

# Liana

**Liana Homsy, 20, Student, Lebanese-American**

“I started school at a private Islamic school, so the hijab has been integrated in my life for a long time. My mom wasn't hijabi; when I was younger, she didn't wear the hijab until I was in about third grade. But I was surrounded by all my teachers who wear the hijab, and my classmates and I would pray in the masjid, wear it during school. The hijab was part of the uniform. Even though I wasn't required to wear it outside, I still had Saturday school, so I had to wear it then, too. I ended up trying to wear the hijab in sixth grade and it didn't stick. My parents thought that I was too young, and that it was too much responsibility. So I didn't. And then in eighth grade, I decided that I was going to start wearing the hijab for real, before I ventured off into public schools.

To me, the hijab is a form of modesty. It's a form of comfort. It's a form of pride in my religion. I like being different. I like standing out. I like representing Islam. I try to have it be a symbol of who I am as a person. For me, I view it a little differently than others, just because a lot of people may view it as an obligation, which it is, but to me, it's more of a personal comfort that I have this physical attachment to my religion.

I feel that as a hijabi, it's a lot easier to stay away from things that are more *haram* (prohibited). I feel like it's a bit easier when you feel like you have to represent your religion. You feel like you're doing an injustice to your religion when you're physically portraying a religion that is beautiful and clean. It just empowers me in a way because I feel like, ‘Yes, I'm Muslim, but I'm still doing everything everyone else can and I'm doing it in a respectful, modest fashion. There's a distinction between obligation and forced obligation. In Islam, we know that hijab is an obligation at some point in our lives. We're not saying the second you hit puberty, you need to be a hijabi. It's your journey, of course, but somewhere in your life you should start wearing it. People often assume that everyone forces you to do it, like you had absolutely zero choice, like you woke up one morning and there was a hijab on your head. That's not how it works, [we have the] choice in taking it off, too. [It seems that if someone has a question about it,] there's a lot of negativity in their question.

[Someone once] asked me if I was bald. I took it with a grain of salt. I was like, ‘Yes, I am bald.’ I have hair, but I can't talk about how long my hair is or what color it is, but you can see my widow's peak. Another time, I remember I was in my Spanish class, I was fixing my hijab and holding onto the little pin [that holds it], and this guy says, ‘Teacher, she has a weapon.’

At the end of the day, it's not about them, it's about me. It's about what is better for me, and my religion tells me that I should wear the hijab. The things that I do in this life count towards the end, and at the end of the day, I'm going to be questioned, not them. I can't just say, ‘Oh, yeah, I took the hijab off because one guy told me that I was a terrorist.’ Allah will respond with, ‘Well, you had so many other opportunities where it was good for you.’

[On the other hand,] you'll find people that will come up to me and say, ‘I love the pattern on your scarf.’ Or others will say, ‘It complements your skin. That's such an interesting pattern.’ I don't see the hijab as an obstacle. I don't see it as an obligation. I don't see it as something that's holding me back from anything. Instead, I always make a joke where I straightened my hair today or I dyed it to match my outfit. I love that the hijab gives me such variety with how I look. Just like the way hair

changes the way your face looks, hijab does too. I love that you can play with so many different styles. I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything.”