

# Hadir

**Hadir Azab, 22, Graduate Student and Communications Coordinator, Egyptian-American**

“I started [wearing the hijab] when I was 10, summer going into fifth grade, so it was an expectation kind of thing. In the beginning, it was a matter of the circumstances. I don't know if it was like, ‘Yeah, I'm excited to do this.’ But I was starting to grow up, and saw my sister and my mom doing it. So I kind of followed in their footsteps.

[I've been wearing it] for the last 12 years. It's been a part of me; it's something that I don't really think about anymore. I will say, though, approaching undergraduate and graduate school is when I really started realizing that I'm a hijabi. I am now someone who's visibly Muslim and in a field where people talk about issues that affect me. I'm in this public policy program and now I walk into a room and people are like, ‘Oh, she's in this program.’ More and more, I'm realizing how visibly Muslim I am. As I approach a field of policy, as I work in communication, as I work with a nonprofit [CAIR], I'm realizing that there are expectations that aren't really the norm. For example, if you walk into a classroom, and you see me and my other friend, we're the only two hijabis in the entire class. [To me,] that's something I'm proud of [now]. It used to be something that would scare me. Now, it's like all eyes are on me, because I'm the exception. I'm sitting here doing the same exact thing that [everyone else does]. And it doesn't stop me. I think it gives me a different insight into the program.

Although I don't think I can imagine myself without it on, I don't know if that's because I started so young. I can't imagine myself not being hijabi, but even in the moments where I'm like, ‘Okay, let me think about what comes with taking it off;’ it's hard for me to actually [conceptualize it]. [It could be due to] family pressure because that wouldn't bode well in my family. It's also a societal thing, where there's a very big judgment against girls who take their hijab off. I completely disagree with that, but that is the case — [some] people don't take it well. I [think that it's] a security blanket at this point; you get so used to this being a part of your personality, your identity. And so to take it off, I feel like it would be whether or not that part of myself [at that time] is at a point of insecurity or a point of confidence.

I don't think anyone should be forced into wearing hijab, because it [could] take such a toll on you as a person. Unless you love it, and unless you make the conscious decision, it's going to eat at you every day of your life. You can grow to love it, but it takes a conscious effort. I think it takes a [strong] self reflection of, ‘I can do this, and I want to do this.’

I think that if I would have waited to become a hijabi, I would have loved it much earlier. It wouldn't have taken me so long to feel confident in it and to love it. But that also has to do with society's expectation with how clothing now suits hijabis. [Now] there's a big trend for baggy jeans and modest clothing and this streetwear look. Post high school, I found that I started finding my style a little bit more. I now pride myself on [my style] that has definitely shifted. I do love street wear a lot; I like that look, I like that hip hop style.”