



How would you define your experience wearing the Hijab?

Growing up, I had a strange view of how I saw the hijab. All the women in my family swore by tradition, covering with a thin veil. Only now, over the years since they migrated to the Middle East, did they adopt the Middle Eastern tradition of the full headscarf, without fully knowing what it truly means to wear one.

In Islam, it's a commandment to protect our beauty. But somewhere along the lines, it got heavily misinterpreted into a male-centred ideology. That was the ideology I was raised with, eventually causing me to question: so if I were to wear the hijab, I'm doing this because a man can't keep it in his pants? Is that still not paying attention to them when we've been told to do everything of the opposite?

These juxtaposing ideals and thought processes, all shaped by cultural conformations, simply put didn't make sense, so it put me on a very rocky path. While I immensely adore hijabi women around me and respect them so much for committing to it, I've always struggled with it ever since I was told to put it on.

Do you think to any extent it makes you a lesser Hijabi for not wearing it routinely?

I think for me it's a part of my identity I can never fully get rid of, even if I wanted to. Being born a Muslim woman in a family who practices the religion extensively, it is always going to be a part of me. With how I viewed it when I was younger, it was disturbing, but the older I get, the more I'm starting to dislike it less, which means something.

Do you feel there are any discrepancies between you and other Hijabi women?

Of course. I mean, while they do it because it's in their heart, I do it to please my family. While I have been vocal about my views on it and how I'd like to take my time in discovering what it truly means to represent yourself as a Muslim woman, they forbade it under the statements of

"what if people were to talk?"

—because then I wouldn't be labelled the perfect marriage material and potentially be known as a slut. Especially with my inconvenient career choice in the creative field, it just adds to the accusations even further.





How would you interpret the societal pressures, contradictions, and expectations on yourself?

That's one of the big reasons I struggle to wear the hijab because I don't want to be put in a box. I wanted to remove myself from their blatant stereotypes of what a woman should be and completely sever ties from those disgusting apprehensions. But unfortunately, I've also come to discover that it's the same even if I don't wear one, it's just a different set of pressures. All the same issues, but in different fonts and different situations. I think as a woman, you can never be rid of performing under the public eye. To be perfect is what's sought after, and if you are not, then names are called. You gain a little weight, you're no longer in your prime. You say you have an affection for someone, you're labelled a slut. You say you have no interest in those who pursue you, you're labelled cold and a man-eater. You pursue a career you've long dreamed of as a child and you're labelled selfish and don't think of your loved ones. Everything and anything you do would never be enough, and I think I speak for all the women out there.



Have your views on the hijab changed over time?, and if so, what experiences contributed to those changes?

I guess recently it has. For a good while, with my personal life, I've always struggled with socialising with the right crowd because of how anxious I used to be. Now that's no longer there, I've been more confident in the way I carry myself. But with that confidence and charm, it has done me more harm than good. My beauty was valued over my work, and that's what was seen first, rather than what I do. I also found myself being objectified in ways that made it hard to be seen beyond my appearance. As much as I love having pictures taken of myself, I don't want modelling to be my main career. When trying to progress in my career through my work, I always get asked to have my photo taken or to pose for a video. I want to remove myself entirely from that. And I think the hijab changes how people see you in that sense. Instead of what's on the surface, they start to focus more on you as a person, and I guess you can filter out the wrong crowd with that. I'd like to be known for my work and my character, not my beauty. I've been in situations where people have only stayed around me solely because of that, and when that fades, I'm no longer needed. Like a doll you got bored of once it's no longer shiny.

Do you think people make assumptions about your faith or values based on when you choose to wear the hijab and when you don't?

Oh absolutely. When I used to have it on, everyone assumed I was super religious. And when I took it off, you can guess, they assumed I rejected my religion. Which is strange, because my faith has grown stronger than ever the minute I decided to rediscover Islam for myself, which involved the removal of my hijab. Surface-level assumptions are an epidemic I hope society can move away from. Whatever I do is between me and God, there's no third person involved.

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What is the emotional cost of existing within the paradox of feeling both connected to and distant from the hijab at the same time?

Losing a huge part of myself. Because you don't know which part of you makes you you. Is it the one ideal I conform to based on what my society infers it to be my true self? Or the one I created to hold my peace? Yet the one I've created, misogyny still finds a place to disrupt me of it. So what is my true self? I still don't know. And that identity crisis is still what I'm stuck in.



What do you wish people understood about women whose relationship with the hijab does not fit into conventional expectations?

It would be lovely if empathy and compassion were strongly advocated for, because you never know what they're going through. Leaving room for kindness helps with growth, rather than stalling it with ruthless comments. Mind your own business and lead your own life instead of telling others how to deal with theirs.



LOST IN TRANSLTION.