

## AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY: DOES WATCHING A VIDEO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS?

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### ABSTRACT

The present research investigated the affect of stereotypes about veiling by means of a short video. Experimental strategy employing a within subject design was used to find out the change in perception regarding veiling of university students. The sample consisted of 98 participants with ages ranging from 17-28 years. The data was collected from a liberal arts university of Lahore, Pakistan via systematic sampling. Students were given a measure of perceptions about women who veil pre- and post-watching a video about a compassionate Muslim woman. Findings of the study suggested that though these university students did not have negative stereotypes about women who veil, a 5-minute video still served as a means of changing their perception in a positive direction.

**Key words:** stereotypes, perception, veiling, experimental, within subject, Muslim women, Pakistan

### INTRODUCTION

“People grab our veils, call us terrorists and want us dead”: What it's really like to be a Muslim woman in Britain” (Vidal, 2014, para. 1).

The *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Esposito, 2004) has stated that the hijab is “The traditional Muslim women's head, face, or body covering, of numerous varieties across time and space” (p. 112). Hijab is the same word for veil; it has a cultural and religious significance in Islam (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). Different styles of veil exist in today's Muslim world. Namely, the chaddar which is a form of shawl Persian women wear to cover their heads and bodies; the jilbab which is like a coat one wears over routine clothes; the khimar which is a type of head scarf; the niqab which is a form of face veil; and the burqa which conceals the entire body except the eyes (Carvalho, 2010).

Franks (2000) suggest that veil causes two types of separations in Islam. The first type of separation refers to symbolic separation whereby a veil descended and separated the prophet, his wives and companions from others. This veil has its origin in the Qur'an. The second kind of veil is about dressing and modesty, which also stems from the Qur'an. Moreover, the Qur'an stresses upon modesty from

both males and females by commanding both to lower their gaze (Qur'an 24:30–32) so that they can guard their modesty. However, the reality is different in practice as stress is laid mostly on female modesty (Franks, 2000).

Droogsma (2007) suggests that there is a significant difference in taking on the hijab as one's personal will in a democratic state, versus wearing it in an Islamic state where it is obligatory, versus wearing it in places where it may not be allowed. He further adds that adopting Islamic dress in Britain is looked upon as diverging from uniformity. Moreover, he suggests that in Britain nowadays courage and fearless are required to wear the hijab. Furthermore, Carvalho, 2010 explains that the veil actually became a symbol of the Islamic movements started by young women, despite the fact that modernizers, post colonists and secularists have tried to eradicate veiling in various parts of the world. Veiling has been banned in several countries around the globe at various times.

Veiling in this study refers particularly to the full covering of the burqa which conceals the entire body except the eyes (Carvalho, 2010). Perception refers to the way people view each other. Stereotypes –

broad generalized views of an individual that are based on group membership – also fall within this definition. Stereotypes are simple images and categories formed in the mind about entire groups of people and if a person's behavior is congruent with the already held set of stereotypes, people are more likely to notice and remember those behaviors and think of them as stable characteristics or traits (Chung, 2007).

### **Rationale of the Study**

Veiling has become a topic of discussion in the west especially after the incidents of 9/11. Following the emergence of oppressive regimes such as the Taliban generalizations based on false media representation against Muslims and veiling has increased. People believe that Islamic nations are the ground of terrorism thus Muslims are looked upon as terrorists and Muslim women as submissive. Consequently, veiling has been banned in several countries around the globe such as Iran, Turkey, Tunisia and Indonesia. France is also significant to mention as it has imposed bans on wearing head scarfs in government schools. Moreover, other nations such as Belgium, Switzerland, Egypt and Italy have also moved bills to restrain veiling. Since Pakistan has served as a first line ally of US in war of terror and unfortunately is also a victim of terrorist activities and lost numerous precious lives. Pakistan is also affected by the emergence of oppressive regimes including Taliban and ISIS. Therefore, even in Pakistan where majority belongs to Muslim religion veiling is associated with stereotypes which create problems for veiling women. This study is aimed at changing perceptions about veiling by means of a video. The hope is to determine if something as simple as a 5-minute video can play a part in changing the negative perceptions about veiling, thereby alleviating some of the problems experienced by women who veil.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is likely to be a significant difference in scores on a measure of perceptions of women who veil after watching a video about a compassionate veiling woman.

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

The present study was quantitative in nature and used an online survey method to collect data.

Experimental research design was adopted for this research. The experimental research strategy establishes the existence of a cause-and effect relationship between the two variables namely independent and dependent variable (Gravetter, 2012). A within subject design was employed to investigate the difference before and after watching the video. A within-subjects design looks for differences between treatment conditions within the same group of participants (Charness, 2012).

### **Participants**

Systematic random sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. In this study a database of student emails from five consecutive years of admission in a liberal arts university in Lahore, Pakistan was created based on the structure of student emails. Every fifth email was compiled and groups of emails were sent, ensuring each email address remained confidential by putting the emails into the BCC line. In Systematic random sampling a sample is obtained by selecting every nth participant from a list containing the total population after a random start (Gravetter, 2012). The student email database was created and randomly sampled. Selected addresses were sent an email with a link requesting their participation in this study. The link directed them to an informed consent page, detailing the purposes of the study, ensuring their confidentiality and informing them that they have the right to leave the study at any time. The online questionnaire included demographics, background knowledge of Islam, and Perception about women who veil was completed.

### **Materials and Measures**

#### **Demographics questionnaire**

A self-designed demographic sheet was created to obtain information regarding age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation.

#### **Perception about women who veil**

A 20- item measure of perceptions about women who veil was created for the purpose of this study. It includes both negative and positive words that have been used by participants in previous studies to describe women who veil and is based on the above literature review. A 7-point Likert scale was used for all items (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). Participants were asked to rate their degree of agreement with each word as a descriptor of veiled

women. The negative words included in this measure are: weak, villain, terrorist, untrustworthy, submissive to men, cold, not well educated, inferior, victims of their own societies, and tranquil. The positive words are strong, hero, modest, loyal, dedicated to their families, warm, intelligent, completely equal with men, liberated, and revolutionary. Reliability estimates of the perceptions of women who veil scale were computed using Cronbach-alpha and ranged from 0.56-0.75.

**Procedure**

After the study received approval from the Institutional Review Boards of a liberal arts university in Lahore. The student email database was created and randomly sampled. Selected addresses were sent an email with a link requesting their participation in this study. The link directed them to an informed consent page, detailing the purposes of the study, ensuring their confidentiality and informing them that they have the right to leave the study at any time. Some deception is required, as the participants should not be aware that the purpose is to change their perception of women who veil; however, they will be informed at the end and provided with the email address of the supervisor of this study. The online questionnaire regarding demographics and Perception about women who veil was completed. Participants were then asked to watch a 5-minute video named “behind the walls” portrayed how a veiling Muslim woman is perceived by a young man. The video shows that a non-Muslim man is concerned about entering an elevator because of a Muslim veiling woman. Unfortunately, the light goes off and they are stuck in the elevator. Suddenly, the elevator moves and the mirror breaks, wounding the man. At that moment the Muslim woman as a sign of good gesture removes her veil and use it to tie the man’s wound to stop bleeding. Participants were then requested to complete the perception about women who veil questionnaire again.

**Results**

Analysis was done using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21. Descriptive analysis included frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The alpha level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$  for the proposed study. Inferential statistics included paired sample t test.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=98)*

Variable	n	Frequency	M	SD
Age	91		20.9	2.19
Gender	98			
Male		34		
Female		64		
Economic status	98			
Upper class		16		
Middle class		82		

Descriptive analysis shows that 98 university students participated in which 34 (34.7%) were male students, 64 (65.3%) were female students. Participants were in the age range of 15-28 years (M=20.97, SD=2.19). Descriptive statistics of the sample are represented in the table (see Table 1). Figure 2 represents the level of education of all the participants.

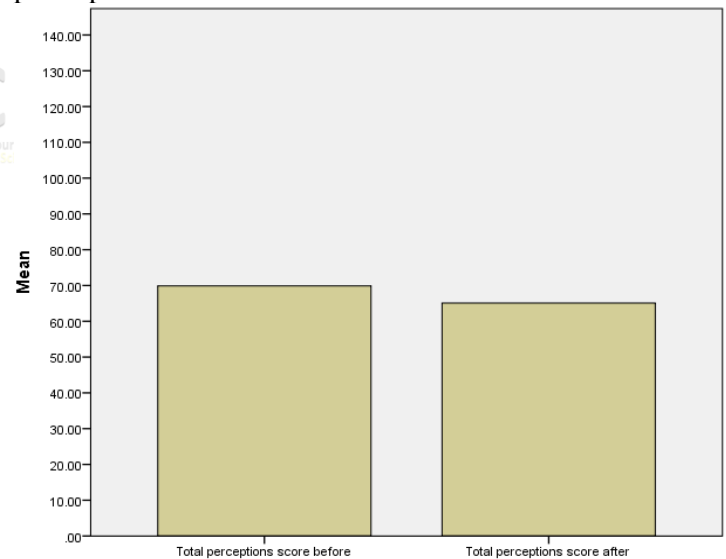


Figure 2: Results of paired sample t-test. Bar graph representing mean total perception score before and after watching the video

**Table 2**  
***Difference in total perception score before and after watching the video***

Variable	M	SD	t(79)	P	Cohen's d
Total perception before	68.85	16.22	2.09	0.039	0.05
Total perception after	64.31	13.10			

Note: M= Mean, SD=Standard deviation

The result of the paired sample t-test was significant [t (79) = 2.095, p = 0.039]. Results of t-test are represented in table 2. Cohen's d was computed to evaluate effect size. A small effect was found (eta squared = 0.05). The mean after watching the video the average perception of women who veil was more positive than before watching the video (Before: M = 64.31, SD = 13.10; After: M = 68.85, SD = 16.22).

**Discussion**

It was hypothesized that scores on a measure of perceptions of women who veil will decrease after watching a video about a compassionate veiling woman. This hypothesis was supported.

According to previous literature Cohen and Peery (2006) conducted a research on sophomore students aimed at changing their perceptions about Muslim women through different kinds of literature. They demonstrated that learning about the duties of women through a collection of different literature such as movies, novels, stories and essays enhanced students' perspectives about Muslim women and in some cases even changed their views about Muslim women in the positive direction. Cohen and Peery (2006) found that when students' perceptions were challenged, some were flexible to change their views about Muslim women. Unexpectedly, it has been found that people, even in Eastern countries can have negative perceptions of women who veil (Awan et al., 2011).

Previous literature shows that negative perceptions can be changed by means of focus groups (Cohen et al, 2004), different kinds of literature such as novels, stories, essays and magazines (Cohen and Peery, 2006). Moreover, media (movies, advertisements and television programs) can also serve as a tool to break stereotypes (Chung, 2007). Furthermore, research shows that live models can also be used to

break stereotypes (McGhee & Frueh, 1980). This current research adds to the previous literature, indicating that perceptions can be changed in a positive direction by a small five-minute video. Interestingly, in the sample in this study, a positive perspective toward women who veil became an even more positive view. This indicates that even people who do not have stereotypes about veiling can have a more positive perception about veiling after watching a short video.

**Implications**

Since a 5-minute video used in this study changed perceptions about veiling this suggests that you-tube videos, documentaries, movies, social media outlets such as Facebook and twitter, and even commercials can serve as a means of breaking stereotypes. Moreover, not only positive videos can change perceptions but negative videos can also influence people by creating stereotypes.

Moreover, if other universities would create a similar atmosphere to a liberal arts university where huge emphasis is laid on morals like respecting others, honesty, integrity and tolerance then it would help to further break the stereotypes regarding veiling. This in turn would be beneficial for veiling women.

Furthermore, when a small video can alter the perceptions of participants then the real-life social interactions with veiled women can also make a difference. As already reviewed above, veiling also creates problems for veiled women. Some people treat them unfairly due to the stereotypes attached to the Muslim faith. They may struggle to attain jobs, spectators shout at them, and they are detained in airports on account of security concerns. Likewise, some people avoid interaction with veiled women (Droogsma, 2007). Both media and positive social interactions with these women would help to change the mindset of others. This would give veiled women a hope for a better future where they would not be stereotyped.

**Limitations**

A major limitation of this study was that there was no way to ensure that the respondents watched the video in the questionnaire before answering the respective questions. Furthermore, the scale created for this research was based on the literature reviewed; however, the low reliability scores suggest

that it may not be measuring a single construct of negative perceptions toward veiling women ( $\alpha = .56 - .75$ ).

Moreover, the video used in this research paper included people who were not from the same culture as the participants. This could have influenced the responses of the participants.

### Conclusion

The present study suggests that university students in a private liberal arts university in Lahore do not have negative stereotypes about women who veil. Moreover, a small 5-minute video can serve as a means of changing perception. Since a 5-minute video used in this study changed perceptions about veiling this suggests that you-tube videos, documentaries, movies, social media outlets such as Facebook and twitter, and even commercials can serve as a means of breaking stereotypes. Moreover, if other universities would create a similar atmosphere as of a liberal arts university where huge emphasis is laid on morals like respecting others, honesty, integrity and tolerance then it would help to further break the stereotypes regarding veiling. Furthermore, when a small video can alter the perceptions of participants then the real-life social interactions with veiled women can also make a difference.

### Data Availability Statement

The data sets associated with this paper are available upon request from the corresponding author. There is no conflict of interest.

### Ethical approval

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee of the liberal arts university (name blinded), Lahore, Pakistan.

### Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### Contribution of each Author

Amber Baseer: Data collection, literature review and manuscript writing, Concept, study design, Data analysis and correspondence

Dr. Elizabeth Schwaiger: Research Supervision, Critical review of the manuscript

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the author.

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