



Introduction:

Different cultures engage in a wide range of practices to dress and adorn the human body. Veiling is one common practice that involves covering the head, face, and body, either partially or completely. It is employed for many reasons, and with many meanings cross-culturally. However, it also has a specific history entangled deeply with notions of Orientalism, imperialism, and colonialism as applied specifically to women in the Muslim world.

In this exercise, you will unpack some of these assumptions about the veil and learn how your views of cultural others are shaped by this history. You will be given a photograph and asked to write a short narrative about the woman in the picture and her life. The purpose of this activity is for you to explore cultural assumptions connected with the obscuring of a Muslim woman's face.

Participant Instructions:

1. The facilitator will distribute a photograph to you.
2. Free write (15 minutes) a short narrative about the life of the woman in the photograph. You can write about any aspect of her life that you wish, and write in either a non-fiction or fiction style, as long as she is the central character of the narrative.
3. Pair up and share their stories with one another (15 minutes).
4. Debrief with the entire group (15 minutes) using the following questions:
 - What commonalities are there among the stories about the veiled vs. unveiled women?
 - What assumptions did you make based on the status of the woman's face?

Think about the ways that the face (un)covering elicited certain notions about difference, beliefs, freedom, morality, health, security, justice, equality, and other cultural ideals.

Learning Points:

- Human material culture means different things to different people.
- History impacts our interpretations of cultural practices.
- Something that is uncovered is not more easily perceived and understood!