



The niqab: to wear or not to wear

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The women who wear the face veil want to be able to speak for themselves. They said:

“This honors me.”

“It protects me.”

“This, for me, is true liberation.”

“Apart from God Almighty, I do not want anyone to tell me how to dress.”

“It is not a sign of backwardness; it is a sign of moving forward.”]

The niqab or the face veil that some Muslim women wear is widely misunderstood and is seen by some as a form of oppression and backwardness. It is a politically charged issue, and in response, a group of women from a wide range of backgrounds living in the West decided to tell the world why they wear the niqab.

Campaign Islam is an organization founded by Muslim sisters. They are not blood sisters but Muslim women commonly refer to one another as sisters because the bond of faith, shared belief, and a desire for each other's good is sometimes stronger than blood ties.

These active, vibrant young women have initiated several awareness campaigns to help speak out against oppression and dismantle stereotypes surrounding Islam. They are giving a voice to the unheard women and children; whether it is the children of Syria pleading for their rights to food, security, shelter, freedom, and education, or the women demanding their right to wear the niqab (face veil).

One of their recent videos has quickly spread on social media websites. The women are pondering how such a small piece of clothing can instigate so much hatred, controversy, and friction, and they invite viewers to ask themselves some deep questions about the veil.

Government officials in a number of Western countries are condemning the niqab and are working hard to ban it.

"Is it because they think that the Muslim woman is oppressed? They say I have no voice because of my veil, but I can speak perfectly fine," said one woman wearing the veil, in a sharp Australian accent.

The majority of Muslim women around the world who wear the veil do so by choice and not out of coercion and they do not view the veil as an infringement upon their freedom.

One woman challenged, "Is discarding the niqab really a form of liberation? Are high heels, short skirts, and lipstick truly symbols of liberation? Do people really think that the husband forces his wife to wear the niqab? I wear the niqab and I am not even married. I wear it to please God and because I believe that it helps me to be more devout."

A Muslim woman is subservient to God and is not dictated by the trends of fashion or what is appealing to the society. No woman should be labeled on the basis of her physical appearance, she should be judged by her intellect and character.

Some of those who disapprove of the niqab claim that it is a barrier to effective communication.

While it is true that reading facial expressions may be useful, other forms of non-verbal communication are equally important, such as tone of voice, posture, body language, and hand gestures. Speaking clearly, fluently, and confidently and imparting authentic information are excellent communication skills that can be mastered with or without the niqab.

According to the Oxford dictionary, communication means the imparting or exchange of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium. Or, it is the means of sending or receiving information through telephone lines or computers. Wearing the niqab does not compromise good communication.

In every religion, a boundary must be drawn between men and women. Several commandments have been decreed in Islam to prevent any form of promiscuity from both sides; men and women. Men are ordered to lower their gaze and women are ordered to lower their gaze and to cover.

Although wearing the headscarf or the face veil is no guaranteed safeguard against becoming a rape victim, some Muslim women feel that covering up does offer some form of protection. The makers of the video found statistics that show that each year there are 69,000 female rape victims from around the world in comparison to 9,000 male victims of this heinous act. Women are no doubt far more vulnerable than men.

An International Business Times report published in January, 2014, compiled a list of the top 5 countries in the world with the highest rates of rape. The report stated that rape crimes are most prevalent in Lesotho in South Africa, Sweden, St. Vincent and Grenadines (Caribbean countries), New Zealand, and Belgium.

Staying covered up is also a tool that Muslim women use to battle the increasingly growing pornography industry and the degradation of women in societies. For them, it is a means of elevating the status of women, not oppressing and overpowering them. They opt to hide their

beauty rather than opening any opportunity for them to be exploited because of their beauty and femininity.

Not all Muslim women wear the face veil, and not all Muslim scholars have deemed it absolutely obligatory. The unanimous consensus is that the hijab, or covering of the hair and body, is compulsory in Islam, but not necessarily the face and hands.

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Reporter, Avery Haines, of City News Toronto interviewed Nour, a young, Muslim, Malaysian university student, about her reasons for covering her face from the world.

Nour said, “In my heart, I wanted to do something more, even though it is not required in religion. By wearing the niqab I feel closer to God. I feel like I am struggling and striving every day; trying to make my intentions sincere and pure and only for God.”

As for myself, I wear the hijab. I do not wear the niqab, unless I am on my way to a wedding and my face is full of make-up. I indeed respect the women who wear niqab and the women who do not.

The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of MuslimVillage.com.

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