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## **Gendered Standards and Veiling in Iran**

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## Gendered Standards and Veiling in Iran

### Abstract

A research project analyzing how appearance standards and cultural norms have been used to define sexual appropriateness while maintaining gender-based prejudices, in the context of mandated veiling practices in Iran during the late 20th Century.

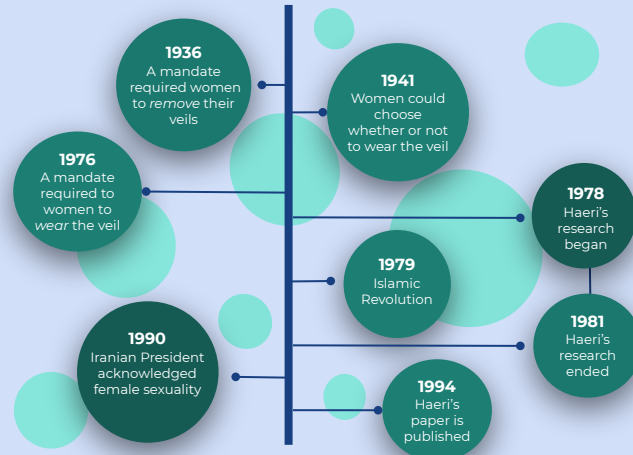
# Gendered Standards and Veiling in Iran

Claire  
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**Research Question:** How are appearance standards and cultural norms used to define sexual appropriateness and maintain gender-based prejudices?

## Hypothesis

Gender expression plays a large role in a culture's overall means of controlling the standards of sexuality. Where resources are generally under control by one sex and are important to the reproduction of the other sex, strategies for controlling the reproduction of the other sex are more common, such as enforced veiling, which results in gender-based double standards and prejudices for sexual behavior.



## Ethnographic Introduction

The Middle Eastern country of Iran, officially the Islamic Republic of Iran, is an intensive agricultural based society, governed by a democratic theocracy. Iranian culture since the Islamic Revolution of 1978, has strict codes of behavior regarding gender and sexuality, with punishments for those who defy those cultural taboos. This field research was conducted from 1978-81 by Shahla Haeri, and her paper details the discourse surrounding female sexuality in Iran.



## Conclusion: How the Data Speaks to the Question

The veil, or chador, is a tangible symbol used to maintain standards of sexuality and mild gender disparity in the culture of Iran, and Islam is an influential factor in the society's attitudes towards gender and sexual expression. During the time of Haeri's research, the female body, including hair, was viewed as an object of desire, and women as the "embodiment of sexuality." Women were mandated by the Iranian government to wear the veil to prevent any amoral thoughts about them and to uphold traditional religious beliefs. "The presence of an unveiled woman," writes Haeri, "communicates a sexual message that is culturally inappropriate." The societal norm of veiling, when broken, yields social sanctions and consequences. Throughout the years, attempts by women's rights groups have been made to separate the veil and the concept of chastity.

The veil is a controversial article that highlights how heavily appearance, especially that of a woman, is connected to how an individual is perceived in regards to their sexuality and chastity. From culture to culture, standards in gender expression vary, but judgement and prejudice is present regardless of whether a woman is wearing a burqa, a bikini, or a business suit.

## Reference

Haeri, Shahla. 1994. "Temporary Marriage: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality in Iran." In *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, 98-114, 203-7. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.  
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