

## The Lack of Representation of the Hijab

Do Muslim women who wear the headscarf feel that they belong in Montreal, or do they feel like complete strangers? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is still hard for young women who wear the hijab to feel accepted in the society, even in a city that celebrates diversity like Montreal. Most “Hijabis” think that one of the biggest problems they face is the lack of representation of women like them in the media. This is the case of seven girls aged between fourteen and nineteen years old: Aeman, Balkis, Izzah, Rahema, Sara K, Sara B, and Souad.

The seven girls all agree that there is still a lot of work to do in terms of changing the mentalities. Not educated, oppressed, not talented, not independent, and the list goes on. These are some of the numerous stereotypes related to the headscarf wearers. Unfortunately, many people view the hijab as a sign of oppression. Balkis wonders “how can we put all the “Hijabis” in the same bag?” She considers that each woman who wears the headscarf is unique: “Just look to the fabric and colors of our hijabs, and you will notice that each of us has a different one.”

Fortunately, things are starting to change. Muslim girls from different countries are challenging the world. They are present in many fields like fashion, television, and sports. For example, fashion brands “are beginning to place more importance on inclusivity and diversity in their campaigns and messaging, and that has translated to greater representation of Muslim women, too.” (Khan) Often complimented for her style, Izzah is really interested in fashion, and hopes that in the future, she will see more girls like her join the industry. For her, by trying to improve their representation, “Muslim girls are redefining the limits.”

The problem is that sometimes, by always looking for representation, some women can lose themselves. For example, in November 2020, one of the most popular Muslim models, Halima Aden, decided to quit the fashion industry. She even wrote on her Instagram that "[she] was just so desperate back then for any 'representation' that [she] lost touch with who [she] was." Furthermore, for Souad, not every representation of girls who wear the hijab reflects the reality. For instance, talking about the girls who wear the hijab in some movies, Souad stated that "whenever she starts to watch a movie and sees a girl who wears the headscarf, she knows that there are high chances that the character will be portrayed as forced to wear it by her parents in the first episode. A few episodes later, she will be saved by her boyfriend and will take it off for him. For Souad, this is an example than not only does not show the reality of most girls like her, but it also reinforces the stereotypes.

Through their diversity and differences, Muslim women who wear the headscarf plan to show the world who they really are. They are powerful, smart, independent, and ambitious. Hopefully, one day they will be seen everywhere, and that will be considered normal, not surprising.

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