

Humayra

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To not be a deer in headlights.

How has your hijabi experience been so far?

I would want to tell them about change, how fast it is, how drastic it can be, how beautiful it can make your life. We always take change in a negative way and fight against it with such a force, but I view it as the opposite. How can you grow without change? Your identity is ever-changing. We could be 100 different people in our lifetime. It's only our core values and traits that explain our real identities. A beautiful person doesn't always have the best soul, and the beautiful soul doesn't always run around shouting about themselves.

How do you align the hijab with your personal faith and beliefs?

To me, the hijab is a constant reminder of my faith in God and helps me stay grounded to my personal beliefs and goals. In a very empowering yet humble way, it helps me stay true to myself by defying how a woman is "expected" to dress, especially in the west. I never feel like I quite fit into the traditional view of how women should dress in the Muslim community nor do I ever feel accepted by western cultures, and I never really have the urge to fit into it either. In addition I would say it also helps me stay away from certain situations that otherwise would have drawn me in. My hijab helps me view the world from a unique perspective.

Has there been a need of a support system in your hijab experience?

In my opinion, I never really felt the need of an external support system. I grew up watching only my mom wear it and neither of my aunts/cousins or friends wore it. I grew up going to multiple international schools and I was often the only person in the entire school who would be wearing the hijab.

My parents did express their concerns regarding me starting at a young age but I never really cared about what others had to say about my clothes. Despite feeling the need of a support system, I feel a lot of joy seeing and relating to honest representation on social

media and women sharing their personal experiences with the hijab, how they style it in different ways and how their perception changes over time.

Living internationally, how has the world viewed you in different spaces?

I grew up & lived in Dhaka, Bangladesh till I was 13 and surprisingly, that is where I faced the most criticism regarding my hijab. Starting with relatives who didn't "approve" of me wearing my hijab while some criticised me for not wearing it "properly" (mind you, I was still a child).

I think criticism that affected me the most were the boys in my 5th grade class when I moved to a new international school. I was called so many names and was made fun of, which was so funny to me because so many of these boys' mothers and other female family members wear the hijab too. And growing up in a country where wearing the hijab is so common, I expected them to have a little more respect and understanding towards it.

After I moved to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the age of 14, I felt a shift in the way I felt so comfortable in my hijab, despite going to an international school. I was called so many names and was made fun of, which was so funny to me because so many of these boys' mothers and other female family members wear the hijab too. And growing up in a country where wearing the hijab is so common, I expected them to have a little more respect and understanding towards its concept.

After I moved to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the age of 14, I felt a shift in the way I felt so comfortable in my hijab, despite going to an international school that had a much lower percentage of Muslim students. I would

say, compared to my environment in Bangladesh, Malaysia was a much more diverse and accepting community for me. Despite having barely any Muslim and no hijabi friends there, I felt more confident and comfortable in my hijab. I felt a drastic change in how I felt in my hijab after having moved to Germany at the age of 19 to start university. Moving to Europe after growing up in Muslim majority countries was very eye opening to me in regards to how hijabis are viewed around the world. I am more cautious of my presence in certain areas and around certain people and still often feel the need to minimize myself to prevent any added attention to myself.

Living internationally, how has the world viewed you in different spaces?

I would think it has mostly to do with how Muslim women are portrayed in all forms of media. Whether it be the news, social media or hijabi characters in movies and shows. There is a very skewed perspective of what hijabis are like and how they think, where in reality we are just like any other woman. We all have our niche interests, personalities and beliefs. The idea that hijabi women in general are all oppressed is something that upsets



me because while I do understand and empathize with how not everyone has the choice in certain parts of the world, that is neither the case for every hijabi nor a true reflection of our religion and reasons behind why it is worn.

Have your struggles ever wavered your faith and question the purpose of the hijab?

I wouldn't say it has ever wavered my faith in God and my religion but I definitely do question time to time the purpose behind why I wear the hijab myself. I often question the different interpretations of religious texts and what makes me more skeptical about certain interpretations is that it's mostly done by men, whereas the hijab (or at least the traditional meaning of hijab which in general is just a head covering) mainly concerns women. So even in the most earnest intentions, I don't think they can ever fully grasp what it is like to be a hijabi woman, especially in the west. Something else that makes me question the purpose of my hijab is how differently is perceived by the different cultures, issues surrounding autonomy and the various angles of criticism that comes with it.

Any last words?

To the hijabis; don't let people command you why and how you should wear your hijab! Religion is a very personal topic which can be strengthened with community but I

believe your faith can be shaken and weakened just as much when you tend too much to other people's opinions. That being said, I think it is just as important to do your own research on the topic of hijab and the different perspectives on it and come to your own informed conclusions. To everyone else that do not wear the hijab; just

and stop policing what people wear. It's a very polite thing to just respect what people chose to wear, despite how revealing / modest it is even if you don't understand why they do it. Be kind!