

Sarah

Sarah Hassan, 21, Student, Egyptian-American

“I've always had a complicated relationship with my hair because growing up, I never really learned how to brush it and do it correctly. I taught myself, and after I learned how to do it, I got really attached to it; it would dictate my mood a lot of times. So it was always kind of daunting for me to face the idea of putting on the hijab because I really loved my hair. I feel like I made it a part of my identity, but it was also because of that that I felt like I should put it on. I felt like my hair had a lot of control over me, and I wanted to not let that keep happening. The week before I had put the hijab on, I had bought some hair accessories. Wearing the hijab really happened sporadically.

I had a conversation with my friends about the hijab around that time, and I was telling them I felt like I was going to put it on soon. I knew people who had the urge to wear it and convinced themselves not to, or would talk to people who could convince them out of it. After I had the conversation with my friends, I was like, ‘Okay, I know people who wanted to put it on and then didn't because they waited too long, and they thought about it too much. So now that I have this urge, I'm going to jump on it and I'm just going to put it on.’

It was scary at first, but it was also the realization that it's never going to be a perfect moment; I'm always going to have a reason not to do it. But it's important for me to wear it, and I feel like it's a step in the right direction. I needed to jump on this urge while I still have it. I never had anybody tell me to put it on. My mom obviously told me this was something I'd eventually have to do at one point, but she always ended those conversations reminding me that it's better to wear it when I'm ready because it's better to put it on late than to take it off.

For a while after I put it on, there was a part of me that was happy because I was like, ‘Oh, I don't have to worry about my hair anymore.’ But then that kind of developed into me just neglecting my hair and not being excited about it at all. There was no between, and that didn't feel good. Since then, I've just been trying to take care of it more, and trying to work on being able to appreciate it by myself, for myself. I think a lot of people my age on social media have this mindset that if other people don't see it, then it doesn't count. I'm trying to get over that and just be satisfied with appreciating it myself, and to [overcome] the urge of having my hair validated. I'm trying to counter the beauty standards in America, and I think I will be at peace. I'm working towards that all the time. I do feel better –day by day.

I think wearing the hijab in different styles helps. I used to dye my hair a lot, at least like nine different colors: pink, purple, blue. Now I feel like I can express myself through my clothing and accessories. The hijab is not a replacement for hair, it's just different. I express myself through art, as well. I have a friend who has been into making accessories, so we've talked about making hijab accessories and she's not even Muslim. She's very supportive.

However, the most irritating thing is shopping and finding a dress that's completely immodest [for me]. It will be perfect, then I'll turn it around and there's a huge hole in the back. It's very annoying. I'm not trying to shop for an apron.”