

# Hagar

**Hagar Azab, 29, Public Health Consultant, Egyptian-American**

“I actually started wearing hijab really, really young. I wouldn't say that it was not my choice, but it was an expectation for sure. It was always presented to me from a really young age that as a Muslim woman, this is one of the practices and that I would be expected to wear it, but I never had an issue with it. But I was really, really young, when I put it on. A lot of people believe that when a girl gets to the age of puberty, then that's when she should wear the hijab. For me, it was even before then. I made the request when I was nine to my parents. In retrospect, I could see how that might have been a bit young, they should have probably just laughed it off, but, you know, my mom was like, ‘Are you sure? You're really young. This is a commitment, if you put it on, you have to keep it on.’ My nine year old self was like, ‘Yeah, I'll put it on.’ 20 years later, [and I'm still a hijabi].

I think, in some ways, it's such a big part of who I am. I think because I put it on so young, before I was even old enough to [really] be aware of who I am or know my identity inwards or outwards. I think I made that decision a bit before I reached that point. So it's almost like growing up with it. This is who I am, I don't really know much else. As I got older, there's a kind of reevaluation of, ‘Who am I? What is this? Why do I do what I do?’ And then it became a thing that I, without ever having to take it off, reaccept [the hijab]. It's a tug and pull.

It would be really difficult for me to take it off. I think there would have to be something tremendously, monumentally life altering for me to make a decision like that. And I think I wouldn't be able to come to a decision like that if I felt like something justified it because it is so ingrained in who I am. A lot of the values that I grew up with circled around how I presented myself, and I think it's [been embedded] and really built my character. I'm sure at some point, how I carried myself outwardly maybe wasn't the same inwardly, but at some point in time, the two became intertwined. How I carried myself became who I am, and how I made myself and how I presented myself to the world and the way that I wanted to become a part of my identity.

This piece of fabric on my head is not just an article of clothing, because when somebody sees me from a mile away, they automatically can tell [who I am] if they know anything about Islam. They know what I really follow. If they do not have any information about it, they can assume some of my core values, and it builds an automatic understanding and gives them information about who I am without ever having to speak to me. Hijab is a symbol of Islam, and therefore a symbol of what it represents. However, I think people have a hard time separating [the person and the hijab,] but it doesn't mean I can't do this or I can't do that.”