

Oppression: muslim women in canada



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Word count: 1, 489 Throughout history, women have been victims of oppression no matter what religion or background they come from. They have learned from a young age, that their appearance is important to fundamentally be happy in their life. The topic of oppression in woman leads to controversial discussion not only to scholars but women of all parts of the world. How a woman presents herself through appearance and clothing targets her in a society obsessed with each other's business.

In today's society, whether we can help it or not, men are treated differently than women. There seems to be different "rules" associated with the acceptable ways they should dress as opposed to the strict rules that apply to women. Women who are westernized are exposed to different forms of oppression than those from the east. Not that westernized women don't face hardship, but they face it in a different light. Islamic women are the focus here, women who follow their religion by wearing the Hijab and women who feel it's not necessary to cover one self to be a good Muslim.

There is no one image of an Arabic woman but whether or not there is a scarf on her head, Islamic women feel the same pressure as women of every culture. Unfortunately in many places, these women don't have a say or have a chance to rebel against these pressures and laws as they could be punished. These pressures come from their religion and their society; from their peers and their culture. Growing up in a Muslim home, I understand what Islamic women go through their whole lives to be accepted not only in their religious community but in modern society as well.

As Tabassum Ruby mentions in her article, *Listening to the Voices of Hijab*, the meaning of the Hijab can be interpreted in a different way depending on whose perspective it comes from. A woman who wears the Hijab may see it as a religious obligation" while a Muslim woman who doesn't wear it may see it as a " cultural symbol" (Ruby 43). The women that were interviewed by Ruby all live in Canada, and have been exposed to the westernized way of living, which differ greatly from the Muslim countries they were born in. " The Hijab limits me from doing certain things.

When I have the Hijab on... as a Muslim woman, I consider myself basically representing the whole community' (Ruby 29). Aspects like this set this woman apart from her peers because she is now labeled as just one thing, a Muslim, when in fact she is much more than that. Women who wear the Hijab, Muhajibah, living in the western world, I believe, have it harder than they do living back home. Here, they are subject to a lot more attention when not necessary such as weird looks walking down the street and subject to stereotypes 'e. being a terrorist.

Islamic women are not the only ones being oppressed by their choice of clothing; in fact every woman around the world is target towards oppression. Islamic women are just targeted more than women of other religions. This is because of the strict faith that they endure from the Qu'ran telling them that they need to dress a certain way. However, it has been debated that the Qu'ran actually doesn't mention anything about a women needing to wear a Hijab to be a good Muslim. (Kawaji) Growing up a Muslim in Canada is tough position to be in; you try to find a pressures to fit in.

Almas Sayeed, is one of many Muslim's in that position. In her article, Chappals and Gym Shorts, she struggles to please her religious dad with his marriage plans for her, while trying to find out her true sexuality and fit in with her mutual feminist peers. She summarizes herself in these words: " I am a Muslim, first generation Indian, feminist woman studying in a largely homogenized white, Christian community in Midwestern America" (Sayeed 211). Almas is the perfect example of a westernized Muslim: she doesn't wear the Hijab yet she stands by her religious beliefs and does not show her legs or arms and respects her dad.

Other Muslim woman might think that Almas is not a true Muslim because she in fact does not cover her hair or her body. In fact, Farza'nah, one of the participants in Rubys focus group has said that " a woman's beauty needs to be concealed, because beauty brings a lot of other things... freedom , the kind that we see here"(Ruby 37) I personally don't understand this statement, as I was always taught that I should embrace my beauty and become an individual. However, in some places like Montreal this individuality is questioned. Two Muslim girls were suspended from school for wearing the Hijab. Kawaja). In nations like Saudi Arabia, women are forced to cover their bodies from head to toe and this includes wearing the veil, by law and tradition. If caught otherwise they will be punished for their actions. But what about personal freedom? A freedom to express one's own independence? Now in France this freedom is also lost, but from the completely opposite view point. They have an anti-Hijab law that forbids girls to wear the Hijab in public school. Kawaja) Neither Saudi Arabia nor France are right in what they're doing as a nation to their people.

In the western society, women are no longer victims of oppression; at least if they choose not to be. Unlike in the east, westernized women have a free will to lead the life they want through their education, to choose a same-sex partner and to surpass in whatever career they choose. However, it may sometimes seem, although not to an extreme extent, that westernized women are victims of oppression through their appearance. Society has a laid out plan for how they need to look and what they should do to get it. They have "role models" in everyday ads, catwalks and the favourite, music videos.

It is very rare these days to watch a single music video without a half naked girl dancing for a male singer, trying to grab his attention with her body. As we watched in class, Desire, sex ; power in music video, displays the mere fact that females use their sexuality as a product to sell music videos for a male audience. The reason I say these females are oppressed is because they are sucked into thinking that they can sell their bodies to get whatever they desire. They see ads every single day about losing weight through a pill or getting surgery for bigger breasts or tighter buttocks.

Or even changing the colour of your eyes through the magic of a contact lense. (Bordo 340). This form of oppression is different than that of the Islamic woman as these women do have a choice in what they're doing. However these choices become difficult because society has made them to be so, society has told every woman that she needs to look, dress and act the same as everyone else. Back in 2002 in the city of Mecca, fifteen teenage girls died in a fire at their school because the Saudi religious police, muttawa, wouldn't let them out. These girls class.

Unfortunately, they didn't put them back on when the fire hit and the muttawa preferred they die than break the Islamic law. (Chesler, 18).

Situations like this really make me wonder the extent to which some nations will go to in order to put women under these oppressions. These teenage girls had no choice but to flee from the scene, while the muttawa thought otherwise. Women all around the world face different challenges every day, but challenges nonetheless. I can say to you that I am a westernized Muslim, I grew up in Canada, I don't wear the Hijab (nor does my mom) but I still respect my values and where I came from.