

Donna

Donna Badr, 21, Scribe and Medical Student, Egyptian-American

“I was 14 when I started wearing the hijab. For me, it was a spur of the moment type of thing, where I woke up one day and had this intuition or gut feeling that I really wanted to put it on. I grew up with my mom wearing it, and other older women around me—my mom's friends and my friends’ moms wore it. I had seen it around. In the beginning, I received some pushback from my dad, specifically because he was worried that it would create boundaries or setbacks in my life in terms of my career, or potential safety problems. He was like, ‘Why don't you just hold off on this for now? You're still very young, you can wear it in the future.’ But I was very persistent, and I knew that I wanted to wear the hijab. It was important to me. So I made that decision.

I don't think most 14 year olds think long term. So for me, my relationship with the hijab grew after I put it on. In the beginning, I didn't really think about the depth of it as much as I do now. But as I grew older, that sort of came along with it. I think that wearing it at that point helped me to grow in that way to get closer and closer to God and [to foster] a strong relationship. The hijab reminds me of my connection with God. It's a reminder of my purpose. A symbol of my devotion to the public, symbolizing to others that I'm devoted to God and to my religion. A huge part of my faith is honesty, but not just in the way I dress, but also in the way that I talk and the way that I treat others and carry myself. [This garment] is just an outward reflection of that. When I was 14, I wasn't thinking about all of that, I just sort of had this gut feeling that I wanted to wear it. I'm glad that I did, because that led me to this.

I have never faced any outright discrimination, but [if I ever did], the point is that I'm wearing the hijab for God and not for other people. I'm wearing it with God in my heart. I know that it protects me during [stressful] moments that I might have. The decision that I made was on my own. I don't feel like I want to take it off because of other people. It's always been for me, I feel like it's going to continue to be that way.

[Working in the medical field,] some of the patients are older and don't come from my background. So for a lot of them, this is their first opportunity to really interact one on one with somebody who wears the hijab. A lot of times they take the opportunity to ask me questions, and I really love that they do that, because I'd much rather be the person to answer than having them Google or assume their own response to something that [pertains to me]. I mostly get asked, ‘Why do you wear that?’ I stick to explaining what it means to me personally, because I know that it doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. I make it known in the beginning of the conversation that this is just for me, and I tell them that it's a symbol of my devotion to God and that it's a part of my religion. I wear it because I want to display modesty outwardly and inwardly: This is my way of doing that.

[I would say] that there is one question that irks me. It's really annoying to get asked [if we're constantly hot] because it's 110 degrees. Yes, I'm hot. But you're also hot. We're all hot. This piece of fabric isn't making a difference right now.”