.

³²⁶ Wilson, *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land*.

³²⁷ Badran, *Harem Years*.

Breaking the Muslim woman's resistance by removing her face-veil

The disappearance of the veil from the faces of Muslim women came with the introduction of Western imperialism into Muslim countries. There were deep psychological reasons for this. Frantz Fanon, a French psychiatrist and philosopher who was very influential in the field of post-colonial studies, was perhaps the pre-eminent thinker of the twentieth century on the psychopathology of colonization. His works have inspired anti-colonial liberation movements all over the world for more than four decades. In his path breaking book *Dying Colonialism*, Fanon wrote about the veil of Muslim women in Algeria during European colonization:

Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare. The occupier's aggressiveness, and hence his hopes, multiplied ten-fold each time a new face was uncovered. Every new Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open and breached. Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the *haïk*, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer.³²⁸

According to Fanon, the colonialists felt victorious in their success in pressuring and persuading Muslim women to remove their veils, because to the occupying forces, this meant that the defences of the Muslim society were getting weaker and weaker. The Muslim

³²⁸ Fanon, *Dying Colonialism*.

women's veil represented a resistance to colonialism. She would frustrate the colonialist who felt helpless in front of a woman he considered to be his possession but whom he could not see. The veil obstructed the possession of the Muslim women. Veiled women did not present themselves as exhibits. The colonialists arrived in the Middle East with the confidence that they were superior to the Muslims, but this conviction was destabilized upon their very arrival in the Middle East. The European colonialists were experiencing their relation to the Algerian woman at a very complex level. How could one exercise authority over subjects who are not known to them? For the colonialists, to bring a veiled Muslim woman out of her home was equivalent to breaking her resistance, as Fanon explains:

Unveiling this [Muslim] woman is revealing her beauty... Hiding the face is also disguising a secret.

This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself.³²⁹

For the women of Algeria as well as many other Muslim countries, the hijab and niqab proclaimed their identity. Many secular women who demonstrated against the Shah of Iran in the late 1970s wore hijab as a sign of protest against his kingdom. The same phenomenon has been repeated in other Muslim countries, such as Egypt, in the case of the Islamic Brotherhood. Egyptian thinker Safinaz Kazem, a former feminist, was one of those Egyptian women who were initially swept away by the Western tide of modernity, which lasted for almost half a century. During this period, "Western costumes symbolised high class and the veil [niqab/face-veil] was frowned on as *baladi* [a derogatory term for 'local']."³³⁰ Kazem considers the hijab to be a symbol of identity, a way of "going back to Islamic roots." She states:

³²⁹ Fanon, *Dying Colonialism*.

³³⁰ Shahine, "A Witch-hunt for Our Times?"

There might be other reasons why many women now are wearing the veil, but there is no doubt, the spread of the Islamic costume is a sign of religiosity.³³¹

Kazem was the first female Egyptian journalist to wear the veil in the secular era of the 1970s. She recalls:

We suddenly realised that we were robbed of our Islamic culture and started to look for roots. I was like an occupied plot of land and the day I took up the veil [in 1972] was the day of my liberation.³³²

Indeed, the hijab and niqab of Muslim women are the symbols of resistance to oppression until this day. Former British nun, and Christian religious scholar, Karen Armstrong states:

The demand that [Muslim women] abandon the veil will ... make some women cling more fiercely to the garment that now symbolises their resistance to oppression.³³³

The European colonizers claimed that they wanted to liberate Muslim women by removing their veils. The question to ask those colonizers is: If they were so sincerely interested in liberating Muslim women, why did they colonize those Muslim countries in the first place? They imposed their Western educational system upon the enslaved Muslim countries in order to strip Muslim women of their modesty and femininity. The primary targets of the Western imperialism's religious wing (of Christian missionaries) were Muslim mothers. Zwemer, a renowned missionary to the Middle East, claims:

Owing to the fact that the mother's influence over the children, both boys and girls... is paramount, and that women are the conservative element in the defense of their faith, we believe that missionary bodies ought to lay far more emphasis in work for

³³¹ Shahine, "A Witch-hunt for Our Times?"

³³² Shahine, "A Witch-hunt for Our Times?"

³³³ Shahine, "A Witch-hunt for Our Times?"

Moslem women as a means for hastening the evangelization of Moslem lands.³³⁴

Some of the missionary schools in Muslim countries went even further by trying to persuade Muslim daughters to rebel against their parents and their religious traditions by not wearing the veil.³³⁵ Obviously, the veil of the Muslim woman was one of the biggest obstacles to their missionary work, so Western imperialists considered it necessary to break her resistance by persuading her to remove her veil.

The crusade against the niqab in Muslim countries

As we have read in the accounts of European visitors and tourists of the past, nearly all the Muslim women in those Muslim societies used to cover their faces. So what happened later to make Muslim women remove their face-veils? A generation or two later, many Muslim women think that wearing a niqab is an exception and a supererogatory act but not a religious commandment observed by almost all of the Muslim women in past societies.

Here is what happened: With the advent of Western imperialism in the Muslim lands, modernist Muslim reforms started to appear in various parts of the world. Of course, we cannot completely dismiss all of those activists because some of them were sincerely struggling for women's rights in the so-called Muslim societies, where Islam was not implemented in its true spirit and women were in fact oppressed in many places.

In Egypt, Huda Shaarawi and Seza Nebrawi, after returning from the International Women's Alliance Conference in Rome in 1923,

³³⁴ Zwemer, *Moslem Women*.

³³⁵ Van Sommer and Zwemer, *Our Moslem Sisters*.

threw off their face-veils in a dramatic gesture after stepping off the train. Elsewhere, Safiyya Zaghloul burned her niqab in a public gathering to declare the dawn of the culture of uncovered female faces in public. That was the time when Kemal Ataturk, the famous dictator of Turkey, encouraged and even forced women to adopt European attire. His wife, Latife Hanim, appeared at their wedding with her face uncovered and then continued to participate in all public appearances without the face-veil.³³⁶ In 1928, Queen Soraya of Afghanistan appeared in public without a niqab, while the King himself advocated the face-veil's abolition.³³⁷

In 1936, the King of Iran, Reza Shah, banned the face-veil, and his wives appeared in public unveiled. Taxi drivers were fined if they accepted women passengers wearing niqab.³³⁸ In addition to the compulsory unveiling of the head and face in schools and elsewhere, Reza Shah ordered that no veiled woman could receive treatment at a public clinic. The desire to adopt the Western dress was so strong in the Kingdom of Iran that the police were instructed by the government to shred a woman's niqab with scissors if she was caught wearing it in public.³³⁹

After that, many modernist Muslim scholars also succumbed to the pressure of the media, the colonial powers, and feminist Muslim women as they started issuing verdicts declaring that niqab was limited to the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) only, and that the average Muslim woman never used to wear niqab.

When Britain took control of Egypt in 1882 CE, Lord Cromer was appointed as the viceroy of Egypt (from 1883 to 1907). Cromer hired Shaykh Mohammad Abduh as the Grand Mufti of Egypt. It

³³⁶ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

³³⁷ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

³³⁸ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

³³⁹ Givechian, "Cultural Changes in Male-Female Relations."

was during this time that al-Azhar University, under his modernist leadership, issued verdicts permitting Muslim women to uncover their faces in public (just as this institution issued various other verdicts making things permissible that are actually prohibited in Islam, such as music and trimming the beard to the extent that it just looked like a “five o’clock shadow”). The goal of those ‘apologetic scholars’ of al-Azhar University was only to please Lord Cromer.

The crusade against the face-veil continues to date in some countries. It is ironic that today the entire Western-controlled media becomes furious when women are forced to cover their bodies or their faces in any Muslim country, yet the same ‘secular and liberal’ media remains silent when Muslim women are forced to remove their veils or headscarves. Is this not a double standard?

Even if a person is a modernist and is not willing to accept Islamic historical documents, he or she needs only to look at the past historical travelogues of European visitors; these will confirm that just two centuries ago in Muslim societies of the Middle East, it was extremely hard to find women on the street with their faces uncovered. Those women understood the Islamic commandment of observing the veil much better than do present day apologists and modernists.



CHAPTER 11

Liberation of Women in Islam

Hijab is a way of giving dignity to a woman's femininity by making her beauty unavailable for public consumption.³⁴⁰

Islam is the biggest benefactor of women in human history. The Islamic commandment of hijab provides liberation, protection and shelter to women. This has been accepted even by Muslim feminist writers such as the Algerian novelist, translator, and female filmmaker Assia Djebar, who writes:

In the West much stress is laid on external, public life; but to the Moslem it is his private family life that is all important. The word *harem*, so cheapened abroad, so suggestive there of clandestine pleasures, is held by us in the highest honor, as the place where a man keeps his most respected and cherished possession: his wife... And one of the most acute and most dramatic aspects [of the modern age] is the predicament of the family whose ancient tribal framework has broken up. And at the center of the family is the woman. It is she who is most exposed to the storm.³⁴¹

The veil protects a Muslim woman from the visual theft of unrelated men. This is true liberation.

³⁴⁰ Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*.

³⁴¹ Djebar, *Women of Islam*.

Islam and social justice for women

It is true that the modernist, secular, anti-hijab mindset is a threat to Islam's values for the sexes. However, there is also a threat when un-Islamic practices are mixed with Islamic ones. Muslim women, whether they observe hijab or not, are oppressed in certain Muslim societies due to incorrect, cultural applications of Islam. Many of the injustices inflicted on women in Muslim societies are due to local customs; these practices continue because people have a hard time changing their customs, and sometimes following the customs is more important to them than following the religion itself.

When outsiders see that Muslims in certain societies force women to cover up, prohibit girls from attending school, sell young girls off as brides to older men who are sometimes abusive and exploitative, force wives to remain with abusive husbands, kill young women in the name of 'honour' (which goes against all Islamic rules), and make divorced women suffer from unfair child custody laws, those outsiders are naturally confused as to which of these practices are Islamic and which are incorrect applications of Islam. The outsiders are often ignorant of this difference and are unable to distinguish the true practices of Islam from some of the harmful cultural practices, which actually represent a distortion of Islam.

Islamic teachings emphasize that Muslim women should have full access to education, a say in the political process, and access to a fair justice system. Islam values women's education as much as men's, as noted earlier in the book. While women are not generally given the responsibility of earning money to support their family, all Muslims, male and female, are encouraged to be educated, effective members of this Ummah. Likewise, Islamic teachings stress the importance of social justice for Muslim women and men. This includes justice in domestic affairs as well. The Qur'an gave women due rights related to marriage, divorce and inheritance centuries before women in the

West were granted such rights; this fact is acknowledged even by Western experts of law. Noah Feldman, a law professor at Harvard University, notes in “Why Shariah?”, in *The New York Times* on March 16, 2008:

As for sexism, the common law long denied married women any property rights or indeed legal personality apart from their husbands. When the British applied their law to Muslims in place of shariah, as they did in some colonies, the result was to strip married women of the property that Islamic law had always granted them – hardly progress toward equality of the sexes.

Muslim women during the Prophet’s generation were never wholly excluded from public life. They were part of community life as a whole, participating in scholarship, community development, and even, at times, political issues (pledging allegiance) and jihad. They did all this while staying in full hijab and maintaining their chastity and modest dress. They also did justice to their primary role as wives and mothers at home. Muslim women even challenged the caliph if they thought he was in error. They were encouraged to pursue education, they participated in the most prized form of scholarship (Islamic learning), they were teachers, and they transmitted their knowledge of Hadith and fiqh. Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed Samrah bint Nuḥayk al-Asadiyah as a market inspector in Makkah and ash-Shifā’ bint ‘Abdullāh al-‘Adawiyah as an administrator of the market in Madinah. Later, ash-Shifā’ was appointed as the head of health and safety in Basra.

Muslim women have certain rights which no one has the right to deny such as right of having full access to education, a say in the political process, and access to a fair justice system.

How could Islam prevent women from receiving fair justice? Islam is a religion that has commanded its believers to exercise justice even with their enemies:

﴿... وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ أَن صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَن تَعْتَدُوا﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٢) ﴿٢﴾...

﴿...And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah lead you to transgress...﴾ (*Qur'an* 5: 2)

﴿وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٨) ﴿٨﴾...

﴿...and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness...﴾ (*Qur'an* 5: 8)

How could Islam allow groups or individuals to force women to wear the niqab and punish women who do not wear it (even though it has been shown in this book that the face-veil is required, especially in the presence of temptation)? The Prophet (ﷺ) did not force people to perform every obligatory action. In fact, the greatest act of virtue in Islam is the act of embracing it – an act which wipes away all of one's previous sins – and even the Qur'an has mentioned that no one should be compelled to embrace Islam:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٥٦) ﴿٢٥٦﴾...

﴿There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...﴾ (*Qur'an* 2: 256)

How could Islam sanction forcing women to remain with abusive husbands? Islam, unlike other religions, grants the wife the right to dissolve the marriage through a process whereby the woman files a case in the court for a divorce process. Islam does not permit an abusive husband to chain his wife to a marriage.

How could Islam prevent women from gaining custody of their children in the event of a divorce? It is true that in some Muslim societies, women suffer from child custody issues. This is not because Islam mandates it; the real reason is that legal systems in Muslim countries have not stayed true to Islam's teachings. In the post-colonial

period, there seems to be a general decline in Islamic scholarship and effective, justice-promoting Islamic legal systems. If Islamic law is applied correctly, when a husband and wife divorce, the mother has more right to the child's custody. Islam recognizes that the mother is more compassionate and more capable of taking care of the child and, hence, grants the custody to the mother, as long as she does not remarry.

Consider the following hadith:

«A woman came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: O Messenger of Allah! (What should I do? I was there for) my son (in all ways) – my belly was for him a vessel. My lap was for him a resting place. And my breasts were for him a water skin. Yet (now) his father claims he is taking him from me.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: You have a greater right to him as long as you do not marry.» (Recorded by Ahmad and Abu Dâwood with a sound chain of narration)

How could Islam endorse honour killings of Muslim girls, when according to the Qur'an, killing a person unjustly is the same as killing all of humanity, and saving a person is the same as saving all of humanity? The Qur'an has condemned female infanticide in the following words:

﴿وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ﴾ (سورة التكويد: ٨-٩)

«And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed.» (*Qur'an* 81: 8-9)

Allah (ﷻ) has further instructed:

﴿... وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّوْنُكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٥١)

«...And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason.» (*Qur'an* 6: 151)

During the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and in the following pious generations, Muslim women did indeed enjoy the rights and responsibilities of the hijab and niqâb, while also having the right to financial support from their husbands or male relatives. When we look at the holistic picture of that exemplary society, we notice that Muslim women in the early generations (when the Muslim community was in much better shape than it is today) enjoyed three broad areas of rights:

- 1- The right (and responsibility) to cover properly in public and to be a homemaker.
- 2- The right to effective participation in the community through quality education, participation in scholarship, and a say in political affairs.
- 3- Unobstructed access to a fair and effective justice system.

These days, all Muslims suffer from a general religious, social, economic and political decline of the Ummah, but women arguably have borne the brunt of it. In the post-colonial Muslim lands, where citizens frequently suffer from a weakened Islamic justice system and a dearth of well-trained Islamic scholars, it is not uncommon to find communities where females do not have access to decent education, do not have a say in the political process, and have little or no recourse to the justice system if their husbands or guardians mistreat them (regardless of whether or not those women observe the hijab). The issue of the hijab is important for Muslim women, but it does not solve all the social problems that they face in the modern era. We must remember that we, as Muslims, are the torchbearers of the message of Islam. We have been regarded as the best nation because of our duty to enjoin acts of righteousness and forbid acts of disobedience to Allah (ﷻ), as mentioned in the Qur'an:

﴿ كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ... ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١١٠)

﴿You are the best nation produced [as an example] for humankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah...﴾
 (Qur'an 3: 110)

It is our duty as Muslims to raise our voices against the oppression of Muslim women in the name of Islam and work towards implementing social justice for women in Muslim societies.

Does the niqab prevent Muslim women from going out in public?

Women in Muslim societies view the veil as a means of liberation. In fact, if we look at Islamic law, a slave woman is exempt from wearing the veil as a sign that she is deprived of her autonomy and is not a free woman.³⁴² Historically, in the Muslim societies, the veil was always regarded as a symbol of a Muslim woman's liberty and freedom. The Islamic command of the niqab does not prevent Muslim women from going out in public; on the contrary, it makes it easy for them to go out. It must be noted here that when Islamic teachings warn against the free-mixing of men and women, this does not mean the mere presence of men and women together in the public places. Islam permits women to go to public places as long as Islamic laws of the hijab and niqab are not violated.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«It is permissible for you (women) to go out for your needs.» (Bukhari)

Hanna Papanek of the University of Chicago, who has done extensive fieldwork regarding the hijab and niqab (*purdah*) systems in the regions of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, described Islamic *purdah* as:

³⁴² al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*.

The burqa or concealing cloak worn by women. It is a logical supplement to the use of enclosed living spaces and enables women to move out of these spaces in a kind of portable seclusion. As a result, and despite its forbidding appearance, the burqa can be considered a liberating invention and is seen in this way by many women themselves. The burqa is an obvious social signal of the wearer's status as a secluded female, but the specific type of burqa worn is also a signal of class, wealth, sophistication and region of origin.³⁴³

Similarly, Florence E. McCarthy, a researcher in the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University, studied Muslim women in villages in Bangladesh. She found that both the wearing of the burqa and strict seclusion practices are widespread there. Many village women remembered that the burqa was introduced in their lifetimes, as long as 50 years ago (probably due to the modern wave of Islamic revivalism and awareness of Islamic teachings) and that the burqa had previously been restricted to the upper-class women in the towns. According to McCarthy, the reason for the popularity of the burqa among the village women of Bangladesh was their experience of increased freedom of movement outside the home.³⁴⁴

Likewise, in a study conducted on six sample villages in the Lahore district of Punjab in Pakistan, sociologists Slocum, Akhtar and Sahi studied selected sociological aspects of the life of Muslim village women. They note:

Every woman is expected to cover her head and breasts [with hijab] to show herself modest and respect worthy. A woman who does otherwise is thought immodest and vulgar. This is the usual way of observing purdah within the village. In a strict sense purdah is observed only by the women of those families which

³⁴³ Papanek, "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter."

³⁴⁴ McCarthy, *Bengali Village Women*.

can manage their affairs without the women going out of the houses. Others may wear burqa on a visit to relatives or a trip to the city. Observation of purdah is a symbol of prestige and fashion in Punjabi villages.³⁴⁵

In a *The New York Times* article titled “Saudis in Bikinis,” dated October 25, 2002, author Nicholas Kristof showed his frustration at finding that Saudi women were confident about wearing the veil and the hijab. A Saudi dietician named Lana scolded Kristof when he wrote a sarcastic reference to the “oppressed” Saudi women:

I cover up my body and my face, and I’m happy that I’m a religious girl obeying God’s rules. I can swim and do sports and go to restaurants and wear what I want, but not in front of men. Why should I show my legs and breasts to men? Is that really freedom? Saudi women interviewed by Kristof in Riyadh:

...offered the same scathing critique, effectively arguing that Saudi women are the free ones – free from sexual harassment, free from pornography, free from seeing their bodies used to market cars and colas. It is Western women, they say, who have been manipulated into becoming the toys of men.³⁴⁶

Muslim women feel a sense of privacy and liberation in donning the burqa when they go out in public. As a matter of fact, the veil imparts a sense of elevation of status to its wearer, as Hanna Papanek explains:

In one sense, of course, the experience of walking on streets where others are rendered invisible, or are depersonalized by being inside burqas is quite analogous to the experience of being a pedestrian and interacting with persons encapsulated inside cars.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Slocum, Akhtar and Sahi, *Village Life in Lahore District*, 23.

³⁴⁶ Kristof, “Saudis in Bikinis.”

³⁴⁷ Papanek, “Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter.”

Hence, for a Muslim woman who is wearing a veil, the power to see without being seen gives her the strength of invisibility. It gives her an elevation of status by rendering her invisible to non-maḥram men on the streets.

Benefits of wearing the niqab

The benefits of wearing the niqab are many, some of which are summarized as follows:

The niqab as an act of God-consciousness

In the present age of secularism, when even Muslims have forgotten the commandments of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), a woman wearing the niqab has to wage a spiritual jihad against her inner self. She wears the niqab only to please Allah, which increases her God-consciousness.

The niqab as a manifestation of *ḥayâ'*

The word *ḥayâ'* is often translated into English as 'shyness'. However, this reflects only a limited meaning of a rather broad Arabic term. A more comprehensive translation of its meaning could be 'keeping private what should be private'. By wearing the niqab, a Muslim woman asserts her right to privacy, no matter where she is in society.³⁴⁸

The niqab as a shield against visual theft

A Muslim woman wearing the niqab in public is safe from 'visual theft' by men; men unknown to her cannot enjoy her visually without her consent. She is hidden from prying eyes. By covering herself from head to toe, a Muslim woman regains her ability to display herself as a tangible being only to her family and to other women.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ al-Muhajabah, "Why Wear Niqab?"

³⁴⁹ Murad, "Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender."

A sense of Islamic identity through the niqab

When a woman wears full hijab, she is not mistaken for anyone else but a Muslim woman. The niqab is a symbol of the chastity and modesty of a Muslim woman. Perhaps this is what was meant by the following verse:

﴿... أَن يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ...﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٥٩)

﴿...they will be known and not be abused...﴾ (Qur'an 33: 59)

In addition, when she goes to public places, she is in a state in which she is perpetually inviting others to Islam. The niqab is an assertion of her Islamic identity. In fact, niqab serves as a signboard of Islam.

The niqab as an act of obedience

Wearing the hijab is an act of obedience to Allah and his Prophet (ﷺ).

The niqab as an act of *gheerah*

Today, in the age of sexual revolution, chastity means nothing, and (protective) male jealousy (*gheerah*)³⁵⁰ also means nothing. The niqab is meant to restore this lost moral value in society. *Gheerah* is a natural feeling in men who do not like people looking at their wives or their daughters. A man whose nature is not disfigured safeguards his women relatives from non-mahram men. A Muslim woman who is wearing the niqab is preserving her beauty from others and sharing it only with her husband.

³⁵⁰ It must be noted here that *gheerah* is not just for men. Women, too, should feel *gheerah* for their husbands, and this jealousy should be balanced and not excessive. Muslims can also feel *gheerah* in terms of competing with one another in good deeds; this is not for showing off but in order to strive to be the best in obtaining Allah's pleasure.

Ibn ‘Umar reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«There are three to whom Allah has forbidden paradise: 1) a chronic alcoholic, 2) the one who severs ties with parents, and 3) the one who agrees with the evil lewdness found in his family.» (Recorded by Aḥmad and authenticated by al-Albâni)³⁵¹

The niqab stresses family unity

The niqab also accentuates the unity of family bonds, since women do not cover their faces in front of their non-marriageable relatives. In fact, Ursula Sharma, female anthropologist at the University of Keele (England), noted that for Muslim women, the niqab “stresses the unity of the kindred vis-à-vis the outside, since it is observed only before males who are outside the trusted circle of kinsmen.”³⁵²

The niqab saves women from the visual theft of men

In an article in 1994, the *Sunday Gazette Mail* (Charleston, West Virginia) reported that “women appear to be relying on the power within rather than powerful dressing without.” Commenting on this modern trend that is found among some women – namely, discovering the value of their modesty – Wendy Shalit writes in *A Return to Modesty*:

It is a respect for this ‘power within’ that once made it impossible for men to view women merely as sexual objects. Rather, women became something deeper, more elemental: possessors of a deep and wondrous secret that is revealed only to the one who proves himself deserving of her.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Authenticated by Shaykh al-Albâni in his *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Jâmi’*, no. 3047.

³⁵² Sharma, “Women and Their Affines.”

³⁵³ Shalit, *A Return to Modesty*.

It is precisely the hijab and the niqab that give this message to the men in society: a woman is not a mere sexual object; she is, in fact, a possessor of a ‘deep and wondrous secret’ inside her veil.

A Muslim woman wearing a niqab is safe in public from the ‘visual theft’ of men and, hence, men unknown to her cannot visually enjoy her without her consent. She is hidden from prying eyes. By covering herself from head to toe, a Muslim woman regains her ability “to present herself as a physical being only to her family and her sorority.”³⁵⁴

The Islamic dress acts as a kind of a ‘moral raincoat,’ particularly useful in the inclement climate of modernity. It allows for a vision of the Islamic woman as liberated, “not from tradition and meaning, but from ostentation and from subjection to random visual rape by men.”³⁵⁵

In his classic book *Ways of Seeing*, English art critic and painter John Berger studied the history of the female body as used in Western paintings. He aptly summarizes the phenomenon of the male gaze as follows:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.³⁵⁶

An example of ‘visual theft’ of the female body by men is the phenomenon of ‘upskirting’. This is the practice of taking photographs from under the skirt of a female without her knowledge and hence capturing (and often distributing) an image of her crotch area and underwear. Although this practice is very obnoxious and shows a disgusting aspect of the male gaze, there is still no general consensus

³⁵⁴ Murad, “Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender.”

³⁵⁵ Murad, “Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender.”

³⁵⁶ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

around the world in terms of illegality of this practice. For instance, Reuters correspondent Shelby Sebens reported on February 6, 2015 that an Oregon state judge acquitted a 61-year-old man who was caught taking photographs up the skirt of a 13-year-old girl as she shopped at a department store in Portland. The judge had determined that no laws were broken.

The hijab and niqab save a woman from such male gaze. Furthermore, by concealing her identity in front of non-mahram men, the niqab prevents a woman from being turned into an object of vision. It saves women from the de-objectifying effects of the male gaze on women. By not being observed, a woman in full hijab becomes immune to “internalization of the male gaze,” which saves her from feelings of low self-esteem or preoccupation with appearance. The Islamic hijab gives women back their personhood. As one Canadian Muslim, Naheed Mustapha, emphasized, the hijab is liberating because it saves women from the tyranny of ‘the beauty game.’³⁵⁷ The beauty game refers to women’s efforts to appear like the images of the beautiful women they see around them in glossy magazines, billboard advertisements, TV commercials, movies, and so on. By putting on the hijab with long and loose clothing, Muslim women feel liberated from the “bondage of the swinging pendulum of the fashion industry and other institutions that exploit females,” as pointed out by *Toronto Star* correspondent Sultana Yusufali.³⁵⁸

The Qur’an has indicated that the phenomenon of the male gaze is the inroad to destruction among the hearts of men:

﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ...﴾

﴿٢٠﴾ (سورة النور: ٣٠)

³⁵⁷ Naheed Mustapha, “My Body is My Own Business,” *Globe and Mail*, June 29, 1993, 1.

³⁵⁸ Sultana Yusufali, “My Body is My Own Business,” *Toronto Star*, February 17, 1998.

﴿Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them...﴾ (*Qur'an 24: 30*)

The next part of this verse commands Muslim women to lower their gaze, guard their modesty, and draw their cloaks all over them. Commenting on these verses, Canadian Muslim convert Katherine Bullock states:

Read together, I suggest that the Qur'an is arguing that along with lowering the gaze there is something about wearing long, loose garments that helps women protect their modesty in the face of the male gaze.³⁵⁹

Thus, the simple message of the Qur'an is that in the public sphere where there are chances of male-female interaction and, hence, exploitation of females by men, wearing an outer garment by females might alleviate this issue. In this way, the hijab saves women from the visual theft of men.

Female Muslim Sharia scholars

Islamic history is full of glittering examples of female Sharia scholars who mastered Islamic sciences such as the exegesis of the Qur'an, Hadith, the biography of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic history. It was only by the end of the nineteenth century that the British invaded and colonized almost all Muslim countries and dismantled their Islamic educational institutions, establishing secular school systems instead. As a consequence, it is thought to be impossible for a Muslim woman to become a Sharia scholar.

However, the widespread presence of female Islamic scholarship throughout Islamic history is a fact that is testified to by many Orientalists. For instance, Hungarian Orientalist Ignác Goldziher

³⁵⁹ Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*.

(1850-1921 CE) noted in his research on Hadith that nearly 15% of medieval Hadith scholars were women. In a more recent study of Muslim women scholars in Islamic history, Ruth Roded, social historian and Senior Lecturer in the History of Islam and the Middle East at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, comments:

If U.S. and European historians feel a need to reconstruct women's history because women are invisible in the traditional sources, Islamic scholars are faced with a plethora of source material that has only begun to be studied... In reading the biographies of thousands of Muslim women scholars, one is amazed at the evidence that contradicts the view of Muslim women as marginal, secluded, and restricted.³⁶⁰

If we take a quick look at Islamic history, we will notice that it is filled with examples of women Sharia scholars, only a few of whom are mentioned here:

- 'Ā'ishah bint Abi Bakr (ﷺ), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), was a brilliant scholar of Islam with whom many notable Companions used to study. She is one of the six Companions who narrated the most hadiths from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). She possessed a photographic memory, which is evident from the huge number of narrations that she narrated.
- 'Ā'ishah bint Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqâṣ was a great scholar of Islam; her students included jurists and scholars of Hadith like Imam Mâlik and Ayyoob as-Sakhtiyâni. Imam adh-Dhahabi has included her among the memorizers of hadiths.³⁶¹
- 'Ā'ishah bint Ṭalḥah was such a great scholar of Islam that she had a debate with the leading figures of the Umayyad house, and she surprised Caliph Hishâm ibn Abdul-Malik with her

³⁶⁰ Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*.

³⁶¹ al-Hashimi, *Four Hundred Exemplary Women*.

knowledge. She was the granddaughter of Abu Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddeeq (the first caliph of Islam).³⁶²

- The students of ‘Amrah bint Abdur-Raḥmân included Imam az-Zuhri, Abu Bakr ibn Ḥazm and Yaḥyâ ibn Sa‘eed. Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez gave so much importance to the hadiths of the Prophet (ﷺ) narrated by her that he told Abu Bakr ibn Ḥazm, the governor of Madinah, to compile those hadiths in the form of a book. ‘Abdul-‘Azeez wrote, “There had not remained anyone who knew more of the hadiths transmitted by ‘Â’ishah than ‘Amrah.” Historian Ibn Sa‘d has given her the title of ‘the Female Scholar’.³⁶³
- One of the teachers from whom Imam ash-Shâfi‘i learned Hadith was Sayyidah Nafeesah, granddaughter of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Ali (who himself was the grandson of the Prophet [ﷺ]). After memorizing the Qur’an, she focused on the science of Qur’anic exegesis and Hadith, and she soon became an authority in these sciences. She was also famous for her piety and her devotion in prayers.³⁶⁴
- Fâṭimah as-Samarqandiyah was from the Syrian city of Aleppo. She was the daughter of ‘Alâ ad-Deen as-Samarqandi and the wife of the famous Ḥanafî fiqh scholar al-Kâsâni. Fâṭimah was a renowned expert in Hadith and other religious sciences. She used to give legal verdicts and rulings from behind the veil. Imam al-Kâsâni himself used to say that his wife Fâṭimah as-Samarqandiyah was a greater scholar than he was, and his students narrated:

We saw our teacher at times would leave the classroom when he could not answer a certain difficult question. After a while he would return to elucidate the answer in great detail. Only

³⁶² Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitâb at-Ṭabaqât al-Kabeer*.

³⁶³ Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitâb at-Ṭabaqât al-Kabeer*.

³⁶⁴ al-Hashimi, *Four Hundred Exemplary Women*.

later on did we learn that he would go home to put the same question to his wife in order to hear her explanation.³⁶⁵

Clearly, he depended on his wife in his scholarly life. One of the best compilations in Ḥanafī fiqh is Imam al-Kâsâni's masterpiece *Badâ'i' aṣ-Ṣanâ'i'*, a commentary on *Tuḥfat al-Fuqahâ'*, which itself was written by Fâtimah as-Samarqandiyah's father. Many princes and rich men wanted to marry Fâtimah, but she decided to marry Imam al-Kâsâni because he was one of the greatest scholars of Ḥanafī fiqh. Fâtimah chose the study of *Badâ'i' aṣ-Ṣanâ'i'* by Imam al-Kâsâni as her dowry for this marriage.³⁶⁶

- Anas Khâtoon was the wife of Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalâni, who wrote the most famous commentary of *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhâri*. She was a Hadith expert in her own right, holding teaching licences from scholars like al-Ḥâfidh al-'Irâqi, and her students included scholars like as-Sakhâwi. Ibn Ḥajar spoke highly of his wife's scholarship and acknowledged that all of his work in the area of Hadith sciences would have been impossible without her help.³⁶⁷
- Shaykh Usman dan Fodio, the spiritual and political leader of the Sokoto community in Africa, had five daughters, and one of his daughters, Nana Asma'u, was a great poet, teacher and Islamic scholar. Her knowledge is demonstrated by the fact that she wrote an exegesis of the Qur'an in many volumes.³⁶⁸
- Maryam Jameelah (formerly Margaret Marcus) was raised in a Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York. She accepted Islam in 1962 and then immigrated permanently to Pakistan. She has written various books presenting the classical and true picture of Islam.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ al-Hashimi, *Four Hundred Exemplary Women*.

³⁶⁶ al-Hashimi, *Four Hundred Exemplary Women*.

³⁶⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalâni, *Buloogh al-Marâm*.

³⁶⁸ Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*.

³⁶⁹ Jameelah, *At Home in Pakistan*.

These are just a few examples of women Sharia scholars in our history. Historically, most of the women Sharia scholars did not write many books on Islam, but authorship is not a requirement to be an Islamic scholar. Instead, in many cases, those women ‘wrote’ (prepared) Islamic personalities. The father of Shaykh Hasan al-Banna once asked him why he was not writing any books. Al-Banna replied, “I write [prepare] personalities, and they will write books.”³⁷⁰ That was precisely the role of many Muslim women scholars in history. Those remarkable Muslim women wrote (prepared) the personalities of their children.

To sum up, Islam values women’s education as much as men’s. While women are not generally given the responsibility of earning money to support their family, all Muslims are encouraged (even ordered) to become educated and effective members of the community. The early generations of Muslims valued education for girls and respected female scholarship, along with female participation in political affairs. Women pledged allegiance to the leaders, and they were eloquent speakers who challenged the leaders with criticism and questions.

In the post-colonial Muslim world, which suffers from a broad range of problems, women’s education has suffered. Some conservative Muslim societies, particularly in rural, uneducated areas, encourage certain positive practices (like the hijab) along with certain negative practices, like claiming that female education is unimportant or even un-Islamic. As female education has declined in some Muslim areas, and as Islamic scholarship has declined in general, these females have seen a parallel drop in their access to a properly functioning Islamic judicial system when they need its support in cases such as marital problems and abuse.

³⁷⁰ Subhâni, *Adhân of a Mujâhid*.

Western women are coming to Islam in greater numbers than Western men

Today, we see that despite the mass media's propaganda against the hijab of Muslim women and the so-called oppression of women by Islam, Western women are coming to Islam in greater numbers than Western men. In the U.S., for every one male convert to Islam, there are four female converts. These educated and thoughtful Western women have found, through personal experience and observation, that Islam offers true liberation to females. They have discovered that Islam brings dignity to their life by covering them with the hijab.

The phenomenon of Western women embracing Islam in large numbers has been so obvious in recent decades that it has become the focus of research by several social scientists at Western universities. One of those social scientists is Anna Mansson McGinty, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who investigated the reasons behind the appeal of Islam to Western women. McGinty shed light on how women are perceived in Islam, through interviews that offer a window into the journey toward conversion. She found that converts were eager to wear the veil in order to identify themselves as Muslims, even though they also saw it as something "intimately linked to the stereotypes of Muslim women."³⁷¹ Hence, the Islamic veil has become a powerful symbol of Islamic conversion.

According to McGinty, every Western woman convert she interviewed found something in Islam that aligned with a core part of her personality. Indeed, some of the women found that Islam allowed them to try out "a new kind of femininity," one that emphasizes modesty and places a high value on who a woman is, rather than what she looks like.³⁷²

³⁷¹ McGinty, *Becoming Muslim*.

³⁷² McGinty, *Becoming Muslim*.

One of the women profiled in McGinty's book is Fatimah, a former Catholic who later became an atheist while studying in college. Later, she married and had two children. Seeing a documentary on the nuclear holocaust prompted her to search for spiritual meaning in her life. During her quest, she divorced her husband and converted to Islam. Later, she married a Muslim man.

Another woman in the book is Mariam, an American woman who went to northern Africa to do field work as a graduate student in Anthropology. There, she embraced Islam at the age of 25. Many years later, she married a man who was also a convert to Islam.

Helena Benuoda, one of Sweden's most high-profile converts to Islam, is the chairwoman of the Swedish Muslim Council. She recalls that her journey towards Islam started at a very young age:

It started when I was 9 and wanted to perform evening prayers but did not know who to pray to, so I started looking for answers, and found all the logical answers in Islam.³⁷³

Explaining the reasons for conversion in the West, Benuoda says: Many people here in Sweden are looking for a spiritual meaning of life. Even those who are against religion find themselves drawn towards it, once they start studying it. But in general people here fear religion, because they fear death, and the fact that several religions deem people accountable for actions in the afterlife.³⁷⁴

Another comprehensive study on the phenomenon of Western women's conversion to Islam was compiled by anthropologist Karin van Nieuwkerk from the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Her book *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West* includes research on gender and conversion to Islam by leading

³⁷³ Rami Abdelrahman, "A Leap of Faith," *The Local (Sweden's News in English)*, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.thelocal.se/20071012/8772>.

³⁷⁴ Abdelrahman, "A Leap of Faith."

Western historians, sociologists, anthropologists and theologians investigating why non-Muslim women in the U.S., several European countries, and South Africa are converting to Islam. The authors of the study found that the factors include:

...an attraction to Islam's high regard for family and community, its strict moral and ethical standards, and the rationality and spirituality of its theology, as well as a disillusionment with Christianity and with the unrestrained sexuality of so much of Western culture.³⁷⁵

This analysis is essentially confirmed by another ground-breaking study on the conversion phenomenon, from the perspective of the sociology of religions, conducted by social scientist Madeleine Sultán Sjöqvist. Her doctoral thesis, "We Became Muslims," is based on interviews with Swedish women who have embraced Islam. The purpose of those interviews is to comprehend how those converts search for meaning from their religiosity. Sjöqvist asked these Muslim women questions regarding their perception of the process of conversion, their religious participation, and their experiences living as converts in a secular society like Sweden.³⁷⁶

For her thesis work, Sjöqvist interviewed Swedish women who had converted to Islam and were practicing Muslims. The women were 20 to 50 years old, and they were either married or had been married to Muslim men, both secular and practicing. Several of the women had been divorced one or more times. Their educational backgrounds varied; some had not finished their basic education, while others had studied at university level. Some had been working outside the home, while others were housewives.

³⁷⁵ Nieuwkerk, *Women Embracing Islam*.

³⁷⁶ Madeleine Sultán Sjöqvist, "Vi blev muslimer" Svenska kvinnor berättar : En religionssociologisk studie av konversionsberättelser, (Doctoral thesis, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2006), taken from: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A168116&dswid=-3765>, accessed January 10, 2015.

According to Sjöqvist, many converts are fairly open in their interpretations of what religious commitment means while they are also searching for the “right answers.” They told her that they are liberated as women because they feel freed from society’s fixation on appearances. The converts emphasized equality and justice between the sexes, while at the same time arguing that “women should obey their husbands and live properly according to Islam.”³⁷⁷

In a separate article written for the Nordic Gender Institute, Sjöqvist explains the Western female converts’ critical views of Western society:

In Western society women are forced to run between home, day-care, school and working life. Combining a functioning everyday life with two working careers is seen as impossible; it is simply unfeasible to achieve a happy marriage and healthy children if both parents are forced to work outside the home. Furthermore, Western women are considered to be fixated on their looks and their bodies are seen as sexualized. The negative effects of life in Western society are obvious: women are stressed, burnt-out and ill. They become shattered and must give up their children. Western men are perceived as being more interested in their own hobbies such as sports and alcohol than in thinking about the well-being of their families... Among Muslims, a woman’s tasks in the home are valued as highly as a man’s occupation. For the first time in their lives, they feel free.³⁷⁸



³⁷⁷ Abdelrahman, “A Leap of Faith.”

³⁷⁸ Madeleine Sultán Sjöqvist, “In a Secular Society, Swedish Women who Convert to Islam,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.nikk.uio.no/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=600>.

CHAPTER 12

Stories of Women Turning to the Hijab and the Niqab

The purpose of this chapter is to listen to the voices of some Muslim women about their understanding of and experiences with the veil. These stories and interviews of Muslim women wearing the hijab will show us that veiling is not a sign of male domination, as is often wrongly perceived by Westerners. It is, in fact, a liberating force for many Muslim women, as has been shown in the previous chapters.

The return of the hijab

Despite the Western media's onslaughts against the veil, more and more Muslim women today, hailing from every social group, rich and poor, are observing hijab. A century ago, it seemed like the hijab was on the way out in the Muslim world, but the tide is turning now, with an increasing number of Muslim females seen in complete hijab. Interestingly, it is the Muslim youth who are spearheading this Islamic revivalism. On top of this, it is a paradox that this wave of Islamic revivalism amongst the youth is most prominent in Muslim countries that were forcefully modernized according to Western standards. Professor John Esposito beautifully elucidates this when he writes:

The history of modern Islam has challenged many presuppositions and expectations. The prevailing wisdom was that modernization required the separation of religion from public life, as modernizing

societies progressively and inevitably became secularized... Islamic revivalism... has countered and discredited such a uniform, evolutionary view of historical change and development. Revivalism has been most visible in countries where modernism had been strongest. Moreover, technology and modern education have often been used to reinforce rather than undermine belief and practice.³⁷⁹

This phenomenon of the return of the hijab is observed in Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike. Dr. Malik Badri, a renowned Sudanese Muslim clinical psychologist, vividly recalls that when he was doing his Ph.D. in England, back in 1959, he used to see that:

...many of the wives of my Muslim friends cast off their Islamic hijab of long robes and head or face cover to wear Western style dress. They felt at the time that everybody in the street would be astonished and see them as being strangely dressed, backward or reactionary.³⁸⁰

Today, however, Muslims are no longer apologetic towards the modernists. Dr. Badri states:

Nowadays, thanks to Islamic revivalism, nobody in London's Oxford Street would be amazed to see fully-covered Muslim women.³⁸¹

In 1995, when the United Nations held its Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, a group of lesbians gathered around a tent of Arab and North African Muslim women and chanted aggressive slogans against Islam while dancing seductively and singing pro-lesbian songs. The Malaysian daily newspaper *The Sun* reported on September 9, 1995 that Muslim women from Malaysia spoke out against these lesbians, describing this insult as "reminiscent of the

³⁷⁹ Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

³⁸⁰ Badri, *The AIDS Crisis*.

³⁸¹ Badri, *The AIDS Crisis*.

Orientalist/colonialist insistence at liberating Muslim women by tearing their veils.” The Muslim women of Malaysia reminded the West that “today Muslims who are veiled include doctors, lawyers and professors. This should not come as a surprise because Islam does not oppress women.”

Reuters distributed a news report on November 2, 2009 with the title “Battle over Face Veil Brewing in Egypt,” written by Mariam Karouny. Following sarcastic remarks about the practice of face-veiling in Islam, it admitted that the niqab has become more prevalent in the last few years in Egypt:

Just 30 years ago, women attended Egypt’s flagship Cairo University wearing miniskirts and sleeveless tops. They strolled along the beaches of Alexandria in skimpy swimsuits at a time when society was seemingly more liberal and tolerant.

Analysts say the headscarf, or hijab, was seen as a status indicator and was prevalent among lower-income classes. Women from upper and middle classes rarely veiled at a young age and those who did usually followed fashionable interpretations of hijab. The niqab was uncommon at that time.

But the niqab has become more prevalent. Women in flowing black robes are a common sight strolling through Egypt’s fanciest shopping malls and five-star hotels, as well as in shanties.

Egypt is not the only Muslim country that is witnessing the return of the hijab. As mentioned earlier, the burqa has become very popular among village women in Bangladesh. The same has been observed in Pakistan, as noted earlier in the sociological study by Slocum, Akhtar and Sahi.

On October 8, 2006, *Time* magazine published a report, titled “No Dates, No Dancing: Why Pakistan’s University Students are Embracing the Fundamentalist Life,” about the wave of Islamic awakening among the youth in Pakistan. The writer of the article,

Aryan Baker, described the atmosphere of the Punjab University of Pakistan as follows:

Walk around the leafy-green 1,800-acre campus, and you will encounter nothing that resembles frivolous undergraduate behavior. Musical concerts are banned, and men and women are segregated in the dining halls. Many female students attend class wearing headscarves that cover everything but their eyes... What's most striking about that climate of conservatism is that it is being driven not by faculty but by students.

At the Punjab University, Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT) is the biggest student group on campus, influencing not just the student lifestyle but also the curriculum and the course syllabi. Baker comments:

A visit to Punjab University reveals what that means in practice. About 2,400 of the university's 24,000 students belong to I.J.T. Members are expected to live morally and to abide by the Koran's injunction to spread good and suppress evil. For many, that involves adopting an austere lifestyle. Members meet for regular study sessions and must attend all-night prayer meetings at least once a month. Outside the classroom, complete segregation of the genders is strictly observed.

In the February 2001 issue of the Indian monthly magazine *Islamic Voice*, M. H. Lakdawala from Mumbai reported that "from parental pressure to peer pressure to self-choice, Purdah, Hijab or Burqa has come full circle," and that today, the hijab is increasingly being seen as an "ideal costume and a social leveler by Mumbai girls."³⁸² According to Lakdawala, the hijab is becoming a fashion statement for the new generation. To support his contention, Lakdawala interviewed some Muslim girls from Mumbai, whose experiences will be summarized here:³⁸³

³⁸² Lakdawala, "Hijab is Back in Mumbai."

³⁸³ Lakdawala, "Hijab is Back in Mumbai."

Unaiza – Third year student, Maharashtra College

Eve-teasing [sexual harassment] is not a new concept and most certainly, every girl at some point in time has been victim to it. That's where the hijab comes to the rescue.

Kavita – Hindu Classmate of Zeenat Baig

Zeenat Baig was a management student and the only Muslim in her class. Her classmates used to tease her for being 'orthodox'. When she explained to her classmates the advantages of the face-veil, their attitude towards her changed completely. Kavita, a classmate and friend of Baig, observed that most men were very courteous to women wearing the hijab. Despite being a Hindu, Kavita admitted that if she were given the option, she would wear the face-veil just so that she could walk on the street without having to worry about sexual harassment.

Tabbassum – Tibbia Unani Medical College

The veil has connotations that ward off male attention. It signifies a certain sense of security, maybe the girl's father or brother is around, is a thought that would come to mind.

Yasmin Sayed – Burhani College

It's pure psychology. If a man cannot see the face, he would not risk making a pass; just in case the seemingly delicate girl turns out to be an old lady, his nightmare would come alive.

Shahnaz – Post-graduate student, Mumbai University

Shahnaz told the interviewer that besides the safety aspect, the hijab can also reduce the difference between the haves and the have-nots.

“Who can tell that the dress beneath is worth ten thousand or a mere hundred?”

Farhana – Post-graduate student, Mumbai University

Farhana pointed out that one advantage of outer garments is that the clothes under it do not get dirty, and no one can tell how many times her favourite dress has been worn.

Rabia – Post-graduate student, Mumbai University

Rabia, who was wearing the burqa (a long gown with a face-veil), pointed out that it protected her from the ultraviolet rays of the sun. “This is the perfect solution to pollution and tanning. No more greasy or ineffective sun-screens.”

In the last two centuries, Muslims have suffered from inferiority complexes, especially during the age of Western colonial rule in Muslim lands. Today there is an emerging wave of religious awareness among Muslim youth, and an increasing number of Muslim girls observe the hijab and the niqab. Indeed, the modern era is witnessing the return of the hijab and the niqab.

The story of Sister Tara Blackthorn

Sister Tara Blackthorn, who had been Catholic, embraced Islam at the age of 17. She has shared on the Internet the stories of her conversion to Islam and her adopting the niqab.

She embraced Islam when she was in the eleventh grade. Before declaring her testimony of faith, she had started to wear a jilbab and a hijab. After one of her Muslim friends explained the virtues of, and the evidence for, wearing the face-veil, Tara made up her mind

that she would begin wearing the niqab the day after school ended that year. Later, she started asking herself why she was waiting until the summer vacation. She wondered whether she was worried about the reaction of her peers and reluctant to deal with their questioning gazes and harsh comments. Being a very God-conscious person, she wondered how much weight she should give to the opinion of her peers over the commandment of Allah (ﷻ). At the same time, she was worried about taking the subway while wearing her niqab, since she had already received vicious stares from some passengers due to her jilbab and hijab.

Sister Tara Blackthorn went through this mental conflict until she attended the very next Friday prayer. The imam of the congregation stated in his sermon that life in this world is very short and that death can come anytime. The message of the imam pierced her heart. She was deeply moved by it and started to realise that she had no guarantee of surviving until the end of school term. Finally, she made the decision:

I made up my mind that from that Saturday, I will be wearing my khimar a little bit differently, with only my eyes showing. I am still wearing the niqab and I have not regretted my decision. For those of you who live in New York City and know the state of their public transportation system, I hope it gives you strength to start your own niqab by knowing that I take the subway (train) and sometimes the bus at least 5 times a week in my niqab. Whenever I take the subway, I remind myself of the hadith that says that if the whole world wanted to harm you, they wouldn't be able to, unless Allah willed it. May Allah raise your Iman [faith] and reward in the Hereafter.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ Tara Blackthorn, "My Niqab Story," accessed January 8, 2015, http://www.muslimconverts.com/hijab_niqab/niqab_tara.htm.

How I came to love the veil – Yvonne Ridley

Yvonne Ridley has been an award-winning journalist for more than 25 years and is the author of two books: *In The Hands of the Taliban* and *Ticket to Paradise*. She has spent the last ten years working for several prestigious Fleet Street newspapers including *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Independent* and *The Sunday Express*. She has also worked with television and radio, producing several documentaries from Iraq and Afghanistan. Ridley has very eloquently explained how she came to love the veil:

Politicians and journalists just love to write about the oppression of women in Islam... without even talking to the females beneath the veil.

They simply have no idea how Muslim women are protected and respected within the Islamic framework which was built more than 1400 years ago...

I used to look at veiled women as quiet, oppressed creatures and now I look at them as multi-skilled, multi-talented, resilient women whose brand of sisterhood makes Western feminism pale into insignificance. My views changed after the truly terrifying experience of being arrested by the Taleban for sneaking into Afghanistan in September 2001 wearing the bhurka [burqa].

During my 10-day captivity I struck a deal that if they let me go I would read the Quran and study Islam. Against all the odds, it worked and I was released. In return I kept my word but as a journalist covering the Middle East I realized I needed to expand my knowledge of a religion which was clearly a way of life.

And no. I'm not a victim of Stockholm Syndrome.³⁸⁵ To be a victim you have to bond with your captors. During my imprisonment I spat, swore, cursed and abused my jailers as well as refusing their food and going on hunger strike. I don't know who was happier when I was released – them or me!

Reading the Quran was, I thought, going to be a very simple academic exercise. I was stunned to discover that it clearly stated women are equal in spirituality, education and worth. A woman's gift for child birth and child-rearing is very much recognised as a quality and attribute. Muslim women say with pride they are homemakers and housewives...

With Islam choosing to remain at home and raise children takes on a new dignity and respect in my eyes, similar to those sisters among us who choose to go out to work and have careers and professions.

I then began looking at inheritance, tax, property and divorce laws. This is where Hollywood divorce lawyers probably get their inspiration from. For instance the woman gets to keep what she earns and owns while the man has to stump up half his worth.

Isn't it funny the way the tabloid media gets very excited over the prospect of some pop or film stars pre-nuptial wedding agreement? Muslim women have had wedding contracts from day one. They can choose if they want to work or not and anything they earn is theirs to spend while the husband has to pay for all the household bills and the upkeep of his family.

Just about everything that feminists strived for in the 70s was already available to Muslim women 1400 years ago.

³⁸⁵ "Stockholm Syndrome" describes the behaviour of kidnap victims who, over time, develop feelings of trust, affection, and sympathy for their captors. (Editor)

As I said, Islam dignifies and brings respect to motherhood and being a wife. If you want to stay at home, stay at home. It is a great honor to be a home maker and the first educator of your children. But equally, the Quran states if you want to work, then work. Be a career woman, learn a profession become a politician. Be what you want to be and excel in what you do as a Muslim because everything you do is in praise of Allah (ﷻ).

There is an excessive, almost irritating concentration or focus on the issue of Muslim women's dress particularly by men (both Muslim and non-Muslim).

Yes, it is an obligation for Muslim women to dress modestly but, in addition, there are many other important issues which concern Muslim women today.

And yet everyone obsesses over the hijab. Look, it is part of my business suit. This tells you I am a Muslim and therefore I expect to be treated with respect.

Can you imagine if someone told a Wall Street executive or Washington banker to put on a t-shirt and jeans? He would tell you his business suit defines him during work hours, marks him out to be treated seriously.

And yet in Britain we have had the former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw describing the nikab – the face veil revealing only the eyes – as an unwelcome barrier. When, oh when, will men learn to keep their mouths shut over a woman's wardrobe?

We also had Government Ministers Gordon Brown and John Reid express disparaging remarks about the nikab – both these men come from over the Scottish Borders where men wear skirts!!

Then we had a series of other parliamentarians enter the fray describing the nikab as a barrier for communication. What a load of nonsense. If this was the case can anyone explain to me why cell phones, landlines, emails, text messaging and fax machines

are in daily use? Who listens to the radio? No one switches off the wireless because they cannot see the face of the presenter.

The majority of sisters I know who choose to wear the nikab are actually white, Western reverts who no longer want the unwelcome attention of those few leering men who will try and confront females and launch into inappropriate behavior. Mind you, there are a couple of London sisters I know who say they wear the nikab at anti-war marches because they can't stand the smell of spliffs.

I am afraid Islamophobia has become the last refuge of the racist scoundrel. But the cowardly, chauvinistic attacks launched – largely by men – is unacceptable to Muslimahs as well as their secular, female sisters from the left.

I was a feminist for many years and now, as an Islamic feminist, I still promote women's rights. The only difference is Muslim feminists are more radical than their secular counterparts. We all hate those ghastly beauty pageants, and tried to stop laughing when the emergence of Miss Afghanistan in bikini was hailed as a giant leap for women's liberation in Afghanistan.

I've been back to Afghanistan many times and I can tell you there are no career women emerging from the rubble in Kabul. My Afghan sisters say they wish the West would drop its obsession with the burka. "Don't try turning me into a career woman, get my husband a job first. Show me how I can send my children to school without fear of them being kidnapped. Give me security and bread on the table," one sister told me.

Young feminist Muslimahs see the hijab and the nikab as political symbols as well as a religious requirement. Some say it is their way of showing the world they reject the excesses of Western lifestyles such as binge drinking, casual sex, drug-taking etc.

Superiority in Islam is accomplished through piety, not beauty, wealth, power, position or sex.

Now you tell me what is more liberating. Being judged on the length of your skirt and the size of your cosmetically enhanced breasts, or being judged on your character, mind and intelligence?

Glossy magazines tell us as women that unless we are tall, slim and beautiful we will be unloved and unwanted. The pressure on teenage magazine readers to have a boyfriend is almost obscene.

Islam tells me that I have a right to an education and it is my duty to go out and seek knowledge whether I am single or married...³⁸⁶

A view through the hijab – impressions of a Japanese convert to Islam

Nakata Khaula, who is Japanese, embraced Islam in France in January 1991, one month after her first encounter with it. In her book *A View through the Hijab*, as well as her oft-quoted articles, she has described her journey from a headscarf to niqab after accepting Islam.

After embracing Islam, Khaula initially started wearing the headscarf. As a Japanese woman residing in a foreign country, she felt uneasy in public places, but with the scarf on, she felt somewhat protected from the impolite stares. When she returned to her small Japanese town, she continued to observe the five daily prayers and wear the scarf. It was certainly a test of her faith, with no other Muslim in that town. When she realized that Islam prohibits women from wearing clothes that reveal the shape of their bodies in public, she started wearing loose clothes.

Six months after her conversion, Khaula travelled to Egypt. There, she was surprised to learn that her hostess was covered in black from

³⁸⁶ Yvonne Ridley, “How I Came to Love the Veil,” accessed January 8, 2015, <http://yvonneridley.org/analysis-and-opinion/how-i-came-to-love-the-veil>.

head to toe, including her face, when she went out in public. “At that time, my Islamic knowledge was very limited, and I believed that covering the face stemmed from ethnic tradition, having no foundation within Islam,” recalled Khaula. However, Khaula sewed a long black dress and a long head cover. Most of the Egyptian women with whom Khaula stayed firmly believed that covering the face was part of their religious duty, but they did not force Khaula and left it to her choice. Although those sisters who veiled constituted only a small portion within the multicultural and secularized city of Cairo, Khaula made one interesting observation:

Average westernized Egyptians kept their distance from the covered Muslim women, calling them “*al-akhawāt*” (“the sisters”). Yet at the same time, men treated them with special respect and politeness. These “sisters” seemed also to share a special bond. Generally speaking, the women who completely veiled were more conscientious of their belief. Those who wore simple scarves or none at all appeared unconcerned with their religious obligation.³⁸⁷

Soon afterwards, she returned to Japan. Three months later, she accompanied her husband to Saudi Arabia, where he found employment. Since Khaula was already curious about how she would feel behind the face-veil, she prepared a small, black face-cover. She describes her view through the niqab:

Previously I had wondered how easily sisters could breathe under a veil. It seemed to be a matter of habit; once accustomed to it, there was no inconvenience. The first time I wore the *niqāb* I felt nice, in fact extremely wonderful, as if I had become a special person. I felt like the owner of a masterpiece who enjoyed its secret pleasure. I had a treasure which no one knew about and which strangers were not allowed to see... Thus, I have experienced the *hijāb* from its simplest to its complete form.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Nakata, *A View Through The Hijab*.

³⁸⁸ Nakata, *A View Through The Hijab*.

Why I shed the bikini for the niqab: the new symbol for women's liberation

Sara Bokker was raised as a Christian and is a former actress, model and fitness instructor. Currently, Bokker is the Director of Communications at "The March For Justice," and she is also a co-founder of "The Global Sisters Network." When she embraced Islam after the events of September 11, 2001, many of her admirers were shocked. In the following lines, Sara Bokker has described her journey from a bikini to the niqab:

I am an American woman who was born in the midst of America's "Heartland." I grew up, just like any other girl, being fixated with the glamour of life in "the big city." Eventually, I moved to Florida and on to South Beach of Miami, a hotspot for those seeking the "glamorous life."...

As the gap continued to progressively widen between my self-fulfillment and lifestyle, I sought refuge in escapes from alcohol and parties to meditation, activism, and alternative religions, only to have the little gap widen to what seemed like a valley. I eventually realized it all was merely a pain killer rather than an effective remedy.

By now it was September 11, 2001. As I witnessed the ensuing barrage on Islam, Islamic values and culture, and the infamous declaration of the "new crusade," I started to notice something called Islam. Up until that point, all I had associated with Islam was women covered in "tents," wife beaters, harems, and a world of terrorism...

One day I came across a book that is negatively stereotyped in the West--The Holy Qur'an...

I found the Qur'an to be a very insightful address to heart and soul without the need for an interpreter or pastor.

Eventually I hit a moment of truth: my new-found self-fulfilling activism was nothing more than merely embracing a faith called Islam where I could live in peace as a “functional” Muslim.

I bought a beautiful long gown and head cover resembling the Muslim woman’s dress code and I walked down the same streets and neighborhoods where only days earlier I had walked in my shorts, bikini, or “elegant” western business attire. Although the people, the faces, and the shops were all the same, one thing was remarkably distinct – I was not – nor was the peace at being a woman I experienced for the very first time. I felt as if the chains had been broken and I was finally free. I was delighted with the new looks of wonder on people’s faces in place of the looks of a hunter watching his prey I had once sought. Suddenly a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I no longer spent all my time consumed with shopping, makeup, getting my hair done, and working out. Finally, I was free...

While content with Hijab I became curious about Niqab, seeing an increasing number of Muslim women in it. I asked my Muslim husband, whom I married after I reverted to Islam, whether I should wear Niqab or just settle for the Hijab I was already wearing. My husband simply advised me that he believes Hijab is mandatory in Islam while Niqab is not. At the time, my Hijab consisted of head scarf that covered all my hair except for my face, and a loose long black gown called “Abaya” that covered all my body from neck to toe.

A year-and-a-half passed, and I told my husband I wanted to wear Niqab. My reason, this time, was that I felt it would be more pleasing to Allah, the Creator, increasing my feeling of peace at being more modest. He supported my decision and took me to buy an “Isdaal,” a loose black gown that covers from head to toe, and Niqab, which covers all my head and face except for my eyes.

Soon enough, news started breaking about politicians, Vatican clergymen, libertarians, and so-called human rights and freedom activists condemning Hijab at times, and Niqab at others as being oppressive to women, an obstacle to social integration, and more recently, as an Egyptian official called it – “a sign of backwardness.”

I find it to be a blatant hypocrisy when Western governments and so-called human rights groups rush to defend woman’s rights when some governments impose a certain dress code on women, yet such “freedom fighters” look the other way when women are being deprived of their rights, work, and education just because they choose to exercise their right to wear Niqab or Hijab. Today, women in Hijab or Niqab are being increasingly barred from work and education not only under totalitarian regimes such as in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, but also in Western democracies such as France, Holland, and Britain.

Today I am still a feminist, but a Muslim feminist, who calls on Muslim women to assume their responsibilities in providing all the support they can for their husbands to be good Muslims. To raise their children as upright Muslims so they may be beacons of light for all humanity once again. To enjoin good – any good – and to forbid evil – any evil. To speak righteousness and to speak up against all ills. To fight for our right to wear Niqab or Hijab and to please our Creator whichever way we chose. But just as importantly to carry our experience with Niqab or Hijab to fellow women who may never have had the chance to understand what wearing Niqab or Hijab means to us and why do we, so dearly, embrace it.

Most of the women I know wearing Niqab are Western reverts, some of whom are not even married. Others wear Niqab without full support of either family or surroundings. What we all have in

common is that it is the personal choice of each and every one of us, which none of us is willing to surrender...

I couldn't be happier to shed my bikini in South Beach and the "glamorous" Western lifestyle to live in peace with my Creator and enjoy living among fellow humans as a worthy person. It is why I choose to wear Niqab, and why I will die defending my inalienable right to wear it. Today, Niqab is the new symbol of woman's liberation.

To women who surrender to the ugly stereotype against the Islamic modesty of Hijab, I say: You don't know what you are missing.³⁸⁹



³⁸⁹ Sara Bokker, "Why I Shed Bikini for Niqab: The New Symbol of Women's Liberation," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.albalagh.net/women/0097.shtml>.

CHAPTER 13

Closing Remarks

*I*t is not the eyes of a woman in purdah but the anxious darkly circled eyes of a girl with anorexia nervosa – the woman trapped inside – that needs to be liberated from the invisible cultural confines of the west. The Burqa and the bikini represent opposite ends of spectrum. We need to find out which one actually exert [sic] a noose-like grip on the psyche, social and physical health of girls and women before jeering at others or internationalising our values. Abid Ullah Jan (Canadian Journalist)³⁹⁰

Now that this book is about to conclude, it is hoped that the arguments presented to the readers from the Qur'an, hadiths and modern scientific research will all prove that the social system of Islam is superior to any other social system. Islamic teachings, when correctly applied, never oppress women. In fact, Islam is the most female-friendly religion on the planet. In Islam, women have a constructive role to play in the society. The liberation of women in Islam is far superior to Western liberation, for it allows women to live with respect, dignity and equality in society. A truly liberated woman always dresses decently and modestly. The hijab empowers Muslim women by making their identities distinct, allowing them

³⁹⁰ Abid Ullah Jan, "The Choice between Burqa or Bikini," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.ummah.com/forum/showthread.php?12157-The-Choice-Between-Burqa-and-Bikini>.

to take control of their bodies and protect their modesty. No woman is truly liberated if she is the target of the male gaze or exploitation in the society. The true Islamic hijab gives an aura of freedom to womankind, facilitating their movement and protecting them from provocation and the wanton greed of human wolves. Removal of the hijab makes them vulnerable to the lust of men in the society. If we look at the glossy cover of any magazine or advertisements on TV and in the newspaper, we will find that most of these advertisements have scantily dressed women in alluring poses so as to attract the attention of men. This is not liberation but degradation of women. It shows that Western society considers women to be a sex symbol.

Today the Western media is very quick to condemn Islamic laws that protect purity of purpose and prohibit the intermingling of the sexes, at all levels of society, outside the family. The Islamic approach to vice and corruption in the society is to nip the evil in the bud. The hijab is an important pillar in Islam's reform of the society, and it blocks the attractiveness of a woman from other men. That attractiveness has a very useful function within marriage, but it is very destructive outside of it. Islam offers a practical solution to the problem of immorality in the society. Islam does not permit illegitimate seclusion of a man and woman, except in the case of some unmarriageable relatives (like a man's wife, mother, sister, daughter or aunt). Islam nips the evil in the bud before it can lead to moral disasters. Islam minimizes social situations where improper conduct may occur. If women were to follow the Islamic standards of dress and conduct, then incidences of sexual harassment would become negligible, and we would be able to eliminate a major source of oppression of women in society.

Today, we know that the differences between the two genders are deeper than merely the differences in their reproductive systems. The differences in men and women lie in the brain and its structure. This difference is at the core of our being. No amount of social engineering can eliminate the differences between men and women, and various

case studies in the books of clinical psychology bear witness to this fact. Yes, men and women are equal, but equality does not mean behaving like one another. Women have their own independent personalities, distinct from that of men.

An attempt has been made in this book to show that opposition to Islamic law and its teachings is an opposition to science. We can clearly see that science affirms that there is an innate distinction between the sexes, a distinction that Allah has commanded us to celebrate, not suppress. The social structure of Islam is quite different from that of the modern secular West, although Western modern science itself affirms the truth of Islam regarding the inherent gender differences between men and women. It is a pity that in the Muslim world itself, modernist Islamic scholars – the secularists as well as the apologetics – are not aware of the new feminism and the emerging science of brain sex. From the secular governments of certain Muslim countries to the emerging feminists in the Middle East, to feminist women like Taslima Nasreen in Bangladesh or Fatima Mernissi of Morocco, all of them are still living in the epoch of old-age science. They continue to insist that gender differences and inequalities in the workplace can be reversed with social engineering. However, no matter what feminists and social engineers do to change the nature of men and women, it always comes back, as in the old Latin proverb:

Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque revenit

“You can drive nature out with a pitchfork, but she always comes back.”

The Muslim Woman ‘Unveiled’ (A Poem about the Hijab)

By Izdehar Albowyha:

*You look at me and call me oppressed,
Simply because of the way I’m dressed,*

*You know me not for what's inside,
You judge the clothing I wear with pride,
My body's not for your eyes to hold,
You must speak to my mind, not my feminine mold,
I'm an individual, I'm no man's slave,
It's Allah's pleasure that I only crave,
I have a voice so I will be heard,
For in my heart I carry His word,
"O ye women, wrap close your cloak,
So you won't be bothered by ignorant folk,"
Man doesn't tell me to dress this way,
It's a Law from God that I obey,
Oppressed is something I'm truly NOT,
For liberation is what I've got,
It was given to me many centuries ago,
With the right to prosper, the right to grow,
I can climb mountains or cross the seas,
Expand my mind in all degrees,
For God Himself gave us LIB-ER-TY,
When He sent Islam,
To You and Me.
Behind the veil I am the queen.
I have a body that nobody's seen.
Many people think I am oppressed-
And wonder how I got myself into this mess.
My veil is my cure.
And makes my heart pure.
It earns me my love from Allah my Lord.
And makes me strong against any sword.*

*Behind my beautiful veil lies.
My savior from the temptation of guys!
“Behind my veil,” I begin to say.
“Is where I shall forever stay!”³⁹¹*



³⁹¹ Izdehar Albowyha, “The Muslim Woman ‘Unveiled’”, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://jamiat.org.za/blog/the-muslim-woman-unveiledpoem/>.

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Appendix

Arabic Text of Hadiths and Quotes Cited in this Book

Chapter 1

-1-

﴿...حَفِظَتُ لِلْغَيْبِ...﴾ (سورة النساء: ٣٤)

In the Qur'an, pious women are mentioned as *ḥāfidhât al-ghayb* (those guarding the unseen) (*Qur'an* 4: 34).

-2-

«الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعٌ، وَخَيْرُ مَتَاعِ الدُّنْيَا الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ». (رواه مسلم)

«The world is but a (passing) pleasure, and the best of its pleasures is a righteous woman.» (Muslim)

Chapter 5

-3-

«عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْبَيْتِ؛ فَإِنَّهُ جِهَادُكُمْ.»

«Take care of your home, for that is your jihad (striving in Allah's cause).» (Recorded by Aḥmad with a weak chain of narration)

-4-

«تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوُلُودَ؛ فَإِنِّي مُكَاثِرٌ بِكُمْ الْأُمَمَ». (أَخْرَجَهُ أَبُو دَاوُدَ
وَالنَّسَائِيُّ وَابْنُ حِبَّانَ)

«Marry women who are loving and prolific (in producing children), for I shall outnumber the (other) nations by you (on the Day of Judgement).» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood, an-Nasâ'i, and Ibn Hibbân)

-5-

«بُعِنْتُ بِجَوَامِعِ الْكَلِمِ..». (أَخْرَجَهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ)

«I have been given the keys of eloquent speech.» (Bukhari)

Chapter 6

-6-

«قَدْ أَدِنَ اللَّهُ لَكُنَّ أَنْ تَخْرُجْنَ لِحَوَائِجِكُنَّ». (أَخْرَجَهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ)

«It is permissible for you (women) to go out for your needs.» (Bukhari)

Chapter 8

-7-

وَالْحِلْبَابُ هُوَ: الرِّدَاءُ فَوْقَ الْخِمَارِ. قَالَ ابْنُ مَسْعُودٍ، وَعُبَيْدَةَ، وَقَتَادَةَ،
وَالْحَسَنُ الْبَصْرِيُّ، وَسَعِيدُ بْنُ جَبْرِ، وَإِبْرَاهِيمُ النَّخَعِيُّ، وَعَطَاءُ الْخِرَاسَانِيُّ،
وغير واحد.

تفسير القرآن العظيم لابن كثير

Jilbab refers to the cloak that is worn above the *khimâr* [head covering]. ‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ood, ‘Ubaydah, Qatâdah, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri, Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr, Ibrâheem an-Nakha‘i, ‘Aṭâ’

al-Khorâsâni, all of them considered this to be the meaning of jilbab.

-8-

عن ابن عباس أمر الله نساء المؤمنين إذا خرجن من بيوتهن في حاجة أن يُعْطِينَ وُجُوهَهُنَّ من فوق رؤوسهنَّ بِالْجَلَابِيبِ، وَيُبْدِينَ عَيْنًا وَاحِدَةً.

تفسير القرآن العظيم لابن كثير

Allah commanded the believing women to cover their faces from over their heads, with jalâbeeb, and to expose [only] one eye, whenever they come out of their homes for a necessity.

-9-

وقال ابنُ عباس وعُبيدة: أمر نساء المؤمنين أن يُعْطِينَ رؤوسَهُنَّ وُجُوهَهُنَّ بِالْجَلَابِيبِ إِلَّا عَيْنًا وَاحِدَةً.

معالم التنزيل في تفسير القرآن للبعوي

Ibn ‘Abbâs and ‘Ubaydah have said that Allah has commanded Muslim women to cover their heads and faces, except for one eye.

-10-

ومعنى ﴿يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ﴾: يُرْخِيهَا عَلَيْهِنَّ، وَيُعْطِينَ بها وُجُوهَهُنَّ وَأَعْطَاهُنَّ.

الكشاف للزمخشري

“They draw their cloaks over their bodies and cover their faces.”

-11-

قال ابن حجر: فاخْتَمَرْنَ أَي: فَغَطَّيْنَ وُجُوهَهُنَّ.

فتح الباري شرح صحيح البخاري لابن حجر العسقلاني

Her saying “used them as khimaars” means we covered our faces with them.

-12-

عَنْ فَاطِمَةَ بِنْتِ الْمُنْذِرِ أُمِّهَا قَالَتْ: كُنَّا نُخَمِّرُ وُجُوهَنَا وَنَحْنُ مُحْرِمَاتٌ،
وَنَحْنُ مَعَ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ. (أخرجه مالك في الموطأ)

Fâtimah bint al-Mundhir narrated, “We used to veil our faces when we were in *ihrâm* (the state of consecration for Hajj or ‘umrah) in the company of Asmâ’ bint Abi Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddeeq.”

-13-

قل للمليحة في الخمار المذهب أفسدت نسك أخي التقى المذهب
نور الخمار ونور خدك تحته عجباً لوجهك كيف لم يتلهب
جلباب المرأة المسلمة في الكتاب والسنة لمحمد ناصر الدين الألباني

You should tell Maleeḥah [the name of the woman with whom the poet fell in love]: You have destroyed the piety and holiness of my brother because of your golden-coloured khimâr. There is a radiance of your khimâr, and then there is also radiance of your cheeks beneath the khimâr. I am surprised at your face; [with so much luminosity,] why is it still not blazing?

-14-

فقد وصفها بأنَّ خمارها كان على وجهها أيضًا.
جلباب المرأة المسلمة في الكتاب والسنة لمحمد ناصر الدين الألباني

“The poet has mentioned the attribute of his beloved – that the khimâr [cloak] was on her face.”

-15-

فليس عليهن حرج ولا إثم أن يضعن ثيابهن، يعني: جلابيبن، وهي القناع الذي يكون فوق الخمار، والرداء الذي يكون فوق الثياب، لا حرج عليهن أن يضعن ذلك عند المحارم من الرجال، وغير المحارم من الغرباء غير متبرجات بزينة.

جامع البيان في تأويل القرآن للطبري

There is no sin upon these [old] women if they remove their [thiyâb], meaning their jilbab, which is the face covering [qinâ] that is worn over the khimâr, and also the cloak [ridâ] that is worn above the clothes [thiyâb]. There is no sin for such women if they remove this in front of related and non-related males, as long as these women do not show their adornment.

-16-

يعني: يضعن بعض ثيابهن، وهي الجلباب والرداء الذي فوق الثياب، والقناع، الذي فوق الخمار، فأما الخمار فلا يجوز وضعه.

معالم التنزيل في تفسير القرآن للبخاري

It means that they discard some of their outer clothing, and the latter refers to that cloak and outer covering that is worn over the clothes or the niqab that is worn over the head covering. As far as the head covering is concerned, removing it is not allowed [in front of non-mahram men].

-17-

قَالَتْ: «كُنَّ نِسَاءُ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَشْهَدْنَ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ صَلَاةَ الْفَجْرِ مُتَلَفِّعَاتٍ بِمُرُوطِهِنَّ، ثُمَّ يَنْقَلِبْنَ إِلَى بُيُوتِهِنَّ حِينَ يَفْضِيْنَ الصَّلَاةَ، لَا يَعْرِفُهُنَّ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْغَلَسِ». (أخرجه البخاري)

«‘Ā’ishah (the Mother of the Believers) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to offer the dawn prayer, and some believing women, covered with their veiling sheets, used to attend the dawn prayer with him; then they would return to their homes unrecognized because of the darkness of the night.» (Bukhari)

-18-

قَالَ الدَّوْدِيُّ: مَعْنَاهُ: لَا يَعْرِفْنَ أَنْسَاءَ أَمْ رِجَالًا، يَعْنِي: لَا يَظْهَرُ لِلرَّائِي إِلَّا الْأَشْبَاحَ خَاصَّةً.

فتح الباري لابن حجر العسقلاني

According to ad-Dâwoodi, these words mean that due to the darkness, it was hard for any observer to recognize if they were women or men; they would just appear as human shapes.

-19-

قَوْلُهُ (مَا يُعْرِفَنَّ مِنَ الْعُلْسِ): هُوَ بَقَايَا ظِلَامِ اللَّيْلِ. قَالَ الدَّوْدِيُّ: مَعْنَاهُ مَا يَعْرِفْنَ أَنْسَاءً هُنَّ أَمْ رِجَالًا؟، وَقِيلَ مَا يُعْرِفُ أَعْيَانَهُنَّ؛ وَهَذَا ضَعِيفٌ لِأَنَّ الْمُتَلَفِعَةَ فِي النَّهَارِ أَيْضًا لَا يُعْرِفُ عَيْنَهَا فَلَا يَبْقَى فِي الْكَلَامِ فَائِدَةٌ.

Al-Ghalas means the darkness of the night that still remains [before dawn]. Ad-Dâwoodi states that it means that it was difficult for the observer to recognize if they were women or men. There is another explanation according to which those women's identity was not recognized. This is a weak [argument] because a woman's identity is unrecognizable even during the day if she is *mutalaffi'ah* [wrapped up in a veiling sheet]. Hence, there is no use [in this latter explanation].

-20-

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مَسْلَمَةَ، قَالَ: خَطَبْتُ امْرَأَةً، فَجَعَلْتُ أَنْحِبًا لَهَا، حَتَّى نَظَرْتُ إِلَيْهَا فِي نَخْلٍ لَهَا، فِقِيلَ لَهُ: أَتَفْعَلُ هَذَا وَأَنْتَ صَاحِبُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ؟ فَقَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ، يَقُولُ: «إِذَا أَلْقَى اللَّهُ فِي قَلْبِ امْرِئٍ خِطْبَةَ امْرَأَةٍ، فَلَا بَأْسَ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا». (أخرجه ابن ماجه)

«Muhammad ibn Maslamah narrated that he sent a marriage proposal to a woman and would try to see her secretly until one day, when the woman went to her garden, he was able to see her (while she was unaware of it).

He said: People said to me: You are a Companion of the Messenger of Allah and still you are doing this?

I told them that I heard from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): When a man intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her.» (Recorded by Ibn Mâjah; classed as sound by al-Albâni)

-21-

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، قَالَتْ: أُوَمِتِ امْرَأَةٌ مِنْ وَرَاءِ سِتْرِ بَيْدِهَا كِتَابٌ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ، فَقَبَضَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ يَدَهُ، فَقَالَ: «مَا أَدْرِي أَيْدِ رَجُلٍ، أَمْ يَدِ امْرَأَةٍ؟» قَالَتْ: بَلِ امْرَأَةٌ، قَالَ: «لَوْ كُنْتُ امْرَأَةً لَغَيَّرْتُ أَظْفَارَكَ» يَعْنِي بِالْحِنَاءِ. (أخرجه أبو داود)

«Ā'ishah, the Mother of the Believers, narrated that on one occasion, a woman made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).

The Prophet (ﷺ) closed his hand, saying: I do not know whether this is a man's or a woman's hand.

She responded: It is a woman's hand.

He said: If you are a woman, you should make a difference to your nails, meaning (colour them) with henna.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood and graded as reliable by al-Albâni)

-22-

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَسْعُودٍ رضي الله عنه، قَالَ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صلى الله عليه وسلم: «لَا تَبَاشِرُ الْمَرْأَةُ الْمَرْأَةَ، فَتَنْتَعَهَا لِزَوْجِهَا كَأَنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا». (أخرجه البخاري)

«A woman should not look at or meet another woman and later describe her to her husband so that it was as if he was actually looking at her.» (Bukhari)

-23-

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رضي الله عنه، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم، قَالَ: «الْمَرْأَةُ عَوْرَةٌ، فَإِذَا خَرَجَتْ اسْتَشْرَفَهَا الشَّيْطَانُ». (أخرجه الترمذي وابن حبان والطبراني)

«All of a woman is ‘awrah. When she leaves her home, Satan looks at her.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Hîbbân and at-Ṭabarâni)

-24-

عَنْ نَبِيَّهَانَ، مَكَاتِبِ أُمِّ سَلَمَةَ رضي الله عنها، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أُمَّ سَلَمَةَ، تَقُولُ: قَالَ لَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم: «إِنْ كَانَ لِإِحْدَاكِنَّ مَكَاتِبٌ، كَانَ عِنْدَهُ مَا يُؤَدِّي فَلْتَحْتَجِبِ مِنْهُ». (أخرجه أبو داود)

«When you (women) have a slave who has enough money to make a contract of emancipation with you (in return for a payment), then you must now cover yourself in front of him.» (An acceptable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood; graded weak by al-Albâni)

-25-

عن المغيرة بن شعبة، قال: أتيت النبي ﷺ فذكرت له امرأة أخطبها، فقال: «اذهب فانظر إليها، فإنه أجد أن يؤدم بينكما»، فأتيت امرأة من الأنصار، فخطبتها إلى أبيها، وأخبرتها بقول النبي ﷺ، فكأنها كرها ذلك، قال: فسمعت ذلك المرأة، وهي في خدرها، فقالت: إن كان رسول الله ﷺ أمرك أن تنظر، فانظر، وإلا فأنشدك، كأنها أعظمت ذلك، قال: فنظرت إليها فتزوجتها. (أخرجه ابن ماجه)

«Mugheerah ibn Shu‘bah narrates: I came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and told him about a woman whom I was intending to marry.

The Prophet (ﷺ) told me: You should go and look at her first, for it is the best means of establishing love between the two of you.

Hence, I went to visit her when she was with her parents. While she was in her room, I told her parents of my intention to marry her and informed them about the Prophet’s saying (to me that I should look at her).

The girl’s parents did not seem at ease with this. The girl was standing behind the curtain, and she overheard my conversation with her parents. She said to me from behind the curtain: If Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) has ordered you to see me, then do so. If that is not the case, then I swear by Allah, do not do this to me.

Thus, that woman gave a high regard to the command of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ). I looked at her, and then I married her.» (Recorded by Ibn Mâjah and authenticated by al-Albâni)

-26-

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، قَالَتْ: «كَانَ الرُّكْبَانُ يَمْرُونَ بِنَا وَنَحْنُ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ مُحْرَمَاتٌ، فَإِذَا حَادُوا بِنَا سَدَلْتُ إِحْدَانًا جِلْبَابَهَا مِنْ رَأْسِهَا عَلَى وَجْهِهَا فَإِذَا جَاوَزُونَا كَشَفْنَاهُ». (أخرجه أبو داود)

«Narrated by the Mother of the Believers, ‘Ā’ishah: The riders used to pass us while we were with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in iḥrām. When they got close to us, we would draw our outer cloak (jilbab) from our heads over our faces. When they passed by, we would uncover our faces.» (Recorded by Abu Dâwood; graded weak by al-Albâni)

-27-

عَنْ فَاطِمَةَ بِنْتِ الْمُنْذِرِ، عَنْ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ، رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا قَالَتْ: «كُنَّا نُعْطِي وَجُوهَنَا مِنَ الرَّجَالِ، وَكُنَّا نَتَمَشِّطُ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْإِحْرَامِ». هَذَا حَدِيثٌ صَحِيحٌ عَلَى شَرْطِ الشَّيْخَيْنِ، وَلَمْ يُحْرَجْ جَاهُهُ. (أخرجه الحاكم)

Asmâ’ bint Abi Bakr (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا) narrated, “In the state of iḥrām, we used to veil our faces from (non-maḥram) men, and we would also comb our hair.”

-28-

عَنْ أُمِّ عَطِيَّةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، قَالَتْ: أَمَرْنَا أَنْ نُخْرِجَ الْحَيْضَ يَوْمَ الْعِيدَيْنِ، وَدَوَاتِ الْخُدُورِ فَيَشْهَدَنَّ جَمَاعَةَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَدَعَوَتَهُمْ، وَيَعْتَزِلُ الْحَيْضُ عَنْ مُصَلَّاهُنَّ، قَالَتْ امْرَأَةٌ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِحْدَانَا لَيْسَ لَهَا جِلْبَابٌ؟ قَالَ: «لَتَلْبِسَهَا صَاحِبَتُهَا مِنْ جِلْبَابِهَا». (أخرجه البخاري)

«Narrated by Umm ‘Aṭīyah: We were ordered by Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) to bring out our menstruating women and those in seclusion (*dhawât al-khudoor*) for the religious gatherings and invocations of

Muslims on the two Eid festivals. These menstruating women were to keep away from their prayer mats.

A woman asked: O Allah's Messenger! What about one who does not have a jilbab?

He said: Let her share the jilbab of her companion.» (Bukhari)

-29-

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، قَالَتْ: «يَرْحَمُ اللَّهُ نِسَاءَ الْمُهَاجِرَاتِ الْأَوَّلِ، لَمَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ: ﴿وَلِيَضْرِبْنَ بِحُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ﴾ [النور: ٣١] شَقَّقْنَ مِرْوَطَهُنَّ فَأَخْتَمَرْنَ بِهَا». (أخرجه البخاري)

‘Ā’ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا used to say:

May Allah have mercy on the first emigrant women. When Allah revealed:

﴿And tell the believing women to... wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests...﴾ (Qur’an 24: 31),

they tore off their aprons or waist sheets and used them as khimârs (head covers). (Bukhari)

-30-

رَوَى بَنُ عُسَيْبَةَ عَنْ إِسْمَاعِيلَ بْنِ أَبِي خَالِدٍ قَالَ: أَخْبَرْتَنِي أُمِّي وَأَخْتِي أَنَّهُمَا دَخَلَتَا عَلَى عَائِشَةَ أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَسَأَلَتَاهَا: كَيْفَ تَحْمُرُ الْمَرْأَةُ وَجْهَهَا؟ فَأَخَذَتْ أَسْفَلَ خِمَارِهَا فَغَطَّتْ بِهِ وَجْهَهَا.

الاستذكار لابن عبد البر

Ibn ‘Uyaynah narrated: Ismâ‘eel ibn Khâlid said that his mother and his sister reported to him that the two of them went to ‘Ā’ishah (the Mother of the Believers) and asked her how a woman could cover her face (*tukhammiru wajjahâ*). ‘Ā’ishah took the lower portion of her khimâr and covered her face with it.

-31-

وَرَوَى ابْنُ أَبِي خَيْثَمَةَ مِنْ طَرِيقِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ بْنِ أَبِي خَالِدٍ عَنْ أُمِّهِ قَالَتْ كُنَّا نَدْخُلُ عَلَى أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ التَّرْوِيَةِ فَقُلْتُ لَهَا يَا أُمَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ هُنَا امْرَأَةٌ تَأْتِي أَنْ تَغْطِيَ وَجْهَهَا وَهِيَ مُحْرِمَةٌ فَرَفَعَتْ عَائِشَةُ خِمَارَهَا مِنْ صَدْرِهَا فَغَطَّتْ بِهِ وَجْهَهَا.

التلخيص الحبير لابن حجر العسقلاني

We [women] used to visit ‘Ā’ishah [Mother of the Believers] on the 8th of Dhul-Hijjah. I told her: O Mother of the Believers, we have a woman here who refuses to cover her face in the state of iḥrām. ‘Ā’ishah took the lower portion of her khimâr from her chest and veiled her face with it.

-32-

عن ابن عباس أمر الله نساء المؤمنين إذا خرجن من بيوتهن في حاجة أن يغطين وجوههن من فوق رؤوسهن بالجلابيب ويبدن عينا واحدة.

تفسير القرآن العظيم لابن كثير

Allah commanded that when the believing women come out of their homes for a necessity, they cover their faces from over their heads, with the jilbab, and expose one eye [only].

-33-

(وَتَمْنَعُ) الْمَرْأَةُ الشَّابَّةُ (مِنْ كَشْفِ الْوَجْهِ بَيْنَ رِجَالِ) لَا لِأَنَّهُ عَوْرَةٌ بَلْ (لِخَوْفِ الْفِتْنَةِ).

الرد المختار وحاشية ابن عابدين الرد المختار

Young women will be prohibited from uncovering their faces in front of unrelated men. It is not because the face is considered to be 'awrah, but out of fear of fitnah.

-34-

قال مشايخنا : تُمنَع المرأة الشابة من كشف وجهها بين الرجال في زماننا للفتنة.

Our scholars have issued this ruling, that a young woman will be prohibited from uncovering her face in front of non-maḥram men in our time, due to the fear of fitnah.

-35-

ولذا تُمنَع من كشف وجهها بين الرجال للفتنة.

Therefore, women will be prohibited from covering their faces in front of non-maḥram men for [fear of] fitnah.

-36-

وقد نص عليه أحمد، فقال: الزينة الظاهرة: الثياب، وكل شيء منها عورة حتى الظفر، ويفيد هذا تحريم النظر إلى شيء من الأجنبيات لغير عذر، مثل أن يريد أن يتزوجها أو يشهد عليها، فإنه ينظر في الحالين إلى وجهها خاصة فأما النظر إليها لغير عذر، فلا يجوز لا لشهوة ولا لغيرها، وسواء في ذلك الوجه والكفان وغيرهما من البدن.

زاد المسير في علم التفسير لابن الجوزي.

Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal clarified that *az-zeenah adh-dhâhirah* [the apparent adornment, as referred to in the Qur'anic verse 24: 31] refers to clothes [thiyâb], and a woman's whole body as 'awrah; this includes even her nails. This tells us that it is not permissible to cast a glance at a non-maḥram woman without

any lawful reason. If it is for some lawful reason, for instance, a marriage proposal or testimony in the court, then it is permissible to look only at a woman's face. However, in the absence of any valid reason, it is not permissible to glance at the face of a woman, and in this issue, the commandment is the same for the face, the two hands and the rest of the body.

-37-

وقد حكى أبو عبيد وغيره: أنها تدنيه من فوق رأسها فلا تظهر إلا عينها ومن جنسه النقاب: فكن النساء يتقبن. وفي الصحيح أن المحرمة لا تتقب ولا تلبس القفازين فإذا كن مأمورات بالجلباب لثلا يُعرفن وهو ستر الوجه أو ستر الوجه بالنقاب: كان الوجه واليدان من الزينة التي أمرت ألا تظهرها للأجانب.

مجموع الفتاوى لابن تيمية

Abu 'Ubaydah and others have pointed out that a woman should draw down [her jilbab] from above her head and should not expose any part of her body except her eye. The niqab is included in this category [of covering]. Women at the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to wear the niqab [in public, which we know] because it has been mentioned in a sound hadith that women should not wear niqab or gloves in the state of iḥrām. Women were commanded to wear jilbab so that «they will be known and not abused». This pertains to covering the face. It is for this reason that the face and both hands are included in that type of zeenah [ornament] that the women are commanded to cover in front of non-maḥram men.

-38-

وقال الدردير في الشرح الصغير: ((و) عورة الحرة (مع رجل أجنبي):
منها أي ليس بمحرم لها جميع البدن (غير الوجه والكفين): وأما هما فليسا
بعورة وإن وجب عليها سترهما لخوف فتنة).

A woman's 'awrah in front of non-mahram men is her whole body except her face and her two palms. These two areas are not her 'awrah, but due to the fear of fitnah [temptation], it is obligatory [for her] to cover the face and the hands as well.

-39-

في هذه الآية دليل على أن الله تعالى أذن في مسألتهم من وراء حجاب، في
حاجة تعرض، أو مسألة يستفتين فيها، ويدخل في ذلك جميع النساء بالمعنى،
وبما تضمنته أصول الشريعة من أن المرأة كلها عورة، بدنها وصوتها، كما
تقدم، فلا يجوز كشف ذلك إلا الحاجة كالشهادة عليها، أو داء يكون بيدنها.
الجامع لأحكام القرآن للقرطبي

Imam al-Qurṭubi, a famous commentator of the Qur'an and a Mâliki scholar, has explained the following verse of Soorat al-Aḥzâb:

﴿...ask them from behind a partition [hijab]...﴾ (Qur'an 33: 53)

He writes:

This verse provides evidence that Allah permitted [men] to ask for help or religious guidance from the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ), from behind a curtain [hijab]. This injunction encompasses all Muslim women because it is a principle of Islamic law that the whole body of a woman is 'awrah, including even her body and her voice... Hence, it is not permissible to expose those parts unless there is a [genuine] need, such as giving evidence or in case there is a disease in any part of her body [which needs to be shown to a male physician].

-40-

وَلَسْنَا نَقُولُ إِنَّ وَجْهَ الرَّجُلِ فِي حَقِّهَا عَوْرَةٌ كَوَجْهِ الْمَرْأَةِ فِي حَقِّهِ بَلْ هُوَ
 كَوَجْهِ الصَّبِيِّ الْأَمْرَدِ فِي حَقِّ الرَّجُلِ فَيَحْرُمُ النَّظْرُ عِنْدَ خَوْفِ الْفِتْنَةِ فَقَطُّ فَإِنْ
 لَمْ تَكُنْ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا إِذْ لَمْ يَزَلِ الرَّجَالُ عَلَى مَرِّ الزَّمَانِ مَكْشُوفِي الْوُجُوهِ وَالنِّسَاءُ
 يَخْرُجْنَ مَتَّقَاتٍ، وَلَوْ كَانَ وَجْهُ الرَّجُلِ عَوْرَةً فِي حَقِّ النِّسَاءِ لَأَمُرُوا بِالتَّنْقِبِ
 أَوْ مُنَعْنَ مِنَ الْخُرُوجِ إِلَّا لِضُرُورَةٍ.

إحياء علوم الدين للغزالي

We do not say that a man's face is 'awrah [what needs to be covered] for a woman in the same way that the face of a woman is 'awrah for a man. Instead, it [the man's face] is like the face of a beardless boy for a [grown] man; in this case, looking is forbidden only if there is fear of sexual attraction [fitnah]. If there is no fitnah, then there is no prohibition. This is because men in every age [in Islamic history] go out with their faces uncovered, whereas women go out wearing the niqab. If men were similar to women in this case, then either men would have been commanded to wear the niqab or women would have been prohibited from going outside their homes.

-41-

ويقوي الجواز استمرار العمل على جواز خروج النساء إلى المساجد،
 والأسواق، والأسفار منتقبات لثلا يراهن الرجال، ولم يؤمر الرجال قط
 بالانتقاب لثلا يراهم النساء، فدلّ على تغيير الحكم بين الطائفتين.

فتح الباري لابن حجر

Another evidence that supports the permissibility of women looking at men is the fact that right from the first era of Islam, women were permitted to go out to the mosques, to marketplaces

and for travel, [as long as they wore the] niqab on their faces, whereas men were never commanded to wear the niqab in order to prevent women from seeing them. Hence, it is a proof that the Islamic command is different for men and for women in this regard.

-42-

وكذا عادة بلاد الأندلس لا يظهر من المرأة إلا عينها الواحدة.

البحر المحيط في التفسير لأبي حيان الأندلسي

This is the custom of the women in the country of Andalus [the Islamic empire of Spain] today – nothing is visible from a woman's body except for one eye...

-43-

وبذلك أدينا الأمانة العلمية حق الأداء، فبينما ما يجب على المرأة، وما يحسن بها، فمن التزم الواجب فيها ونعمت، ومن أخذ بالأحسن فهو أفضل. وهذا هو الذي التزمته عملياً مع زوجتي، وأرجو الله تعالى أن يوفقني لمثله مع بناتي حين يبلغن أو قبيل ذلك.

جلباب المرأة المسلمة في الكتاب والسنة لناصر الدين الألباني

Thus, we have clearly stated what is obligatory for women and what is highly recommended. For those who have grasped tightly what is obligatory, this will be sufficient for them and also better for them. For those who have understood and implemented the better, this will be better. This [face-veil] is exactly the one which my own wife observes, and I hope that Allah may grant me the guidance regarding my daughters [to observe this face-veil] when they come of age.

-44-

بأن يستجيب النساء لما أمر الله به من حجب البدن كله؛ حاشا الوجه والكفين، فمن حجبهما أيضًا منهن، فذلك ما نستحبه لهن، وندعو إليه.

جلباب المرأة المسلمة في الكتاب والسنة لمحمد ناصر الدين الألباني

Whoever has covered both of these, the face and hands, this is what we regard as highly recommended, and this is what we invite all women to.

-45-

والمرأة كلها عورة؛ لقوله: «والمرأة عورة»، صححه الترمذي، ... هذه النصوص وما جاء بمعناها من الكتاب والسنة -وهي كثيرة شهيرة- تدل على أن المرأة كلها عورة أمام الرجال الأجانب.

الملخص الفقهي لصالح الفوزان

A woman's whole body is 'awrah. The evidence comes from the narration of at-Tirmidhi which states that the whole [body] of the woman is 'awrah... This as well as other similar texts from the Qur'an and the Sunnah testify that the whole body of a woman is 'awrah in front of non-mahram men.

Chapter 9

-46-

عَنْ يَزِيدَ بْنِ طَلْحَةَ بْنِ رُكَانَةَ، يَرْفَعُهُ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «لِكُلِّ دِينٍ خُلُقٌ، وَخُلُقُ الْإِسْلَامِ الْحَيَاءُ». (أخرجه مالك)

«Every religion has a characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty and inhibition (ḥayâ').» (A reliable hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi and Mâlik)

-47-

عَنْ أَبِي حَمِيدٍ، أَوْ مُحَمَّدَةَ -الشَّكُّ مِنْ زُهَيْرٍ- قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «إِذَا حَاطَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ امْرَأَةً، فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَيْهَا إِذَا كَانَ إِنَّمَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا لِخَطْبَتِهَا، وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَا تَعْلَمُ». (أخرجه أحمد)

«When one of you intends to marry a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, as long as his looking at her is only for the purpose of the intention of marriage. This is even if she is unaware of it.» (Recorded by Ahmad and authenticated by al-Albâni)

-48-

عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: خَطَبْنَا عُمَرَ بِالْجَابِيَةِ فَقَالَ: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنِّي قُمْتُ فِيكُمْ كَمَقَامِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ فِينَا فَقَالَ: «... أَلَا لَا يَخْلُونَ رَجُلٌ بِامْرَأَةٍ إِلَّا كَانَ ثَالِثَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ...». (أخرجه الترمذي)

«Whenever a man is alone with a woman, the devil makes a third.» (Recorded by at-Tirmidhi and authenticated by al-Albâni)

-49-

عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ تَشَبَهَ بِقَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ». (أخرجه أبو داود)

«Whosoever imitates a people is one of them.» (Reported by Abu Dâwood and authenticated by al-Albâni)

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حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مَسْعُودٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: «... إِذَا لَمْ تَسْتَحِ فَاصْنَعِ مَا شِئْتَ». (أخرجه البخاري)

«If you do not have modesty and shame (ḥayâ'), then do whatever you like.» (Bukhari)

Glossary of Islamic Terms*

<i>abu</i> (or <i>abi</i>)	أبو، أبي	father (of)
<i>'awrah</i>	عَوْرَة	the part of a person's body that must be screened from public view; for males it is the area between the navel and the knees, and for females it is everything except the hands and the face
<i>burka</i> (<i>burqa'</i>)	بُرُقَة	an outer garment often covering the face
Eid (<i>'eed</i>)	عِيد	This refers to the two annual Islamic festivals; one of them (<i>'eed al-fitr</i>) marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the other (<i>'eed al-aḏḩā</i>) is the festival of sacrifice celebrated by Muslims to commemorate the willingness of Prophet Ibrāheem (ﷺ) to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to Allah but instead was commanded by Allah to sacrifice a ram

* The Arabic words are transliterated according to the conventions of the Transliteration Chart found in this book. If a word has become part of the English language (that is, is found in a dictionary of Standard English), that spelling is used in this book and appears first in this Glossary, with the transliterated form in brackets after it.

<i>fiqh</i>	فِقْه	Islamic jurisprudence; understanding or interpreting Islamic law
<i>fitnah</i>	فِتْنَة	<i>lit.</i> trial, temptation; (attempting to sow) discord between Muslims
<i>fiṭrah</i>	فِطْرَة	the natural inclination (of humans) instilled by Allah
<i>gheerah</i>	عَيْرَة	feelings of protective jealousy
Hadith (<i>hadeeth</i>)	حَدِيث	the collected statements and actions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that with the Qur'an form the basis of Islamic law
hadith (<i>hadeeth</i>)	حَدِيث	a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers
<i>al-Hâfidh</i>	الحَافِظ	'the one who has memorized (the Qur'an)': an honorific title
Hajj (<i>hajj</i>)	حَجَّ	the major pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque, site of the Kaaba at Makkah, to be undertaken by every able Muslim once in his or her lifetime
<i>hayâ'</i>	الْحَيَاء	modesty, bashfulness, shyness, moral conscience and self-respect
hijab (<i>hijâb</i>)	حِجَاب	veil ordained by Allah for believing women
<i>iḥrâm</i>	إِحْرَام	the state of consecration for Hajj or 'umrah; the special clothing worn by the pilgrim in such a state
imam (<i>imâm</i>)	إِمَام	title given to an Islamic scholar

jihad (<i>jihād</i>)	جِهَاد	struggle or striving (in Allah's cause)
jilbab (<i>jilbâb</i>)	جِلْبَاب	a long, loose garment worn over a woman's indoor clothing; it covers the whole body, like a full-length coat
<i>khimâr</i>	خِمَار	a scarf or similar head-covering worn by a Muslim woman as part of her hijab
<i>maḥram</i>	مَحْرَم	a degree of consanguinity precluding marriage; a man whom a woman may never marry due to the close blood or marriage relationship. e.g., father, brother, son, uncle, and father-in-law
niqab (<i>niqâb</i>)	نِقَاب	face-veil of Muslim women; face-covering
<i>Quraysh</i>	قُرَيْش	the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time of the Prophet's mission; their society was based on polytheism
Sharia (<i>sharī'ah</i>)	شَرِيعَة	Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah
<i>shaykh</i>	شَيْخ	teacher, mentor; scholar
<i>soorah</i> or <i>soorat</i>	سُورَة	chapter of the Qur'an
Sunnah	سُنَّة	the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that together with the Qur'an forms the basis of Islamic law
Ummah	أُمَّة	community or nation: <i>usu.</i> used to refer to the entire global community of Muslims

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