

# Hijab

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A woman wearing an Al-Amira hijab in bright blue.

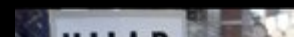
In Arabic, ***hijab*** literally translates to mean barrier. In one form of practice, hijab is the partition dividing men and women in a mosque, but usually hijab refers to the “principal of modesty” (Religion & Ethics n.d.). The Koran instructs both men and women to “lower their gaze and guard their modesty” (24:30,24:31). Depending on his or her interpretation, a woman might wear a simple headscarf or cover completely with a burqa while men most often do not cover.

The Koran does not specify how women should dress beyond instructing her to “draw their veils over their bosoms” (24:31) but numerous references are found in the Hadith. Muhammad is said that no girl who has reached puberty should reveal no more than her hands, but also noting her face should be uncovered during prayer (Religion & Ethics n.d.). Common practice also instructs men to cover from navel to knee and women from breast to knee in front of everyone except a spouse. Traditionally, elderly women are allowed relaxed hijab once past the age of marriage (Religion & Ethics n.d.).

## Controversy

To cover or not to cover is one of the more controversial debates occurring throughout the Islamic world. Some argue that scarves and other coverings liberate a woman from flirting and unwanted attention. Others contend that the practice is degrading and sexist (100 Questions and Answers about Arab Americans n.d.). Either way, many compromise that the scarf should be choice--an act that brings believers closer to God.

In the Middle East, “there is no standardized modern hijab [but] minimally it includes a loose-fitting, long-sleeved garment that covers the body and some form of head cover” (Bates and Rassam 2001, 234-236) In recent history women have both gained and lost the right to choose appropriate clothing. In Afghanistan, under the Taliban a woman was required by law to wear a burqa, covering her entire body with only a slit for her eyes (Religion & Ethics n.d.). Conversely in Turkey, a secular state, women are often barred from wearing any coverings. And in Egypt women have both worn and taken off the scarf in political protest—all within the last couple of decades (Bates and Rassam 2001, 234-236).



Even in westernized countries, Muslim women have fought for the right to cover. Recently in America, a young girl sued her school for the right to wear a headscarf. Furthermore, France has completely banned any religious apparel in public schools (Frieden

2004). While America has reaffirmed the freedom of religion, France continues to support their ban.



**A Muslim women protests for her right to hijab in France**

### Man and the Veil

As quoted earlier, the Koran instructs both men and women to guard their modesty, and in some Islamic sects, a man will also cover his face. For example, in a few Sufi orders, a man will veil and cover his body when he retreats to mediate (Religion & Ethics n.d.). Furthermore, the West African Tuareg Tribe requires the men to veil while the women do not. Traditionally, men begin to wear the veil around age twenty-five. By doing so, a man is displaying his maturity (Tuareg Tribes n.d.). Though it is rare today to see a man cover, Fudwa El Guindi and other scholars note that it is more than likely Muhammad covered his face:

There is enough evidence that the Prophet himself covered his face...when warriors were on horses and camels they covered their faces.. so we were missing a half of the story here when we focused too much on women ... (Religion & Ethics n.d.)

Nevertheless, traditionally a Muslim man will be the one to lower his gaze, while the women guard their modesty.



**A Tuareg man wears the traditional turban/veil**

Works Cited:

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