

Nada

Nada Mohamed, 24, Baker and Entrepreneur, Egyptian-American

“I was born in New York, and I moved to New Jersey with my family when I was two and a half; I was raised here. I went to an Islamic school when I was four years old, and I stayed there from pre-K to 12th grade. So my whole life, I've been surrounded by other Muslims and teachers who wear the hijab, so transitioning into wearing the hijab was pretty easy. Especially because I wasn't attending a public school, I was attending Islamic school, and I had to wear it anyway as my uniform. Then in eighth grade, that's when I decided to wear it [officially] when I was 13, and it was a super easy process. I was already wearing it for school, [so I took the extra step] to wear it when I go out.

It was easy up until it was time for me to go to college, and that's when it became a big shock. I was getting a little bit worried and I was hoping that I wouldn't get judged. But, luckily, I also went to Rutgers University, and there were so many other hijabis because there's a huge Muslim community that goes there. So again, it felt comfortable.

[I choose to wear the hijab] for a lot of reasons. I feel like number one, it's a good way to represent Islam. I feel like I'm a walking symbol of it. It also makes me more aware of my actions because I never want anyone to think badly about the religion, so I'm always trying to show others that, Muslims are nice people: caring and peaceful. I'm always trying to be on my best behavior. It's also a constant reminder of my religion and my connection to Allah. So, I feel like it's just become a part of me, and I can't imagine not wearing it. It's been 11 years of me wearing it. It means a lot.

When I wanted to join the rugby team [as an undergraduate student], I was worried that I wouldn't fit in, that I'd be looked at differently. But, it was all in my head. I don't think I ever felt [judged] in college. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to make friends or that people were just going to look at me differently. What I didn't realize is that especially now, I feel like there's so many of us [hijabis]. I go to the supermarket, and I'll probably find a hijabi. It's [actually] rare if I don't see other hijabis.

A common misconception about the hijab is that I think a lot of people think that we're oppressed wearing it and that we're just forced and not happy. However, a hard thing about wearing the hijab is finding proper clothes. In the winter, it is super easy to dress for it. You can wear nice sweaters, jeans, it's easier, but then in the summer it's harder to cover up because we don't have that many hijab shops. Most of them are online and ridiculously expensive.

Every person that is a hijabi has a different story: both on how they started it, and a different outlook on wearing it. At the end of the day, we're all women, we're all human with a religion. Wearing the hijab is about being modest, and I feel like that is a major part of it, but there's [truly] so much more to it. Some people can say that [our beauty] is being protected, or that we're being modest. [At the end of the day] we're just safe when we're out in the world.”