

We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900

Open access books available

185,000

International authors and editors

200M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com



The Islamic Veil, the Domestic Environment, and Femininity

Fatma Zehra Fidan

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.69802>

Abstract

This study aims to determine the way that the women who define themselves as religious Muslims dress and act in a manner that evokes femininity at home. During the study, focus group interviews were held with 10 religious women (9 veiled, 1 non-veiled), and in-depth interviews were held with two women who were members of the İsmailağa community. The participants of the focus group interview were highly educated, employed, and married with children. The women who were members of the community had completed primary school, were unemployed, and married with children. The data were analyzed using the discourse analysis method. The study results showed that home was a space of liberation for all the women. It was found that the highly educated employed women and the housewives who had graduated from high school have different ways of dressing and acting femininely at home. Religious Muslim women considered their home as a space of liberation for feminine actions; however, having children limited their life at home. The notion of raising an ideal generation legitimizes restrictions of religious women's private space.

Keywords: women's religiousness, life at home, feminine actuality, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Religious Muslim women's identities have become the subject of a wide range of research from struggling for existence in the public arena to the sharing of housework. Veiled dressing styles are directly associated with the beliefs of religious Muslim women. Veils have been at the core of many of these studies with attempts to understand female religiosity from this perspective. The ways veiled women dress in their homes and display feminine behaviors are not detailed sufficiently. This study focused on the dress and behavior in the private indoor lives of women who consider themselves to be religious Muslims.

Women's bodies play a central role in the construction of a Muslim religious identity since they have a place in social norms, practices, and values. Determining what is *natural* for bodies according to social and cultural codes resulted in the evaluation of women's bodies under social pressures [1–3, 5]. Veiling is one of the most important indicators of female religiosity. A woman who is veiled to carry out the orders of the religion is thought to bring her religious beliefs into action. This is based on the Muslim identity's desire to establish a deep connection between thought and action [6, 7]. The root cause of the legitimization of veiling is consensus on women' being living creatures who leads to *fitna*,¹ which is identified with bodies and bodily desire. Thus, veiling was considered as a way of dressing that would minimize or eliminate the sexual desire of men. *Fitna* is the most basic foundation of the Islamic social order, which depends on gender duality since it is the justification for supervising women in Islam [8].² In this sense, dressing style has a moral function, the function of saving the honor of women. According to Islam, dress is a means of modesty and decency that should not reveal women's bodies and their shapes. On the contrary, it should hide them [24].³

Although the appearance of Muslim religious women is identified in this way, the limitations of women's veiled dressing and the behavior that evokes femininity in their private indoor lives are not known. Here, behavior that evokes femininity means how a woman reveals her sexual identity to the person she feels romantic about or sexually attracted to, in this research context, her husband.

2. Aim

This study is intended to understand the indoor dressing styles of women who define themselves as religious Muslims and their behavior that evokes femininity.

3. Method

To answer our basic research question, a focus group discussion was conducted with 10 highly educated, working women, nine veiled and one non-veiled, who defined themselves as religious

¹Derived from "trouble or going astray," the other meaning of the term, *fitna* [9], is a beautiful woman. It indicates the degree of beauty that prevents men from non-indulgence or a *femme fatale*. *Fitna*, by the definition of a Muslim feminist, Kasim Amin, can be interpreted as the chaos that results from sexual disorder caused by women [10].

²In the traditional Islamic social system, women's education [11–13] and taking part in social life as professionals were not considered appropriate [8, 14, 15]. Their inclusion in other social and political activities was not supported. It has been argued that women are not competent in these fields [16]. The human roles of women who were completely integrated with their domestic roles [17, 18] were limited to bodily tasks based on only the reproduction of the bloodline, and their social acceptance was attributed to being obedient to their husbands [16, 19, 20]. This female identity constructed by male interpretations of the religion has encountered modern objections in recent decades [21]. Islamist women who argue that the limitation in question is not appropriate for Islam have struggled for existence in the visible areas of social life and contributed considerably to the reconstruction of female religiosity [22, 23].

³Veiling is based on the *Koran*, which supports the social separation of women and men [27, 28]. It means "curtain" or "a barrier in the spatial dimension" [29, 30]. Veiling is considered to be a form of cruelty that restricts women's freedom [31], but it is not always the result of coercion. It is known that Muslim women in some non-Muslim countries are veiled by their own preference [28, 32]. Muslim women consider traditional veiled dress as a reminder of a life that obeys the orders of the *Koran* and conforms with Muslim beliefs and values [33].

Muslims. Focus group discussions are “series of discussion that are carefully planned to obtain ideas about a predetermined subject in a moderate and non-threatening environment” [25]. During the focus group discussion, participants affect each other’s feelings and ideas as a result of the mutual interactions and associations, thus allowing for a sufficient information flow. Using this method, researchers overcome various obstacles such as peer pressure, social approval, and likability, and they aim to learn about the real perceptions, feelings, and ideas of the participants [26].

The women who participated in the group discussion did not veil in the same way. Although it is possible to categorize participants’ clothes such as topcoats, long skirts, jackets, trousers, and tunics, these clothes differ in tightness, wideness, length, shortness, fanciness, and simplicity. An unveiled woman who calls herself religious was considered to balance the program. It was realized during the group discussion that we were right about our predictions. This woman offered questions and points from different perspectives and contributed to the group discussion. Of the participants, one was divorced, and the others were married. Of them, five defined themselves as “students of Nur,”⁴ three defined themselves as “sect members,” and two did not define themselves as belonging to any religious group.

The women with whom we conducted in-depth interviews defined themselves as religious Muslims and defined as members of the İsmailağa Jamia.⁵ We met with these women while preparing the book, *Çarşafı Dindarlık (Veiled Piety)*. Other meetings were conducted as part of this study, and participant observation supported the claims of the women. Participants veil themselves with a uniform black cloth that reaches from head to the feet and is called *jilbab*. The women were married. They had completed primary school and had children (one was pregnant).

In-depth interviewing, one of the most widely used research methods in sociology [25], is an effective method for obtaining information about individuals’ experiences, attitudes, feelings, complaints, views, and beliefs [34]. The key purpose of in-depth interviewing is to enter the inner world of the individual about whom the researcher wants to obtain information and to understand their point of view on that issue [25, 35]. Defined as “a carefully planned series of discussions to obtain the perceptions of a predetermined issue in a moderate and non-threatening environment,” focus group discussions can contribute to obtaining information on the matter at hand [25] (Tables 1 and 2).

3.1. What is discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has three analytical focuses of interest: interpretative repertoires, subject positions, and ideological dilemmas [36–38]. Interpretative repertoires are composed of themes, metaphors, images, and patterns in speech, which are constructed by people and have descriptive functions [39]. Subject positions are determined after the social actor providing the explanatory repertoires is found [38]. Determining the subjects within discourse enables us

⁴Nur students are the Muslims who study and live by the book, *Risale-i Nur*, by Said Nursi.

⁵İsmailağa Jamia is a branch of Nakşibendi tariqah. Women veil themselves with a uniform black cloth that reaches from head to the feet and is called *jilbab*. Many women in the Jamia completely veil their body except for their eyes. Men in this Jamia wear sirwal and thawb, and cover their heads with taqiyah or imamah. One of the most important rules in the Jamia is to comply with the dressing rules determined for the genders and spatial separation between the genders. Another permanent rule of the Jamia is that women cannot study or work in public schools. Women’s experiences in this Jamia have been detailed in our book, *Çarşafı Dindarlık*. This book is being published.

Participant	Age	Education	Veiled	Marital status	Number of child
G-1	38	University	Yes	Married	1 B/1 G
G-2	37	University	Yes	Married	2 G
G-3	36	University	Yes	Married	2 B
G-4	31	University	Yes	Married	1 G/1 B
G-5	36	University	Yes	Married	2 B/1 G
G-6	31	University	Yes	Divorced	1 B/1 G
G-7	39	University	Yes	Married	2 B
G-8	36	University	Yes	Married	1 B
G-9	37	University	No	Married	2 B
G-10	37	University	Yes	Married	2 K

Table 1. Participants of focus group.

G-11	27	Primary educ.	Yes	Married	(Pregnant)
G-12	30	Primary educ.	Yes	Married	1B

Table 2. In-depth interview group.

to describe the discursive world and develop criticism of the discourse [40]. As a discursive practice, positioning is a skill through which the people in question can move to new positions. Positioning practices occur in different ways, and they vary [38]. This study examines the interpretative repertoires and subject positions and will not emphasize ideological dilemmas [3].

4. Discourse analysis

4.1. Home is the place where women can live their sexual identities freely

All of the participating women defined home as a legal place where religious women can display their sexual identities. Although their ideas about limits of this legality differ, home is identified as the most private space in religious Muslim women's lives.

The participants presented religion-based facts regarding the holiness of marital life and maintaining their health, and agreed that the private relationship between partners has no limits other than those determined by religion, namely not to have sexual intercourse during their menstrual periods⁶ and *livata*.⁷

⁶The provision for women during menstruation (*hayız*) period and puerperant (*nifas*) women is like for a *junub* person, and it is *haram* for such women to have sexual intercourse [41].

⁷*Livata*, which is forbidden in Islam, is sexual intercourse between men or anal intercourse. This is forbidden by Islam's prophet with these *hadiths*: "He who has intercourse with his wife through her anus is accursed," "On the day of resurrection, Allah will not look at a man who has had intercourse with a man or woman's anus" (see EbûDâvûd, Nikah, 45; Müsned, I, 86, 444; Tirmizi, Taharet, 201; Mişkâtü'l-Mesabih, II, 184).

"I think there is no limitation between wife and husband. It is also acceptable for women... Men should satisfy their wives. They should do whatever their wives like. I mean, it is mutual" (G-11).

The statements of G-11, who is veiled in her social life outside the home, defend the spatial segregation principle based on Islam and satisfying pleasures that religious people need is supported as a religious task. The participant defined marriage as a legal and beneficial place for partners to achieve satisfaction, and identified mutual emotional satisfaction as a task that is necessary for a healthy marriage. According to the social actor (G-11), while unveiled women display their femininities in their social lives, those who are religious display femininity and are only sexual in their homes.

The homes of people who prefer to live according to Islamic rules are seen as being free of religion-based barriers in social life at a certain extent. G-12 enthusiastically spoke of her relationship with her husband and emphasized that her femininity in private has only religious limitations. G-12 specified the romance level in her marriage saying, "In the first year of our marriage, we were always having candlelit dinners,⁸" and claimed that feminine attraction should be very strong in religious women's homes. G-12 states that women can unveil themselves and wear attractive clothes only in front of their husbands, which suits the principles of the Jamia.

"Even if you are with other women, you cannot wear trousers or skirts. It is not approved. In society, you should wear a loosely fitting, long dress. You can wear whatever you want at home. Hair coloring, wearing fancy clothing are women's duties towards their husband, are *ibadah*. It is required for women to protect their husbands from sin. For example, I dye my hair blonde. At home, I put on makeup for my husband. When my hair color fades a little, he says, 'Let's dye your hair blonde again.' (The participant was laughing continuously while saying this.) When my son was little, I wore strap dresses. My husband said, 'Someone who sees you outside cannot imagine you in those dresses.' Now, our son has grown up, I cannot dress like that now. It is necessary to be careful" (G-12).

The speech text that can singly set an example for the research question is a common emotion and statement of women who belong to the İsmailağa Jamia. Personal pronouns used in the participants' statements, which have different introduction sections, are important to the analysis of this issue. The sentence about how religious women should dress while they were with other women indicates a rule. This rule is generally based on Islam and specifically on the principles of the Jamia. The personal pronoun, you, used in sentences such as "You can wear whatever you want in the home. Hair coloring, wearing fancy clothing are women's duties towards their husband, are *ibadah*.⁹ It is required for women to protect their husbands from sin." is an extension of the social actor's (G-12) identity as an instructor for the Jamia. As a hodja in Jamia courses,¹⁰ she produces discourse or conveys

⁸According to the participants' statements, in their interaction with their husbands, the romance level was high, and emotional expressions such as "my love" were commonly used.

⁹*Ibadah*: "Executing the orders of Allah, avoiding from what is banned. Any benevolence that is performed with good faith" [42].

¹⁰According to the principles of İsmailağa Jamia, female and male children should not go to public schools because the education in public schools is considered to be noncompliant with Islam. The Jamia opened courses to raise a religious generation in accordance to its principles. Quran, sunnah (statements and behaviors of the Prophet), Arabic lessons, and the teachings of Sheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu are provided in these courses for at least 3 years. There are further stages of education in the Jamia, but they are optional. Followers who wish to advance in any religious subject continue with the further stages. Women and men who successfully complete the 3-year education in this course are called masters. They teach their knowledge to other people. This mission can be performed within the course as well as during religious meetings (*sohbet*) [43]. More details can be found in our book, *Çarşafli Dindarlık*.

discourses by positioning herself as an instructor in her congregation's hierarchy to her interlocutors.¹¹ The last sentences, where she uses the first-person singular pronoun, include personal experiences. Her gestures and facial expressions while expressing how femininity is experienced in her domestic space indicate her pleasure and happiness in her private life and mutual satisfaction between wife and husband. G-12's husband said, "Someone who sees you outside cannot imagine you in those dresses." This is remarkable because it implies that people outside the Islamic life style misperceive both religious men and women. Displaying feminine attraction, which is limited to older children, creates a conflicting situation for the participant, since children should be kept away from the symbols that evoke sexual desire in order to achieve the planned level of *taqwa*¹² and complete the moral education.¹³ According to the principles of the Jamia, if female and male children see their mothers without hijab, even at home, after the age of 4, it will be against the *taqwa*. On one side, there is an obligation for parents to educate their children as religious Muslims, and on the other side, there are gender-based actions that are desirable and seen as proper. After the last examination, the obligation to raise the children in the *proper manner* dominated, and the social actor (G-12) limited these actions by dressing in a more moderate way around the children. The indispensability of Islamic principles ("It is necessary to be careful") prevailed over dissatisfaction ("I cannot dress like that now").

Among the group of highly educated women, wearing revealing clothing was not based on religious responsibility toward their husband. It was as a personal desire.

"I do not veil myself in the house, I mean, in summer. A short, knee-length dress, I mean, I wear revealing clothes" (G-5-).

"I do not dress at Home as I do at work... I prefer to be relaxed. But whatever I wear, I prefer good quality clothing. For example, I wear tracksuits, but they are stylish, not sloppy" (G-3).

The highly educated working participants emphasize comfort in their clothing styles at home. Sentences using the first-person singular pronoun indicate different criteria, which are independent from religious discourses, for indoor clothing styles.

This differs from the religious approach to daily life. The fact that the participants are highly educated and have jobs affects this situation; however, the religious limitations on the domestic reality of another participant (G-7) with the same qualifications show that an absolute conclusion cannot be reached.

At this step of the discourse analysis, it is possible to say that home is a liberation area, at a certain extent, for religious Muslim women. It is obvious that the Jamia¹⁴-based religious attitude

¹¹The researcher is the respondent of the participant in this interview. Students and the group of women are the respondents when a master is present and performs his/her duties.

¹²The Jamia considers *taqwa* as avoiding what is absolutely banned by Islam as well as behaviors that are not banned, but should be avoided. According to Islam, a mother can be around her male children without a hijab, but Jamia considers this against *taqwa*.

¹³In addition, TV had been banned by the Jamia until recent years. However, to protect the followers from the *modern attacks*, the Jamia opened its own TV channel (Lalegül TV), giving followers access to TV. The sheikh gave permission for opening a TV channel. This is a method to protect the religious generation from the harm of other TV channels, which is considered *ehven-i şer* or the lesser evil. For more details, please see *Çarşafı Dindarlık*.

¹⁴This congregational approach belongs to the İsmailağa Jamia. A study, *Çarşafı Dindarlık (Veiled Piety)*, which examines female members of the İsmailağa Jamia, thoroughly analyzes this issue. This book is in progress.

about women's dressing styles among other women is multilaterally¹⁵ limited. Therefore, how different perceptions differentiate religious orientations and daily practices [43] are recognized once again. The difference between the religious perceptions and ideas regarding the religious manners of women, and the religious practices performed with these perceptions and ideas are enormous. The behaviors of religious women with liberal religious beliefs are elaborated in the book, *Modernlik ve Dindarlık Arasında Kadın (Women Between Modernity and Religiousness)*,¹⁶ and the behaviors of dependent religious women are detailed in the book, *Çarşafli Dindarlık*. This once more indicates that Islam should be reinterpreted being released from the pressure of masculine or traditional points of view [43–47]. The masculine approach that limits women's daily lives with religion-based arguments is a subject of another study.

4.2. Women's most important duty is satisfying their husbands/getting dressed up for their husbands: *ibadah*

Rather than a personal sense of satisfaction, there is a religious justification for the fact that women display their feminine attractions at home.¹⁷ Displaying feminine attraction to her husband is a religious command and *ibadah*.

"According to Islam, a woman's most important duty is satisfying her husband, looking beautiful to him... Getting dressed up for husbands is an *ibadah* as long as she does not show this to other men... I frankly think that this is very important for both men and women. There is something mutual. Women want to be admired, and men want to see beauty. If he protects himself outside, he tries not to look..." (G-11).

¹⁵Women's indoor clothing styles are not independent from the Jamia mission. In a television program broadcast by İsmailağa Jamia members, a female audience member asked, "Can a woman stay at home bareheaded?" and the answer was: "Indeed, a woman can wear revealing clothes in the home, but this can pose an obstacle for angels of mercy to enter houses and for the spirits of prophets, martyrs and good people. Of course, uncovering the hair a little is acceptable, but a woman should cover her hair as far as possible. It will not be appropriate." <https://www.youtube.com>. (Accessed: January 7, 2017) [48].

¹⁶*Women between Modernity and Religiousness* is a study conducted with women who define themselves as Nur students, but do not belong to any of the Nur communities in Turkey. The women improved their religious thinking and practices by reinterpreting the religious texts named *Risale-i Nur* using a hermeneutic method. They also carried out economic events articulated to modern life as a result of the activities carried out in the meetings for religious conversation named *Sohbet*. Two of these events were a fireproof gloves factory and Kırçiçeği kindergarten. The ideas of these women about women having a profession, receiving higher education and working are close to Islamic feminism. The women have no knowledge of any kind of feminism. Nevertheless, it is remarkable in terms of religious sociology that they reached the level of Islamic feminist thought by reinterpreting the *Risale-i Nur* texts. Each of the characteristics specific to this group is a separate research subject. The most important characteristics include love, the preacher-student relationship, theodicy, the specific language they created in a state of consciousness that reminds one of Kristeva, and shaping daily life within the context of *Esma-ülHüsna* (the beautiful names of Allah).

¹⁷The indispensability of this principle has been emphasized in many religious conversations we participated in for *Çarşafli Dindarlık*. Some women who are not happy with their marriages and do not like sexual intercourse stated that they performed sexual intercourse since they were afraid of "being cursed by the angels," although they did not want intercourse or feel any satisfaction. However, forcing women to do so does not always lead them to dress in an "attractive or pleasing" way. Although many women in the Jamia accept the rightness of the principle, being or looking beautiful at home, they do not enact this principle. The reasons for this are unhappiness, old couples, or men's wish to see their women in *taqwa*. "I would do it if my husband wanted, but my husband does not make any *perverted demands* like that. However, I can do it if he says so" (a woman from İsmailağa Jamia).

The indispensability of this principle has been emphasized in many religious conversations we participated in for *Çarşafli Dindarlık*. Some women who are not happy with their marriages and do not like sexual intercourse stated that they performed sexual intercourse since they were afraid of "being cursed by the angels," although they did not want intercourse or feel any satisfaction. However, forcing women to do so does not always lead them to dress in an "attractive or pleasing" way. Although many women in the Jamia accept the rightness of the principle, being or looking beautiful at home, they do not enact this principle. The reasons for this are unhappiness, old couples, or men's wish to see their women in *taqwa*. "I would do it if my husband wanted, but my husband does not make any *perverted demands* like that. However, I can do it if he says so" (a woman from İsmailağa Jamia).

This quote shows a change in different themes that reflect the participant's (G-11) identity as a *hodja*. The fact that her interlocutor is a student and a talker is an instructor is in question. At the beginning of the quote, the issue was holiness,¹⁸ and no opportunity for criticism was admitted. A woman should display her feminine attractions to only her husband. Looking beautiful and attractive, as long as other men do not see her, is *ibadah*. It is clear that the social actor's personal approach developed within the dogmatic frame of religious rules. The hypothesis was reinforced with the use of first-person singular pronoun describing the appropriateness of men and women's natures to this rule. Satisfying women's need to be admired and men's desire to see beauty in private appears as a mechanism that is encouraged by religiousness. A man who protects himself from sin by not looking at women who are not *halal* outside in social life, where feminine attraction is all around, already deserves his wife's sexual duty.

4.2.1. Women should protect their husbands from other women's attraction

The first argument that religious Muslim women developed to overcome the conflict between looking beautiful and veiling is the notion of serving for religion, and the second is the duty to protect their husbands from *haram* Ref [4]. In both cases, protecting religious man from *haram* is required because of the feminine attractions of bareheaded women in society.

"Now, this is not only valid in the current business world. The moment you go out, it is hard because now women compete with each other, am I clear? Lots of things are cheap now. It's easier to get lots of things... Women will not wear again what they wore once. They are always made up and always well-groomed. Sometimes, they catch your eye even if you are a woman. You look at her! She makes her clothing and makeup go with each other (emphasis). Okay, it is a sin. She should not do it, but she does. It suits her. She gets out of bed flamingly, and she goes to bed flamingly... Then, you think that your husband is with these women in business life or outside... I don't think that there is a limit for this" (G-11).

This quote describes the feminine danger that religious men encounter outside the home and indicates a wide divergence between different femininities. G-11's language and approach toward bareheaded women position herself against a life style she has disowned. She thinks bareheaded women have the power to offer pleasure, and that men have a weakness for this power. This requires religious Muslim women to display and use their feminine attractions at home. Bareheaded women who think wrongly (non-religiously) and do wrong (sin) are considered a threat to Muslim families, and this lays the burden of being beautiful, attractive, and charming at home on religious Muslim women.

Another speech text which different femininities are perceived as a threat is largely in agreement with this study's finding.

"I think no man... Therefore, I am jealous of my husband because other women show everything. I want them to close everything a little... Not only for my husband, for everyone else, too, because I cannot do their actions to my husband outside... A bareheaded woman takes

¹⁸A great majority of Islamic law and interpretative works (Gazali is an exception because he attributed importance to women's sexual satisfaction) state that women should be ready for their husbands, not that men should be ready for their wives. This biased attitude is obvious even in contemporary discussions that attempt to discuss sexual rights of men and women in an egalitarian way. Kecia Ali says that, in this case, an important duty falls to those who redefine sexual life in marriage as a mutual and egalitarian effort [44].

care of her hair and clothing... Why... But, we do not take care of ourselves as much as they do. Maybe I am not a well-groomed woman but, even my well-groomed friends do not take care of themselves as much as they do. For example, there are more bareheaded women... Their skirts and socks... I enviably looked at her. She was very beautiful. They dress carefully" (G-7).

The use of the first-person personal pronoun, I, in this quote shows emotions and thoughts rather than a religious rule. The participant, who said that she is jealous of her husband due to bareheaded women's beauty and attractions, feels weak and defenseless as a woman. The social actor, who complains¹⁹ that she cannot achieve the expected body shape because of her excess weight, feels that she cannot be as attractive as other women. In this sense, her desire to limit the visibility of bareheaded women is based on personal emotions rather than a religious rule.

The idea of protecting the husband from *haram*, which is deemed a duty by Muslim religious women, was detailed explicitly in interviews about the research question. This idea, which has turned into an ideal especially among the women of Ismailağa Jamia, has become a religious basis for legalizing their own femininities. Among female members of the Jamia, femininity in private life is not an expression of their own desires, but protecting their husbands from *haram*. Although there are women, such as G-11, who care about mutual satisfaction and openly express this, the fact that femininity is generally based on religion arises from the idea that feminine tendencies, which are independent from the husband, are not appropriate for *taqwa*.

4.3. The effect of children on displaying feminine attraction

While some of the participating women said that their clothing styles and behaviors at home were restricted because of their children, others said that they did not experience this.

4.3.1. *It is wrong for women to display their feminine attraction to their children*

"My children are male. I'm telling the truth. I really like wearing revealing clothes, but Allah commanded. I have to do... My children have grown up, and I absolutely cannot wear tight skirts, trousers, even short-sleeved t-shirts... I do not dress like that anymore. I am not free anywhere" (G-7).

This highly educated participant's statement caused indignation in the group. Her use of the first-person singular pronoun reveals an identity that is torn between religious limitations and personal emotions. As a religious command, the participant sees veiling as an obligation and experiences it as being unfree. The idea that religion makes women unfree is the main argument of irreligious feminist approaches [49, 50]. However, the expression of this unfreedom by a religious woman means that the negative effect of religion on women is not restricted to feminists. This participant is a person who willingly covers herself and is an absolute believer in religious ideology. Thus, her conflict is emotional, and not derived from ideas or faith. Her emotions want to display feminine attraction in all the dimensions of life, but her beliefs do not allow her to do so.

¹⁹During the meeting in which religious women's perceptions toward beauty were discussed, a participant mentioned her displeasure with her weight.

The approach of a bareheaded woman who calls herself religious to the subject is based on the fact that she prioritizes her own wills and desires. G-9 accepts the necessity of wearing hijab although she does not wear it,²⁰ but she also states that a woman should have the freedom to shape her life, including the way she executes the orders of the religion.

“(This) is quite related to loving ourselves... A person should accept herself before loving herself” (G-9-).

G-9’s statement, also a response to the claims of G-7, is a psychological proof. G-9, a psychologist, mentioned that G-7’s dependence-related ideas are based on her displeasure with herself instead of the perceptions related to religious feelings and ideas.

G-7’s statements have conflicting themes about restrictions on indoor clothing styles that caused indignation in the group because she wants to do as she pleases, but cannot do so.

“In books I read, there is something that affects me. But I have never been such a veiled woman. Her children have never seen their mother without socks... But, I am not so strict. I can stay at home bareheaded. That is all I can do” (G-7).²¹

It is clear that the participant’s voluntary obedience to religious rules makes her feel unfree. However, her clear attitude that the religion should be experienced in the *taqwa*²² dimension shows her perception and experience of the authenticity of religion.

The common opinion among the participating female members of İsmailağa Jamia is like that of G7. Like G-12, G-11 limited her indoor sexual actualities in the presence of her children.

“Children are born. They turns 3 or 4... Modern-day children are very clever. There can be a rule not to do this in front of children... Children should not see their mother with makeup or in a short skirt... I think the only limitation can be this. This should be only between wife and husband. Such an image should not be formed in the eyes of children” (G-11).

The restriction in the statements of G-11 is not related to performing sexual activities in front of children. It is related to keeping children away from the appearances evoking sexual desire. The emphasis on the intelligence of the modern-day children indicates that sexual appearances may trigger the child at the early ages.

Women’s space of relative freedom, home, is limited by the presence of the children. This is accepted on the basis of raising religious children. The contradiction in religious arguments claiming that religion does not limit women’s lives and that family life satisfies all needed pleasure mechanisms is obvious. The maximum amount of time that a woman can display her femininity, even at home, is 4 years. After having a child (3–4 years), women’s freedom to express

²⁰G-9 started to wear hijab approximately 6 months after she participated in the group conversation.

²¹The participant quotes a reference from a book she read and talks about how a religious Muslim woman should dress and behave around her son. According to this book, the Muslim mother of a significant Islam scholar paid great importance to wearing hijab around her son and even wore socks when she was around him. It is emphasized in this book that the mother’s good behavior played a significant role in raising her son as a significant Muslim scholar. She is a model for women to raise a religious generation. G-7 mentions her sorrow for failing to be that careful around her sons. G-7 only removes her hijab around her sons, but veils other parts of her body.

²²This means protecting yourself from all sins and abstaining from things suspected of being *haram* [42].

their sexual identities even at the level of clothing is restricted to a single room, the bedroom. However, this limitation is legalized and normalized for the sake of raising religious children.

4.3.2. It is not wrong for women to display their feminine attraction to their children

In the focus group interview with highly educated women, only one participant (G-7) presented arguments like the comments of the Ismailağa Jamia women. The group responded negatively to the idea of limiting indoor dress and behavior because of children and G-7 was left alone in her argument. G-1 thought that limits for women in the home make religious life difficult.²³

“What can be as natural as being like that in front of children? For example, I have a son, but I can wear shorts in the home. But maybe when my son turns a certain age²⁴ I can wear long shorts... Maybe the length of my shorts will be longer” (G-1).

The question this participant asked her interlocutor (G-7) is answered in the quote with the argument that religion does not conflict with nature. The personal pronoun, you, used in the question not only shows an arm’s length relationship but also has tendencies of not accepting the interlocutor’s opinion, even of criticizing. In the next sentences, the personal pronoun, I, marks the individualism of religious types and an advocacy for comments that does not restrict women’s freedom. G-1’s response to the religious comment that limits religious women’s indoor wearing styles has become clear in her statements (Maybe the length of my shorts will be longer...).

The highly educated participants found G-7’s arguments extreme and objected to them. However, they also claimed that it is necessary for women to pay attention to their clothes and femininity in front of their children to some extent. “At home, I rarely wear skirts above the knee” (G-10).

At this stage of the discourse analysis, it is possible to say that the presence of children widely limited religious Muslim women’s indoor femininity and clothing styles. Although the effect of the presence of children on the way women dress and act femininely at home vary among women, the ideal of raising a religious generation predominated over the women’s tendency to liberty at home.

4.4. Subject positions

While discourses as informative repertoires build subject positions, they also build the opposite of subject positions. These are not independent of each other. The subject position is strengthened by its own opposite [51].

²³G-1 is a teacher who wears trousers outside, ties her hijab behind her head in a way that does not cover her neck. Like all women who participated in the focus group interview, G-1 worked in her workplace by taking off the hijab when the hijab was forbidden. However, the Ismailağa Jamia women argue that, according to the religion, it is not appropriate for a woman to go to school and work. These two approaches to the religion reveal deep differences in the interpretation and practice of the religion.

²⁴The son of the participant is 9 years old.

4.4.1. *Women protect their husband from sins outside the home*

Religious Muslim women prefer to cover their feminine attractions on the basis of their religious beliefs. However, this tendency is not independent from male religiosity. Veiling not only protects women but also protects religious men at risk of seduction by the female body. This means that women sin and cause men to sin by ignoring religious rules and wearing revealing clothes. The subject position of a *woman who protects her husband from sins outside the home by displaying her sexual attractions in the halal home* is the opposite of the subject position of a *woman who causes men to sin by wearing revealing clothes*.

4.4.2. *A woman is a model for her children with her well-behaved attitudes*

Some participants say that Islam does not limit women's domestic life and prefer veiling in the domestic space because of the ideal of raising a religious generation. This preference uses historical religious characters as an example for the subject position of a *woman who is a model for her children with her well-behaved attitudes*. This construction is completed on the basis of two opposite positions. The first is a religious Muslim female (G-7) subject position *who is impressed by the modern world thus, becomes distant from herself*, and the second is the subject position of a *woman who ignores her children's growth for her convenience*.

4.4.3. *Religious women become dependent due to their religious ideas and feeling*

Daily lives that include religious practices formed with references to Islam make some followers feel dependent. One of the reasons for this is veiling to execute the commands of the religion instead of displaying the bodily beauty. Another reason is the restriction on dressing at home and femininity related raising a religious generation. "Therefore, the subjective position of *religious women who become dependent due to their religious feelings and ideas* formed within this context stands against the subjective position of *those who become independent with their religious feelings and ideas*." The majority of the women with whom we spoke in this study did not regard the difficulties they have due to wearing hijab as dependence. This is based on two factors: some women believe that Islam does not limit women at home and around their children in terms of dress and behavior and thus feel themselves independent; others believe that the Islamic restrictions for raising religious generations cannot be defined as dependence because voluntariness is foremost in Islam.

5. Conclusion

A daily life of religion and piety is an understandable issue in the context of the relationship of the actors' opinions, practices, and faith. Women's domestic experiences, the most impenetrable area of daily religious life, can only be understood by researchers understanding and interpreting their intentions. Religious Muslim women's domestic dress and femininity remain as unresolved questions in the social sciences. Although data collected from interviews conducted with a limited number of women cannot present completely clear results about female piety, they yielded a considerable amount of information about the issue.

This study determined the home as the main space of freedom for religious Muslim women. Home is a place where religious women can display their femininity and sexual identities freely and take pleasure in them. Human nature, the reference point for domestic practices, was identified as the legalizing resource for different interpretations of the religion. Arguments suggested that religion is not against human nature. In this study, it even improves the religion to have conflicting themes. However, this contradiction is solved by means of obedience and voluntary affiliation to religion. The religion-based liberating notion of daily life is being legalized.

After presenting domestic life to partners, especially to women, as a space of freedom, the religious limitation introduced by the presence of children takes place is the focus of this conflict. The ideal of raising a religious generation also limits religious Muslim women's domestic practices. Not developing children's sensibility about sexual issues and allowing them to have a good command of private issues as late as possible are seen as indispensable rules of moral development. Therefore, especially for religious women, clothes and femininity that can be regarded as pleasure-based or comfortable are permitted only in the bedroom or postponed to times when children are absent.

One of the most important bases for women's domestic femininity and their active sexual identities is their duty to protect their husbands from *haram*. This threat, posed by women who are not veiled, in social life outside the home, is the basis for this duty due to emotional and religious reasons.

The participants' opinions and approaches about the research question differ. The way highly educated, working religious women dress and display feminine behaviors is independent from the religious idea that "looking beautiful for the husband is also an *ibadah*." The way the much less educated (primary school graduate) women of İsmailağa Jamia dress and display their feminine behaviors focuses on pleasing husbands based on the religious idea that "looking beautiful for the husband is also an *ibadah*." The husband-related approaches of Jamia women are not independent from individual satisfaction. However, the responsibility toward the husband that emerges with religiosity stands at the basis of feminine behaviors.

In conclusion, religious rules for daily life considerably restrict women's domestic lives. Different interpretations of religious texts lead to different religious practices regarding this issue. Reading and reassessing religious texts is without a doubt difficult for all societies. In particular, revising religious rules related to women without paying importance to traditional and patriarchal effects causes thorny issues [42, 45]. However, without doing so, it is clear that traditional religious interpretations and daily life practices restrict women's freedom.

Author details

Fatma Zehra Fidan

Address all correspondence to: fatmazehrafidan@gmail.com

Celal Bayar University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of Sociology, Manisa, Turkey

References

- [1] Pereira C. Ibrahim J. On the bodies of women: The common ground between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. *Third World Quarterly*. 2010;**31**(6):921-937
- [2] Fidan FZ. Beauty perception of veiled woman and her tendency to beauty: Minds and bodies perambulating in purgatory. *International Refereed Academic Social Sciences Journal*. 2014;**5**(15):25-42
- [3] Fidan FZ. Dinsel Gruplarda Kadın Odaklı Kontrol Mekanizmaları: Kadın Kadının Kurdu mu? *Kadın/Woman* 2000. 2014;**2**(15):23-48
- [4] Fidan FZ. Tesettürlü Kadınlarda Özbakım ve Estetik Yönelimler. *Bilig*. 2015; Sayı. 75:103-126
- [5] Kara Z. Günahkâr Bedenlerden Referans Bedenlere: İslâm'da Beden Algısı Üzerine Sosyolojik Bir Değerlendirme. *Din Bilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*. 2012;**1**(12):7-41
- [6] Köysüren AÇ. Kültürel ve Dini Algıda Toplumsal Cinsiyet. Ankara: Sentez; 2013
- [7] İlyasoğlu A. Örtülü Kimlik. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları; 2000
- [8] Moghadam V. Revolution, the state, Islam, and women: Gender politics in Iran and Afghanistan. *Social Text*. 1989;**22**:4:40-61
- [9] Kandiyoti D. Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar. Çev. Aksu Bora, Fevziye Sayılan, Şirin Tekeli, Hüseyin Tapınç, Ferhunde Özbay. İstanbul: Metis; 1997
- [10] Mernissi F. İslâm'da Aktif Kadın Cinselliği Anlayışı. Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik. Der. Pınar İlkkaracan. İstanbul: İletişim; 2004. pp. 33-53
- [11] Ahmed L. Women and the advent of Islam. *Signs*. 1986;**11**.4:665-691
- [12] Horvatic P. Ways of knowing Islam. *American Ethnologist*. 1994;**21**(4):811-826
- [13] Bradley T, Saigol R. Religious values and beliefs and education for women in Pakistan. *Development in Practice*. 2012;**22**(5-6):675-688
- [14] Barkow JH. Hausa women and Islam. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. 1972;**6**(2):317-328
- [15] Ross ML. Oil, Islam, and women. *American Political Science Review*. 2008;**102**(01):107-123
- [16] Pal ID. Women and Islam in Pakistan. *Middle Eastern Studies*. 1990;**26**(4):449-464
- [17] Mahmood S. Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 2011
- [18] Golley NAH. Is feminism relevant to Arab women? *Third World Quarterly*. 2004;**25**(3):521-536
- [19] Hale S. The rise of Islam and women of the national Islamic front in Sudan. *Review of African Political Economy*. 1992;**19**(54):27-41

- [20] Kamali MH. References to Islam and women in the Afghan constitution. *Arab Law Quarterly*. 2008;**22**.3:270-306
- [21] Kandiyoti D. Between the hammer and the anvil: Post-conflict reconstruction, Islam and women's rights. *Third World Quarterly*. 2007;**28**(3):503-517
- [22] Moore KM. Visible through the veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law. *Sociology of Religion*. 2007;**68**(3):237-251
- [23] Fidan FZ. Tesettürlü Kadının Eril Zihniyet Aynasındaki Görüntüsü: Yeniden Oluşan Zihinsel Estetik Kalıplar. Ed: Fatma Zehra Fidan/Duygu Alptekin. *Kadın Bedeni ve İstismarı içinde*. İstanbul: Opsiyon; 2015. pp. 93-119
- [24] Göle N. İç İç Girişler: İslâm ve Avrupa. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları; 2010
- [25] Yıldırım A, Şimşek H. Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri. Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık; 2011
- [26] Çokluk Ö. Nitel bir görüşme yöntemi: Odak grup görüşmesi. *Kuramsal Eğitimbilim*. 2011;**4**(1):95-107
- [27] Khan MW. *Women between Islam and Western Society*. New Delhi: A-Risala Books; 1995
- [28] Reece D. Covering and communication: The symbolism of dress among Muslim women. *Howard Journal of Communication*. 1996;**7**:35-52
- [29] Ruby RF. Listening to the voices of hijab. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 2006;**29**:54-66
- [30] Hargreaves J. 4 Sport, exercise, and the female Muslim body. *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*. 2006;**74**:74-99
- [31] Droogsma RA. Redefining hijab: American Muslim women's standpoints on veiling. *Journal of Applied Communication*. 2007;**35**:294-319
- [32] Read JNG, Bartkowski JP. To veil or not to veil? A case study of identity negotiation among Muslim women in Austin, Texas. *Gender & Society*. 2000;**14**(3):395-417
- [33] Dunkel TM, Davidson D, Qurashi S. Body satisfaction and pressure to be thin in younger and older Muslim and non-Muslim women: The role of Western and non-Western dress preferences. *Body Image*. 2010;**7**(1):56-65
- [34] Briggs CL. *Learning How to Ask: A Socio Linguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2003
- [35] Patton MQ. *Qualitative Evaluation Checklist*. Evaluation Checklist Project. 2003. Available from: www.wmich.edu/evalctr/cheklists. [Erişim tarihi: April 2, 2015]
- [36] Wetherell M, Potter J. *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage; 1987
- [37] Billig M et al. *Ideological Thinking in Everyday Thinking*. London: Sage; 1988

- [38] Willig C. Foucaultcu Söylem Analizi. Çev. Sibel A. Arkonaç. *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: Open University Press; 2008
- [39] Wetherell M, Potter J. Discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. In: Antaki C, editor. *Analysing Everyday Explanation*. London: Sage; 1988
- [40] Arkonaç S. Eleştirel Psikoloji Bülteni. *Psikolojide Araştırma ve Yöntem Tartışmaları Sayısı*; 2014. pp. 39-54
- [41] Bilmen ÖN. Büyük İslâm İlmihali. İstanbul: Bilmen Basım evi; tarihsiz.s.73
- [42] Yeğin A. Osmanlıca-Türkçe Yeni Lügat. 4. Baskı. İstanbul: Hizmet Baskı; 1983.s.681
- [43] Fidan FZ. Modernlik ve Dindarlık Arasında Kadın. İstanbul: Opsiyon; 2015
- [44] Ali K. Cinsel Ahlak ve İslâm. Çev. Adnan Bülent Baloğlu. İstanbul: İletişim; 2015
- [45] Barlas A. "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press; 2002
- [46] Hidayatullah AA. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press (UK); 2014
- [47] Hassan R. Feminism in Islam. *Feminism and World Religions*. 1999;248-279
- [48] Evde saç açık gezilebilir mi? 20 March 2017. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com> [Accessed: January 7, 2017]
- [49] Badinter E. Kadınlık mı Annelik mi. Çev. Ayşen Ekmekçi. İstanbul: İletişim; 2011
- [50] Beauvoir S. Kadın/İkinci Cins/Evlilik Çağı. 8. Basım. Çev. Bertan Onaran. İstanbul: Payel; 2010
- [51] Arkonaç S, editor. *Söylem Çalışmaları*. Ankara: Nobel Yayınları; 2012. [Erişim tarihi: 7 Ocak 2017]