



Intersections of Cross-Cultural Style:  
The Design and Assessment of the Infinity Hijab Headscarf for Saudi Arabian Women

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The demand for cross-cultural clothing is best met if there is an accurate understanding of the cultural factors that influence clothing needs and preferences (Mullet & Park, 2011). An understanding of cultural factors through research is important because the development of products marketed and used across cultures continues to expand. The needs of Saudi Arabian women who are living under cross-cultural circumstances, in particular, are important to consider because many Saudi Arabian women are Muslim, and Muslims have an increasing presence in the Western world and are deeply immersed in Western culture (Smith, 2010). The hijab headscarf (HH) plays a significant role in Muslim women's dress, for it's a symbol of cultural, religious and traditional values (Rabolt & Forney, 1989).

Two designers collaborated to develop a modified HH, referred to as the Infinity Hijab Headscarf (IHH), in an effort to meet the HH needs of Saudi Arabian women acculturating to United States culture. The two-piece IHH set can be worn together or separately, as a headband and/or scarf (see Figures 1 and 2). The initial inspiration for the IHH came from two fashion trends: a wide stretch headband and an infinity (or tube) scarf. The design was also informed by scholarly research regarding the socio-religious cultures of Islam and Saudi Arabia.

This research is an extension of an undergraduate course project in which the IHH was designed. This study presents the results of a focus group that was held with Muslim women to obtain feedback on their HH wear and the IHH design prototypes. A total of ten participants were included in this study; six in the first focus group and four in the second focus group. Participants self-identified as Saudi Arabian female students attending Oregon State University who wear a HH on a regular basis. Data were analyzed using constant comparison processes.

Analyses also revealed reoccurring themes related to the physical and psychological benefits of the IHH design to the wearer; more specifically, comfort, both physical and psychological, was the single most important factor for the respondents. Given this finding, it is essential that designers working on modification of the HH understand this concept. The IHH design also stands to benefit the wearer by offering a novel and fashionable style, convenience and ease of wear, function, assistance in a youth to adult transition, effective social interaction, and the reduction of cultural barriers. The ability of the IHH design to meet the needs of a wearer who wished to remove it at varying times throughout the day was an unexpected benefit.

The IHH design stands to benefit the wearer psychologically by addressing issues related to tradition and effective social interaction, the reduction of cultural barriers, and the transition from youth to adulthood. The focus group participants informed the researchers that the IHH design could meet the needs of a market that had not been previously considered: pre-teens who

are undergoing the transition from youth to adulthood at the onset of puberty. The participants expressed that the IHH could be ideal for this transition because the two-piece design would allow a young girl to become accustomed to the feel and appearance of the HH during a stage of life when acceptance and conformity can be important. The fact that the participants perceived a sense of unity as a result of wearing the IHH design reinforced the researcher's original aim to design a cross-cultural HH that would provide Muslim women with a covering that can be worn in the United States with fewer stigmas.

Taken together, the critique of the design by focus group participants indicated that differentiation in HH wear already exists, therefore, the variation provided by the IHH is likely to be acceptable in the presence of American peers, as it reflects Saudi Arabian cultural values and American design trends in its inspiration. It is important for a woman to wear the IHH in the appropriate context, which can ultimately depend on who she is with at any given time. Future research may include (a) additional focus groups that further assess the IHH, (b) the expansion of IHH critique to Muslim women of other socio-religious cultures, and (c) further exploration of how the IHH can meet the needs of pre-teen hijab-wearing Muslim girls.



Figure 1. Separate pieces of IHH Design



Figure 2. IHH Design in hijab headscarf configuration

#### References

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