

Veils, headscarves may improve observers' ability to judge truthfulness, study finds

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Contrary to the opinions of some courts, it is easier to determine the truthfulness of a woman wearing a headscarf or even a veil that leaves only her eyes exposed than a woman wearing no head covering at all, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

"The presence of a veil may compel observers to pay attention to more 'diagnostic' cues, such as listening for verbal indicators of deception," said Amy-May Leach, PhD, of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. The study was published in the APA journal *Law and Human Behavior*.

Judges in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada have ruled that witnesses may not wear the niqab, which covers everything but the eyes, when testifying, in part because they believe that it is necessary to see a person's face to detect deception.

In the study, believed to be the first to look into the effects of religious garments on lie detection, researchers conducted two experiments with a total of 523 participants. They examined participants' lie detection accuracy, response biases and decision strategies when evaluating the testimony of eyewitnesses in three veiling conditions: women wearing a niqab, which covers everything but the eyes; women wearing a hijab, which covers only the head and neck; and those wearing no veil.

"We hypothesized that lie detection accuracy would be higher in the

niqab condition than in the hijab or no-veil conditions because it would minimize the availability of misleading cues to deception," Leach said. "It was only when witnesses wore veils (i.e., hijabs or niqabs) that observers performed above chance levels. Thus, veiling actually improved lie detection."

In the first experiment, 232 students at a university in Canada were divided into groups. In one, 80 female "witnesses" were shown a video of a woman watching a stranger's bag. Half the witnesses saw the woman steal something from the bag. All the witnesses were told the woman was accused of theft and that they were being called upon to testify about what they saw. All were instructed to say the woman stole nothing - meaning half would be lying. Then they were randomly assigned to wear a niqab, a hijab or no veil. All wore black shawls over their clothing.

The witnesses were interviewed by trained experimenters and videotaped. The researchers then selected 10 videos of liars and 10 videos of truth-tellers in each veiling condition. The other participants watched the videos and indicated whether the women were lying or not. The result: Participants' judgments were more accurate when they watched the women in the niqabs and hijabs than when they watched those who were not veiled.

The second experiment was similar to the first but, in addition to Canada, it was also conducted in the Netherlands, where the government had recently nearly banned the niqab, and the United Kingdom, because a ruling on the permissibility of wearing a niqab in British courts was then imminent.

"Contrary to the assumptions underlying the court decisions cited earlier, [lie detection](#) was not hampered by veiling across two studies." the researchers wrote. "In fact, observers were more accurate at detecting deception in [witnesses](#) who wore niqabs or hijabs than those who did not

veil. Discrimination between lie- and truth-tellers was no better than guessing in the latter group, replicating previous findings."

More information: "Less Is More? Detecting Lies in Veiled Witnesses," by Amy-May Leach, PhD; Nawal Ammar, PhD; D. Nicole England, BA; and Laura M. Remigio, BA, University of Ontario Institute of Technology; and Bennett Kleinberg, MSc, and Bruno J. Verschuere, PhD, University of Amsterdam; *Law and Human Behavior*, published online June 27, 2016.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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