



The influence of important values and predominant identity on South African female Muslim students' dress practices

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Due to acculturation, South African Muslim women follow a variety of dress practices, ranging from traditional Islamic dress to more revealing Western fashions (Muthal, 2010, pp. 3 & 86; Kopp, 2002, pp. 64). The integration of new values and the creation of a new identity is a possible result of the acculturation process, when different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact. Values and identity are both expressive in nature, and individuals are motivated to communicate them to others through their appearances or dress (Kaiser, 1997, pp. 290). This study investigates a) the most important values (i.e., Social, Religious, Economic, Political, Aesthetic, Theoretical, Exploratory) and b) the predominant identity (i.e., Muslim, South African, Hybrid) as reflected in c) the different dress practices of South African female Muslim students. Everyday dress practices (material culture) are a reflection of underlying values and identity (non-material culture) (Kaiser, 1997). The cultural perspective recognizes the relationship between these two components and provided a framework for this study to determine how abstract concepts, such as values and identity manifest in dress (Kaiser, 1997, pp. 33, 48-50).

An exploratory survey design was followed. Reliable scales for values were adapted from Allport *et al.* (1960) and Bardi and Schwartz (2010). For measuring participants' predominant identity, scales from Phinney and Ong (2007) were adapted to relate to participants' dress practices. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 200 female Muslim students from the 354 female Muslim students enrolled at the University of Pretoria. Female Muslim students were purposively recruited on campus and asked to voluntarily complete the self-administered questionnaire. SAS software (version 9.3) was used to perform statistical analysis. Cronbach's α values indicated that reliability for most constructs were high (between 0.64 and 0.86) except for S.A. identity ($\alpha = 0.59$). The means of all constructs ranged from 2.45 ($M_{\text{Political Values}}$) to 4.64 ($M_{\text{Theoretical Values}}$). The standard deviation ranged from 0.53 to 1.10.

A two-way contingency table analysis was used to divide participants into two groups based on their dress practices - those who dress less modest and those who dress more modest. For both groups the Friedman test showed that all values were ranked in the same order of importance according to their

median values (1. Theoretical; 2. Religious; 3. Economic; 4. Exploratory; 5. Aesthetic; 6. Social; 7. Political). Results from an independent *t*-test indicated that the mean score of social values for the less modest group ($N = 104$; $M = 2.91$; $SD = 1.124$) and more modest group ($N = 96$; $M = 2.32$; $SD = 0.995$) differed significantly ($t = 3.94$, $p = 0.0001$). For religious values the mean score of the less modest group ($N = 104$; $M = 4.12$; $SD = 0.591$) and the more modest group ($N = 96$; $M = 4.39$; $SD = 0.538$) also differed significantly ($t = -3.37$, $p = 0.0009$). No significant difference in the importance the groups placed on economic, political, aesthetic, exploratory and theoretical values were found. The means were all similar at a $p > 0.0001$ level. Results indicated there is statistically significant difference ($t = -4.59$, $p = 0.000$) between the less modest group ($N = 104$; $M = 4.15$; $SD = 0.548$) and the more modest group ($N = 96$; $M = 4.48$; $SD = 0.449$) in terms of a Muslim identity. For both groups their S.A. identity and hybrid identity (a combination of a Muslim and S.A. identity) were equal in importance.

Female Muslim students at the University of Pretoria hold onto their Muslim heritage despite being in contact with the South African way of life on a daily basis. They continue to demonstrate their dedication to their Muslim background by dressing modestly to different degrees. The results revealed two groups: those who follow less modest and those who follow more modest dress practices. The more modest group placed more importance on religious values than the less modest group, while the less modest group attributed more importance to social values than the more modest group. The less modest group might feel a greater need to fit into the campus context and wants to appear more similar to other students on campus than the more modest group. For the more modest group their Muslim identity was more predominant than for the less modest group. The less modest group's combination of Islamic and Western garments may however point to a tendency to communicate a hybrid identity. Despite these differences, both groups were biculturally oriented, as aspects of Islamic and Western thought and behaviour were synthesized in each individual. Within the campus context they found a way to balance more than one cultural identity and to incorporate both in their dress practices.

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