

Veiling in style: How does a stigmatized practice become fashionable?

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Why are an increasing number of Turkish women wearing veils in a secular country where the practice is banned in public buildings? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says one factor is fashion.

Authors Özlem Sandıkcı and Güliz Ger (both Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey) report that much like the first people who began wearing blue jeans or getting tattoos, adopting this "stigmatized" [fashion](#) signifies independence from the social norms of the secular country. So while the veil is perceived as repressive to Westerners, some Turkish [women](#) adopt it as a sign of deviance from the values of their mothers and peers as well as for religious reasons.

According to the authors, in a middle-class, urban, secular social milieu in Turkey, adopting the veil is a choice that runs against the grain of consumer socialization. In many cases, Turkish women wear the veil to rebel against the tradition of their mothers' generation, which has been wearing Western garb since the 1920s.

The study found that the interaction among the market, religion, and the national and international political spheres underlies the emergence of new veiling as an attractive choice for individuals. "Women, in their pursuit of freedom from the discomforts of various political and everyday anxieties and moral threats, willingly chose a stigma symbol and became part of a new community," the authors write.

The fashion industry is responding. The scarves and loose overcoats

worn by Muslim women in the 1980s have been replaced by fashionable alternatives. "As women compose new elegant, beautiful, and fashionable styles, they inspire others to adopt veiling. Fashionable veiling owes its spread and visibility partially to a new business sector claiming to 'make covering beautiful,'" the researchers write.

"Faced with increasing demand for fashionable covering, clothing companies catering to a newly emerging clientele proliferate. As new fashionable styles of covering spread and become visible, a new Islamist bourgeois aesthetics gets constructed."

More information: Özlem Sandıkcı and Güliz Ger. "Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?" [Journal of Consumer Research](#): June 2010.

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