

Sarah

Sarah Poswal, 27, Paralegal, American (White)

“I became Muslim when I was 14. That kind of started from a series of events that were a little bit strange, where I saw somebody else wearing the hijab: that person is now my mother in law. Her son and I, who is now my husband, were not romantically involved at all at that time, I just knew him. We were on the same swim team. [When I saw her] at a swim meet, I became curious about the hijab, and I started researching it that night. I had actually never seen somebody wearing a scarf in person, which sounds a little bit unbelievable now, but I had only seen hijabis in pictures. The more I researched, the more I came to the realization that what I personally believed was closer to the nature of Islam. However, I wasn't saying, ‘Oh, I'm Muslim’ yet, that’s a big decision. I had also done extensive research on other religions, too, but I just kept coming back to Islam. That's how I became Muslim. That's actually how I also started talking to my husband, too, because I was asking him questions about it. Later on, we obviously got together, but they were kind of two separate trajectories.

The positive things happen more often than the negative [regarding questions from others about the hijab]. I get people who come up and ask questions a lot, which is a good opportunity to clarify things. A lot of people will also say that they want to wear something similar, but they feel worried about offending people. They're not Muslim, but they want to cover because they feel more comfortable that way. Being there [as a hijabi] is an opportunity to [shed light] and help people.

I think, overall, that this conversation about hijab doesn't have a lot to do with the actual piece on your head, but more so with what you're wearing on your whole body. I think that one of the big things is having control. I think that as women, a lot of people walk through society, and they feel like they don't have control over their own bodies. There's a lot of things that we see everyday that show us that the control that we currently have is tenuous, like the overturning of Roe versus Wade, the established precedent since the 70s, right? But things can come and go so fast, and I think that a lot of women are cognizant of that. So, having control over how people view your body is a very powerful thing, and it is a way that you can personally control how people view you, especially from the male gaze.

I think a lot of people who are not in the Muslim community have a kind of confusion over what hijab is about, so they don't really understand people's reasons or motivations are for it. I think that those reasons and motivations are extremely varied for each person. I honestly couldn't tell you that I even know what my mother in law's reasons were, but for me, personally, I have always felt that it is something that is supposed to be done. I'm actually not one of those people who is 100% on the side of hijab being completely required. I sometimes wonder if maybe the requirement was a little bit closer to something like how Indian women modernly wear the *dupatta*, where it's just loosely over the head, draped over the shoulder. [The hijab can be cultural too.] There's an element of fashion. Even in Malaysia, Indonesia, hijab is so fashionable there. Some people who are not even Muslim wear the hijab, because it's part of the mainstream look.”