The Islamic Influence on the Role of Women and Girls in the United States:
Muslim Women’s Historic Role and its Relevance in Countering the Sexualization of Western Women
Julia Ismael
Antioch University, Seattle

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Abstract
Research confirms that for many Americans, Muslim women and girls symbolize oppression and inequality (The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2006). In actuality, Islam mandates the equality of women’s human rights and access to privileges including education. As Islam finds a nesting place specifically within United States’ culture, historically religious overlays encourage dignity through modesty, and more specifically in regards to the role of women and girls in media. Through re-asserting Islamic jurisprudence, especially relating to the non-gender specific pursuit of knowledge and the practice of modesty, Muslim American women and girls serve as ambassadors of both worlds. As ambassadors of Islam, Muslim women and girls through the religious practice of modesty, hold great potential to provide a cultural alternative to counter the sexualization and objectification of women in the United States, thereby contributing to the emerging identity of the modern woman general.
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Introduction
Since the time of the time of the Prophet Mohammed, Islam commands the seeking of knowledge and specifically provides an ideal model for girls’ education and dignity. Yet, as Muslims play an increasing role on the world stage, isolated cultural practices of de-emphasizing girls’ education dominate precious news time dedicated to Muslim girls. Stories of girls in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and their struggle for equal access to education and opportunity color a popular American view of Islam and Muslim women. The fear of Islam around the Western world, especially surrounding the treatment and perceived exclusion and repression of women, has led to the proposal of anti-Sharia laws¹ in twenty states including the most recent passage in the Kansas in May 2012. To explain the reasoning behind supporting the measure, Kansas Senator Susan Wagle shared her reasoning: “In this great country of ours and in the state of Kansas, women have equal rights,’ Wagle said during the Senate’s debate. ‘They stone women to death in countries that have Shariah law.’” (Associated Press, 2012) Unforeseen consequences of this bill is that Muslim women, through Sharia are also granted civil rights such as the right to inherit, the right to divorce, the right to keep money earned, and the right to prenuptial agreements, including the personal receipt (not payment) of a dowry. These rights afforded to women, to Muslims constitute an aspect of Sharia which is now up for debate in the various political arenas in the United States.

The emphasis in imposing anti-Sharia legislation tend to center around the treatment of women and is mentioned as a central issue, as illustrated by the Kansas Senator. Similarly in France, Muslim women’s right to wear the burqa brought national and international attention. By singling out Muslim women’s choice to wear the burqa, it reinforced negative and discriminatory French attitudes towards Muslims in the workplace and educational places in general. (Amnesty International, 2012)

¹ “Sharia” is Arabic for “law”, thereby making “Shariah law” a redundant phrase. This illustrates the lack of basic knowledge of Islamic law. Sharia in fact, finds many similar characteristics to a modern-day democratic and civil-rights based system of governance.
The reality is that the religion of Islam has promoted the inclusion of women in all circles of society. From the girl as student to woman as national leader, the prominent role of women in Islam represents a vital component to the endurance of the religion throughout the ages. Most notably, women such as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, and former and late Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, were elected Heads of State in Muslim countries often considered among the most restrictive.

As Muslim women around the world begin to enter the world stage, Western non-Muslim societies react to the concept of modesty while also suffering the physical and mental effects of sexualization and objectification.

**Women’s Educational Roles in Early Islam**

In the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet that is used as jurisprudence in forming Islamic creed and practice), it was narrated that Anas bin Malik said: “The Messenger of Allah said, ‘Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim.’” (Hadith 224, Sunan Ibn e Majah) This hadith is markedly non-gender-specific. In the Qur’anic chapter, Surat al-Mujadith (She Who Disputes), a woman pleads with the Prophet Mohammed to respond to her husband’s accusation that she was like her mother. The verses in this chapter grant this pleading woman a right to divorce solely because of her husband’s insults. This chapter, without coincidence and in context, also illuminates the connection between acquisition of knowledge and favor of Allah (swt):

> O you who have believed, when you are told, “Space yourselves” in assemblies, then make space; Allah will make space for you. And when you are told, “Arise,” then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do. (Hadith 58:11, Bukhari)

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2 Swt: “Subhahanwa tala” translates from Arabic to “Glorious and Exalted is Allah” and is used after mention as a sign of respect and a way to avoid misuse of the name.
Again, the edict to gather in assemblies is notably non gender-specific. By differentiating between “those who have believed” and “those who were given knowledge”, the assumption is made that the pursuit of knowledge includes secular education. This applies to both men and women. Also present in the Qur’an: “So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): ‘I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female. You proceed from one another.’” (3:195, Holy Qur’an) Women learn and grow from the work of men and men learn and grow from the work of women.

To address any remaining doubt that the teachings of Islam advocate for the education of women and girls, the decree to educate women can also be found in this Hadith:

Narrrated Abu Said: A woman came to Allah's Apostle and said, “O Allah's Apostle! Men (only) benefit by your teachings, so please devote to us from (some of) your time, a day on which we may come to you so that you may teach us of what Allah has taught you.” Allah's Apostle said, “Gather on such-and-such a day at such-and-such a place.” They gathered and Allah’s Apostle came to them and taught them of what Allah had taught him. (Hadith 413, Bukhari)

Researchers such as Dr. Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi and Dr Mohammad Akram Nadwi (Akram Nadwi, 2007) among many others have successfully documented the influential roles of women in early and classical Islam. For example, Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the wife of the Prophet Mohammed (pbour3) narrated a major percentage of Hadith. Aishah also participated in central exegetical debates which up until today influence the daily practice of Islam. (Geissinger, 2008) Again, early Islam points to the prominence of women through accounts of women such as Fatima al-Fitr who sponsored in 851 CE the building of the world’s oldest continually operational university, Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco. (1001 Inventions, 2010) In the preface to the most comprehensive encyclopedia of the 8,000 plus women scholars of Islam, it states: “Some of the most renowned scholars among men have depended on, and praised on the

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3 Pbour: Peace be upon him or her. In Islam, when mentioning the Prophet and other revered figures and Prophets such as Moses, this is said after the mention as a way to show respect and avoid using the name in an inappropriate manner.
scholarship of their women teachers. The women scholars have enjoyed considerable public authority in society, not exceptionally, but as the norm.” (Akram Nadwi, 2007) [emphasis mine]

Women’s Educational Roles in Contemporary Islam

The religion of Islam encourages the education of women and girls and this remains true today in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. For example, in Iran women comprised 63% of women entering undergraduate programs. (Rezazadeh, March 2011) Closer to home, the University of Washington’s Muslim Student Association from 2007 to 2012, elected 33 women leaders out of a total of 54 available positions, or 61% were female officers. (University of Washington Muslim Student Association, 2012) Muslim women around the world enjoy a great deal of educational support:

In most cases, the diversity of achievements and the expectations of women in the region defy that idea [of women in the Muslim world being socialized to expect second-class status]. For example, it is hardly unusual for women in predominately Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa to have achieved higher education levels. The education ‘gender gap’ ranged from zero in Iran, indicating no difference, to women needing to increase their levels 73% in Pakistan to equal that of men. For perspective, while the United States, like Iran, boasts no gender gap, other developed countries such as Japan have reverse gender gaps (a greater proportion of women than men pursue higher education), France and Germany have gender gaps of more than 50%. (Gallup Poll 2005)

Statistics speak louder than perceptions. Muslim women around the globe capitalize on Islam’s open invitation to seek knowledge. On the world stage, Muslim women are not only scholars but leaders of nations and instigators of world peace. In 2011, two Muslim women, Shirin Ebadi and Tawakul Karman, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize - the first ever to be awarded to any Muslim woman.

Attitudes Towards Muslim Women
The reality of valuation of women and girls’ education in Islam often differs from a mainstream American view of women in Islam. In 2006, The Pew Research Center found that 69% of those polled believed that Muslims are not respectful of women. (2006) In 2010, A Gallup poll noted that 43% of those surveyed had at least a little prejudice towards Muslims, more than twice that felt against Christians and three times that than felt against Jews. (Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, 2010) The United States, through experience with the civil and women’s rights movements, holds fast to an understanding that separate is not equal as written into law by the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954. Because Muslim women wear hijab, even in the United States they are not seen as equal to their male counterparts by a large segment of Americans because of the perceived separation versus equality standard.

That framework [of Brown vs. Board of Education] shaped the public’s understanding of the civil rights movement and the second wave of the women’s movement. Thus “gender neutrality” has emerged as the cultural frame to solve the problem of gender inequality; it has achieved legitimacy as the culturally appropriate way to relate to individuals…Equal rights as gender neutrality rejects any institutionally authorized sanctioning of behavior that separates the sexes or that applies to men and women differently. (Williams & Vashi, 2007)

Muslim women, because of the more obvious mandate to dress modestly, are seen by non-Muslims as oppressed. In reality, both men and women are commanded to observe basic modesty. “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.” (24:30, Holy Qur’an) Because wearing a hijab is a more visual symbol of difference between Muslim and non-Muslim, Muslim women and Muslim men, it is often a source of contention for Muslim women in non-Muslim societies.

Susann Bashir, an AT&T employee and convert to Islam began wearing the hijab seven years ago. During that time, she was continually harassed at work, called a terrorist and was repeatedly told to remove her hijab – they created a “hostile work environment,” the standard language for anti-
discrimination cases. At one point, the suit states that she was physically grabbed and her hijab nearly ripped from her head. She filed a discrimination suit and won. (Gillam, 2012) Would her co-workers had ever realized that Ms. Bashir converted to Islam if she chose to not wear the hijab? Would it have had the same effect on them had she chosen to not wear it?

Ms. Bashir’s exerting her “difference” in terms of her modesty obviously didn’t correlate to her co-workers’ perception of women’s hard won freedom and liberty to express sexuality. They equated sexual freedom with women’s equality in a broader sense and demonstrated through their actions their belief in Islam’s oppression of women. But, from Ms. Bashir’s perspective and in the eyes of the law, she was the one in fact suffering from oppression not by Islamic practices, but by the standards of a woman’s sexual identity in the United States. In this case who was more oppressive, Muslims or non-Muslims?

**Sexualization of Adolescent Girls in the United States**

One of the most confusing components of what Americans consider “mature” centers around that of sexuality. In the last thirty years, the United States has experienced an astronomical increase in the use and disuse of female sexuality in mainstream media – television, print advertising, movies, video games, and internet. It is reported that women are six times more likely than men to appear in sexy attire in *family* movies (rated G, PG and PG-13). (Smith & Choueiti, 2010) In media targeting our most impressionable population, images of women and girls in non-intellectual, sexualized roles dominate various media outlets. Through the continual influence of various forms of media, our girls continue to receive conflicting messages on what it means to be a woman. Sixty percent of teenagers studied spend on average 20 hours of “screen time” per week, 33% spend 40 hours per week and 7% spend 50% a week. (American Heart Association, 2008) The modern effect of this relationship between media and self-image is apparent.

Girls participate in what is arguably a one-way friendship with television characters, movie stars and other depictions of women. Now imagine this faux relationship through the magnified looking glass
of adolescence. As a girl approaches adolescence, usually around age 10, they arguably begin to explore their position and relevance in any given society. Standardized beauty as depicted in the mainstream media continues to reach towards the physically unattainable. Bombarded with unrealistic, graphically-enhanced and unhealthy images of the ‘ideal’ female body, adolescent girls are the most affected.

Frequent exposure to cultural beauty ideals via the media has been shown to be associated with higher rates of eating disorders, both for individuals and for the population at large. Indeed, Lucas, Beard, O’Fallon, and Kurland (1991) studied the incidence of anorexia nervosa among 10-to 19-year-old girls during a 50-year period and found that it paralleled changes in fashion and idealized body image. (Zurbriggen, et al., 2010)

Taking note of this phenomenon, Glamour Magazine conducted a survey that included over 1,000 participants regarding the use of digitally-enhanced images in their magazine.

“Study after study has shown that when we see perfected, altered images, it leads to anxiety and low self-esteem and can even play a role in the development of eating disorders,” says Kearney-Cooke. “It sets up an unrealistic beauty ideal and creates this feeling of ‘I’m not good enough.’” And while our survey shows that women are more forgiving of changes to personal photos than commercial ones, experts think they shouldn’t be. Celebrities, we all know, have crazy fitness routines and the glam-squad advantage, but if Jane Doe down the street suddenly looks flawless, we wonder why we’re falling short. (Dreisbach, 2012)

As a result of this survey, Glamour Magazine now limits their use of digitally-enhanced images.

**Sexualization and Effects on Girl’s Education**

Besides the effect of sexualization on a girl’s self-image and consequently mental and physical health issues, much research has been dedicated to the correlation between sexualization and their ability to succeed in school. This is most saliently conveyed in the 2010 American Psychological Association’s report on the sexualization of girls:
The implications are stunning and suggest that sexualization may contribute to girls’ dropping out of higher level mathematics in high school. Studies show that as girls develop through adolescence, their science and math self-concepts are less stable than those of boys (e.g., Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2006). For example, girls begin to underestimate their math ability relative to boys and show diminished interest in upper level, optional math classes in high school (Linver, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2002). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) have pointed out that these declines in estimations of ability and the value girls place on math begin around puberty, when their bodies mature. Studies show that single-sex math classes lead girls to feel less self-conscious and improve their math performance substantially (Rutti, 1997). (Zurbriggen, et al., 2010)

Recent strides have been made to correct this issue of under-achieving math, science and humanities students within the lowest performing schools in Tacoma, Washington. In 2011, Jonathan Kellett, the principal of Jason Lee Middle School, a public school, launched single-gender math, science and humanities classes. (Cafazzo, 2011) Although test scores showed a significant increase, the pilot program was aborted due to a violation of Washington State law which, according to Cafazzo says that “all classes shall be required to be available to all students without regard to sex.”

It must be emphasized that a vast amount of research has been conducted that successfully correlate an all-girls educational setting with higher test scores and confidence in social and emotional areas. (e.g. Sax, et. Al, 2009; Owens, Smothers & Love, 2003) By removing one source of externalized objectification and raising scholarly expectations, girls tend to thrive in a gender-specific classroom.

**Women and Girls’ Reactions to Sexualization in the United States**

Contrary to the growing influence of women’s purchase power, the corporate advertising promotion of sexualization of women is still pervasive. “In 35 percent of double-income households in
the United States, wives now make more than their husbands, up from 28 percent five years ago.
Assuming the trend continues, the average woman will make more than the average man by 2024.”
(Foroohar, 2010) Paradoxically, the Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls outlines
the ineffectiveness of sexualized images in relation to sales:

Evidence indicates that such tactics may not be as effective as advertisers think. Advertising and
marketing researchers have studied sex in advertising since the 1960s, and a general finding has
been that attention and processing resources are directed toward sexual material including nudity,
sexual behavior, and embedded sexual material (Lang, Wise, Lee, & Cai, 2003). Recent evidence,
however, indicates that drawing attention does not always translate into selling products.
(Zurbriggen, et al., 2010)

In short, sexualization in advertising does not necessarily lead to higher sales. Why then are the media
industries perpetuating these negative stereotypes of women in various forms of media and advertising?

In response to this mental and physical health issue, Julia Bluhm, a teenage activist, circulated a
petition to Seventeen Magazine in 2012 to include at least one natural, un-retouched photograph in their
monthly fashion spreads. Her petition states: "Girls want to be accepted, appreciated and liked. And when
they don't fit the criteria, some girls try to 'fix' themselves. This can lead to eating disorders, dieting,
depression, and low self-esteem." (Bluhm, 2012) As of May 2012, her petition’s signatures had exceeded
78,000. The growing movement aims to negate the mainstream media’s unhealthy images of women and
girls and can be evidenced in the rise in women in the media focused organizations. Most notably are
organizations such as the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, “the only research-based
organization working within the media and entertainment industry to engage, educate, and influence the
need for gender balance, reducing stereotyping and creating a wide variety of female characters for
entertainment targeting children 11 and under.” (2012) Other evidence of the need for gender balance is
the popularity of the independent documentary film, *Miss Representation* that “explores how the media’s
misrepresentations of women have led to the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and
influence.” (2012) Women in the United States are becoming more aware of both the obvious and subtle messages in the media that are leading to the unhealthy objectification of women and are organizing to do something about it.

**Modesty and the Muslim Woman**

Islam is relatively new to mainstream American culture. The first wave of Muslim immigrants occurred in 1875, the second wave in the 1930’s and the third in the 1950’s with the latter being the higher educated more influential immigrant group. (Haddad, 1986) According a recent study of 60,000 Muslim Americans by the Pew Research Center, 46% are women and 56% are between the ages of 18 and 39. The majority of Muslim Americans attended some college and earns more than $30,000. Further, “[n]o single racial group constitutes a majority among the Muslim American population: 38% describe themselves as white, 26% black, 20% Asian, and 16% mixed race.” (2007) In short, the average Muslim American is squarely middle class. In addition, American women are the source of the greatest number of converts to Islam. Of the estimated 20,000 conversions to Islam in the United States, nearly 75% are women. (NBC News, 2006) Similarly, in the United Kingdom, 66% of all converts surveyed were women. (Brice, 2010) Why are so many women in developed nations converting to Islam when common sentiment presents Islam as oppressive to women? One British woman, a former MTV presenter, comments on the subject:

I always try to explain to people that I've converted to Islam, not to any culture. Suppression of women, honour killings or forced marriages are all cultural aberrations, not Islamic ones. Islam is also about dignity and respect for yourself and your femininity. Even in the dating game, Muslim men are very respectful. Women are cherished as mothers, too – as a Muslim woman you are not expected to do it all.” (Peppiatt, 2011)

Through various narrations of the Hadith, a popular vignette guides Muslims’ view of the mother: A man once consulted the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) about taking part in a military campaign. The Prophet asked the man if his mother was still living. When told that she was alive, the Prophet said:
"(Then) stay with her, for Paradise is at her feet." The elevated status of women continues through the height of physical beauty into older stages of life. Islam respects the woman in all stages of life: through the education of girls, the dignity in finding a spouse, the honor of lifelong motherhood. Modesty is the most visual representation of Islam’s respectful view of women and their role in society. Islam de-emphasizes fleeting beauty as a measure of worth. Instead, focus is placed on quality of character, piousness and usefulness throughout a woman’s life.

What is most striking about the accusations that Islam is a religion that relegates women to second-class citizens is the perception of Muslim women themselves on the subject. According to the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies’ Executive Director, Dalia Mogahed:

Perhaps the most revealing were the responses to the open-ended question, “What is it you most resent about the West?” which often included descriptions of promiscuity, pornography, and public indecency – impressions gathered from Hollywood images exported daily to the Muslim world. So while the veil is often perceived by many in the West as a symbol of women’s inferior cultural status in the Muslim world, in Muslim societies, the perceived lack of modesty portrayed in Western media is thought to signal women’s degraded cultural status. (2006)

Objectification is defined by Fredrickson and Roberts as: “whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her.” (1997) The Muslim women in the Gallup poll understand on a visceral level through the most exportable cultural vehicle of media the ill-effects of gender bias and oppression. The inordinate focus on the female body as representative of the whole person is simply not conducive to Islamic practice and is rejected by the majority of Muslim women. Objectification and sexualization of women in the Western media presents a contrast to not only the practice of Muslim modesty, but also to universal female mental and physical well-being.
Through the examination of the West’s view on Muslim women’s standing in Islam in juxtaposition to their own views of themselves, a dichotomy emerges. How can this discrepancy be explained?

Western representations of veiled Muslim women are not simply about Muslim women themselves. Rather than representing Muslim women, these images fulfill a different function: they provide the foil or negative mirror in which western constructions of identity and gender can be positively reflected. (Williams & Vashi, 2007)

According to Williams and Vashi’s article, the issue of oppression in relation to Muslim women, especially the most visible component of modesty, the hijab, serves to perpetuate the objectification and sexualization of Western women in global media and beyond. Modesty versus objectification now rests outside of both realms of Islam and the West and can begin to be discussed as a stand-alone mental and physical health issue.

**Effect of Modesty on Self-Image**

Tolaymat and Moradi, through their research attempt to link modesty in Islamic dress to an American Muslim woman’s experience with objectification:

The present findings also contribute to understanding the role of the hijab in U.S. Muslim women’s body image. In this study, wearing the hijab was associated with lower reports of sexual objectification experiences. This is consistent with findings that some Muslim women may wear the hijab to mitigate sexual objectification (e.g., Ali, 2005; Droogsma, 2007; Ruby, 2006). In this study, wearing the hijab was not linked with internalization, body surveillance, body shame, or eating disorder symptoms. Thus, wearing the hijab may be associated with how others behave toward U.S. Muslim women but not with U.S. Muslim women’s own body image perceptions. (Tolaymat & Moradi, 2011)
Although Muslim women are not immune from unhealthy body self-image perceptions, the occurrence of external objectification is diminished when wearing modest clothing, the most apparent in the wearing of the hijab. The internalized objectification and constant comparison to the cultural standard of physical beauty can then be directly linked to non-personal interactions with media portrayals of women and girls. Indirectly, this research yet again points to the socializing effect of sexualization and objectification through the various outlets that shape culture.

**Conclusion**

Islam holds the potential to provide a complete package that ensures and encourages spiritual, practical and knowledge based learning for girls and women. With nearly 1,400 years of inclusion of women in respectable leadership positions in religious and social realms, Islam directly addresses the needs of women in all stages of life. Regardless of a woman’s artificial rating against an increasingly unattainable standard of beauty, a modestly dressed Muslim woman holds steadfast to another standard to judge her own self and other women.

For the first time in history, a global perspective is a reality. Women around the world are experiencing together a slow yet unwavering third women’s movement. During the first women’s movement, women in the United States gained basic civil liberties including the right to vote. During the second wave of the women’s movement in the U.S., women entered the workforce and experienced a sexual freedom unparalleled in modern history. Women in the United States today have not only entered the workforce and political arenas but are also slated to make more money in two income households in the very near future.

Paradoxically, as women in the U.S. gained civil and social freedoms, the social definition of what it means to be a woman is rapidly eroding, as evidenced in mainstream media’s unbalanced portrayals of women and girls as sexual objects, even in media directed towards young children. Now deemed a physical and mental health issue especially amongst adolescents and teenage girls, the de-sexualization in media guides the work of many women’s organizations and individual advocates. By
placing a strong focus on reaching out to girls in the formative adolescent years when sexual identity emerges, a conscious attempt is being made to circumvent the pull of sexualization and objectification in the media. Girls, through various social movements are increasingly made aware of the not-so-subtle messages about femininity and self-worth. Girls of today are the women of tomorrow, and will represent any future perpetuation of the movement towards social equity for women. How will these conversations today change this destructive message?

As the girls take to task, the world also takes note, including and especially the Muslim world. To a Muslim woman, women in the United States who suffer from sexualization and objectification – not Muslim women who practice modesty in dress – experience a greater form of oppression. The West’s misconception and a superficial understanding of the historic role of women in Islam leads to fear and even violence against Muslim women in non-Muslim settings. Yet, when examined as a psychological issue, Western societies that most fear the inclusion of Muslim modesty into the native culture are most likely to portray women in an unbalanced manner in the media in their culture. France goes to extremes to ban the burqa, yet French culture is notorious for objectifying women. By showcasing the Muslim woman as oppressed, the logical assumption would then be that Western women are liberated, even as the media projects a consistently younger sexualized and objectified female image. Through examining this contradictory message, a new approach to feminism emerges that incorporates the civic and social freedoms alongside the moral and ethical roles of women.

Modesty is becoming a relevant avenue for change in the way the media interacts with women and girls. By widening the definition of modesty beyond the common image of a Muslim woman in a headscarf and loose-fitting clothing, non-Muslim women and girls in the United States find methods to express a more healthy and realistic identity. Modesty presents itself in many forms, like the lengthening the couture dress on the fashion runways of Paris and New York. By de-emphasizing the sexual power of women and girls, opportunities to focus on education and dignity in the workplace and media increase.

However, the assumption that when a minority group of woman chooses to dress modestly, that will automatically leads to a heightened sense of self-worth is false. It has been shown that while the
frequency of external sexualization and objectification interactions decreases when dressed modestly, the danger of an internalized devaluation is still present. In order to affect change, the culture as a whole must embrace a new view of women’s relevance. By focusing on girls in adolescence and shaping their expectations around sexuality and education, the Muslim tradition of modesty translates into a wider platform for change. Girls, both Muslim and non-Muslim, raised today with a heightened sense of a worthy self will become film-makers, fashion designers mathematicians, and scholars of the future all the while enjoying the civic and social freedoms fought for and won by women of the past. Enjoying a rich tradition of knowledge-seeking in respectful environments, Muslim girls with their modesty and intellect intact are truly the ambassadors to the new equitable world.
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