



Is it Permitted for a Woman to Wear a Gun?

Isn't Gender Equality in Clothing Biased Against Men?

On my recent visit to Denmark, to attend my mother's 85 year-old-birthday party, I brought home some of my father's, OBM, remaining neckties, to be worn by his descendants and other Israeli males. My own husband and younger son do not wear neckties on principle, but that is a story for another time. One of the ties, in a beautiful turquoise and burgundy silk pattern, caught my eye. Perhaps, I could wear it on top of one of my many solid color turquoise/blue scarves? I could rip up its seams a bit and refold it, but would it go against the Torah prohibition of crossdressing? (Torah law forbids both men and women from wearing clothes meant for the opposite sex). It seems to me that it would be ok, because using the necktie in my head covering would no longer seem like a man's garment at all. Rather, it would be altered to become a colorful headband, a kind that women often wear. The issue spurred me to look into this mitzvah and try to understand the underlying reason for the Torah prohibition against crossdressing. In the name of gender equality and the empowerment of women, our modern Western world tries to blur gender distinctions in many ways, including the dress code. One major distinction between men's and women's attire has always been that men wear pants whereas women wear dresses or skirts. This is, by the way, still the halacha practiced among the Torah observant. Some of the more 'progressive,' modern- oriented people deride mitzvah-observant women for shunning pants. Interestingly, the accepted norm in the Western world is that women wear men's garments – which in many societies is no longer categorized as such – for example, pants, button down shirts with a collar, business suits, sometimes even with ties, sweat suits, unisex shoes and more. Thank G-d, even today, if a man shows up in a dress, high heels, eye makeup and a woman's hairdo, he will be considered as a transvestite, in even the most 'progressive' circles. So, if we want to use the principles of those advocating gender equality in clothing, we could say that the modern adherence to equal opportunities for crossdressing is biased against men!

What is the Problem with Crossdressing?

ספר דברים פרק כב פסוק ה

לֹא יִהְיֶה כְּלִי גִבֹר עַל אִשָּׁה וְלֹא יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה:

"A man's attire shall not be on a woman, nor may a man wear a woman's garment, because whoever does these [things] is an abomination to Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim* 22:5).

This Torah verse teaches us the following two mitzvot:

a) Women must not wear men's clothes.

b) Men must not wear women's clothes.

Transgender dressing is moreover "detestable to Hashem your G-d."

Why is the Torah against crossdressing to the extent that it calls it "an abomination"? What's the big deal with women wearing pants? Solomon Olusola Ademiluka from Kogi State University examined our Torah verse to ascertain its relevance for wearing pants by women in Nigeria. He concludes that *Devarim* 22:5, rather than being a prohibition against cross-dressing, primarily dissuades the Israelites from indulging in idol-worship practices that involved 'transvestitism.' He assumes that since biblical references to clothing mainly refer to male garments, both males and females wore the same type of dress at home, without difference between male and female

attire. Therefore, Solomon concludes that *Devarim* 22:5 is not relevant in determining whether to accept women wearing pants today. Although, I cannot deny that there are Torah authorities who mention that certain ancient pagan rituals involved cross-dressing, and therefore, we must distance ourselves from this type of behavior (Rambam *Guide for the Perplexed*, Third Section, Chapter 37; *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Mitzvah* 542), this non-Jew is obviously unaware of the array of commentaries that give more foundational explanations of the Torah prohibition of crossdressing. The main reason for the Torah's emphasis on distinctive garments is "to distance our holy nation from matters of sexual immorality and any matter whatsoever that contains a stumbling block towards it... In His love for us, He distanced us from promiscuity, which is an exceedingly ugly thing, [and which] takes the heart of a man and pushes it off from the good path and from desirable thoughts, to a bad path and thoughts of stupidity. And there is no doubt that if the clothes of men and women were the same, they would constantly mingle "and the world would be filled with promiscuity" (*Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah* 542). This reason makes a lot of sense to me, as we see in our modern culture that crossdressing and cross-mingling go hand in hand. To the extent that the distinctions between men and women are blurred through dress, so do their improper interactions increase. What may have started off as a 'platonic' relationship, often leads to inappropriate emotional attachment at best, and to sexual assault at worst. Along these lines, other commentaries explain that when a man dresses up like a woman, he may have inappropriate thoughts about women (which often lead to inappropriate action). This explains why our Torah verse uses the active term *לֹא יִלְבַּשׁ* /lo *yilbash* – "may not wear," regarding the prohibition for men, while it uses the passive *לֹא יִהְיֶה... עָלָהּ* /lo *yiheyeh... al* – "must not be... on a woman." This is because women are less susceptible to having and acting upon inappropriate sexual thoughts. Therefore, the prohibition for a woman is that a "man's garment shouldn't be on her" while she walks around men (*Panim Yafot*).

May Women Wear Unisex Pants?

What about wearing unisex garments? Although unisex garments are a rather new concept, dating back no earlier than 1968, garments designed to be suitable for both sexes, that do not infringe upon the laws of modesty, i.e. shirts, sweaters and sweatshirts are halachically permissible. Since it is commonplace for women in the Western world to wear pants, there are opinions that pants are no longer considered a man's garment. Nevertheless, it is still immodest for women to wear pants, as they are more form-revealing than a dress or skirt- emphasizing the place where the legs meet. Therefore, many halachic authorities still consider pants to be a man's garment, forbidden by the Torah. For more on this topic, see the article by [Rabbi Arye Citron](#). One of the bones we pick with adherents of gender equality is their combat for the right of women to wear men's garments, that fulfill a particular mitzvah, which is inappropriate for women. Interestingly, the authoritative *Targum Yonatan* from the Mishnaic period, translates our Torah verse *לֹא יִהְיֶה גִּזְזִית וְתַפְּלִין דְּהִינוּן תְּקוּנֵי גִבֹר עַל אִיתְנָא* – "tzitzit and tefillin, which are considered a man's rectification, must not be on a woman." Thus, he holds that it is prohibited from the Torah for a woman to wear any of these items. There are exceptions to this rule, as the Talmud states, "Michal, the daughter of King Saul, would wear *tefillin*, and the Sages did not stop her" (*Eruvin* 96a). There are additional reasons why it is problematic for a woman to wear tefillin, so if you really desire to wear any of these items, I advise you to consult with an authoritative *shomer Shabbat* Rabbi!

May Women Wear a Gun for Self-Defense?

Onkelus translates the first part of *Devarim* 22:5 as follows: *לֹא יִהְיֶה תְּקוּנָה זֵין דְּגִבֹר עַל אִיתְנָא* – "A weapon of a man shall not be on a woman." That seems a straightforward answer to our question. Since, it is normally only men who serve in combat units (*Babylonian Talmud*, *Yevamot* 65b), it is forbidden for a woman to bear arms (Rambam, *Hilchot Avodah Zara* 12:10). "From

where do we learn that a woman may not go out to war with a weapon? This is derived from the verse, 'A man's garment shall not be on a woman and a man shall not wear a woman's dress'" (*Talmud, Nazir* 59a). That explains why Yael killed the Canaanite general, Sisra, with a tent peg rather than a sword (Rashi *ibid.* based on *Shoftim* 4:22 and 5:26 with *Targum*). Nevertheless, it is clear from the wording of the Rambam and the *poskim* (authorized to make halachic rulings) that when something which used to be exclusively a man's garment becomes common for women to wear as well (an vice versa), the prohibition is lifted. Although, weapons are usually made more for men than for women, nevertheless, when there is an essential need to carry a weapon, such as in border communities in Israel, where there is always fear that murderous terrorists will strike and cause destruction and bloodshed, women may in fact train with and carry weapons in order to protect themselves and the school-children in their care, for nothing stands in the face of a life-threatening situation. Rav Moshe Feinstein permits women living in yishuvim to carry pistols for self-defense purposes (*Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim* Volume 4, 75 and *Yoreh De'ah* Vol. 6, 35). A support for this is found in *Sefer Chassidim*:

"There are certain times when one must act against the Torah in the name of Hashem. Thus, if enemies have occupied a Jewish city, where women walk around, and they are afraid of being caught and assaulted by these enemies, they may dress themselves in men's clothing and arm themselves with swords in order to trick the enemy into thinking they are men. The same holds true for young men without a beard that they may dress up in women's garments in order to protect themselves from the enemy"
(Rabbeinu Yehuda Ha'Chassid, *Sefer Chassidim* Chapter 200)

In the cases where women are permitted to carry arms, they must nevertheless adhere strictly to the rules of modesty appropriate for Jewish women, avoiding seclusion with a man during their training operations ([Maran Harav Ovadia Yosef Shlit"a, Yechave Da'at Volume 5, Chapter 55](#) based on the rulings of Tur and Shulchan Aruch, *Even Ha'Ezer* Chapter 22).

A Feather in the Cap of My Mitzvah of Modesty

Returning to my original question about my father's necktie, worn as a headband on my scarf, after searching high and low, I haven't found any precedent for my question. Yet, considering that the main reason for the prohibition of wearing garments of the opposite gender is to avoid inappropriate intermingling, my new 'headband-tie' doesn't seem to pose any threat whatsoever. Moreover, it has become fashionable for women to use different headbands in their hair-covering. Therefore, using my father's tie as part of my full head-covering, would be included in the halachic leniency, that when a garment is no longer considered gender specific, it is permissible, as long as it doesn't infringe upon the laws of modesty. Even more so when my father's tie serves as a feather in the cap of my mitzvah of modesty!