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# Hijab & Halal

A Look Into Islamic Culture



For Western Women



The Bridges Option



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### A Look Into Islamic Culture For Western Women

These observations are generalizations. The degree to which they apply to any specific Muslim will depend on how long they have been in the US, which culture they come from, and the degree of their assimilation.

### Cross Gender Contact

#### Modesty

Avoid direct eye contact

Revealing dress such as sleeveless or low cut tops or short skirts are perceived as immoral.

Pants are fine

Don't initiate conversation with a man

#### Ceremonial uncleanness

Don't shake hands or initiate touch to a man-being touched by a woman who is not a relative makes a man unclean for prayers

*...but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:4*

Eid al-Fitr is at the end of Ramadan and is a time for visiting, gift giving, and feasting. This is sometimes called Little Eid.

Eid al-Adha is the Festival of Sacrifice. It is also called Kurban or Greater Eid. It is a week of celebrating God providing a substitute sacrifice for Abraham's son. It concludes with killing an animal and giving the meat to the poor.

Each year both these celebrations are 11 days earlier than the preceding year

The Hajj and Umrah- At least once in a lifetime, if possible, one should make a pilgrimage to Mecca and other holy places.

### Clothing

Burqua or Abaya—long robe cover up worn to cover the woman's shape

Hijab – head covering – hair seen as sensual and only to be seen by women or close male relatives

Nikab – face covering allowing only the eyes to be seen

Gloves – many women also wear gloves

Chador – worn in some countries over head with screen in front of the eyes (this may not always have the face cover)

The host is responsible to cover all expenses for those they have invited.

Property and money are considered community owned within the extended family or clan

There will be a jug of water in the bathroom to cleanse with after using the toilet.

The left hand is used for bathroom cleansing. Therefore don't pass food that will be eaten by others with your left hand.

### Celebrations

A child's first birthday is very important

The Anniversary of the death of a loved one (esp. parents)

Weddings are preceded by a mendhi/henna party including all the bride's family and friends

Nowruz is a spring/new year celebration in Shia culture

Ramadan – a 30 day fast during daylight ending with a large meal at sunset called Iftar. Often this is a community meal at the Mosque

### Women

Depending on their cultural background, most Muslim women are not aggressive in initiating cross cultural relationships

Generally they do not date or have male friendships other than relatives

They almost always have a 3<sup>rd</sup> party introduce them to possible spouses

Will cover their hair as a sign of modesty and submission to God (Hijab)

Those who cover their faces do so because they believe their beauty should only be for their husband to see

Bearing children is a vital part of their marriage

Many are new to US and not fluent in English

They tend to gravitate to people of their own culture and language group

A woman is unclean and unable to go to the Mosque when bleeding, so many women always do their prayers at home

To be heard by God you should not be wearing nail polish.

Around men they should not wear perfume because it distracts men and draws attention to themselves.

Even if praying at home, hair should be covered.

When praying at the mosque, women are in a separate room or behind the men so that their kneeling and bending do not distract the men

Children, esp. younger are cared for by the mother. When boys are old enough to behave, fathers will take them to Mosque on Fridays

Adoption is extremely rare and then only within the extended family. If it is a boy, he should be nursed by a female on the man's side of family, a girl should be nursed by someone on the mother's side.

The lighter your skin, the more beautiful you are considered to be. The same is true for hair

Even women who have been highly educated still have a lot of serious beliefs about *jinn* and the *evil eye*.

Be restrained in complimenting a baby when in a group. The mother may worry that someone will be jealous and give the evil eye

## Within the house

Shoes are removed at the door

All meat products must be ceremonially clean (halal)

Cooking is a woman's job

Cleaning is also the responsibility of women

There is no artwork depicting living things. Quranic verses or pictures of Mecca are the only art. They do have photographs, but they are not displayed on the wall

When entertaining groups, men and women gather in different rooms or on opposite sides of the same room

Alcohol is not allowed

Dogs are not kept as indoor pets because they are unclean. Birds and cats are okay

The mothers are responsible to make sure their children learn to read the Quran and are trained in other religious practices

The eldest son is generally the most important/favored of the children

A young girl will begin to cover her head before puberty

Hospitality toward the extended family is the norm and expected. Visits can last for weeks or months