

Misconception: Muslim women must fully cover up in Islam



Background: Some think that Muslim women must cover their whole body, including face when in public. Women's dress code in Islam is one of the most focussed upon subjects not only in the Western media but also in Muslim countries.

Firstly, according to The Quran, the most important rule of the dress code for both men and women is as follows:

O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as to adorn you. But the best garment is the garment of piety/righteousness. These are some of God's signs, so that they may be mindful. [7:26]

The Quran tells women to guard their private parts (i.e. genitalia) and cover their chests, see [24:30-31]

From the verses 24:30-31 it can be deduced that for the purposes of women's dress code two types of beauty are described:

1. What is apparent (this can be revealed in public)
2. What is hidden (this type must be covered in public, but could be revealed by a striking of feet or walk/stride which is revealing)

The verse clearly brackets what beauty it is referring to by saying "...the child who has not yet understood the composition of women" implying it is relating to what is specific to a woman (i.e. what is different between man and woman) nothing else. This understanding would also fit with The Quran's instruction on the body parts that are to be cleansed during daily ablution (hands, arms, face, head and feet), see 5:6, 4:43.

A headscarf (commonly called "hijab") is often worn by Muslim women, however this word is not used like this in The Quran. In fact, the word "hijab" is not even used to mean an item of clothing. All verses where this word occurs are as follows: 7:46, 33:53, 38:32, 41:5, 42:51, 17:45, 19:17, 83:15.

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