

The Voices of Muslim Women in Our Community



Ayasha Medina

“Back home, it definitely feels like it sometimes -there are certain scenarios that I can't freely say my opinion on because of a "reputation" of being a female muslim and just to "keep my honour" as a muslim girl. In a more open and supportive community, it's a lot easier now, but the hijab especially sometimes still makes me feel like I'm expected to behave and only say things in a certain manner.”

“When I first came, I remember people just being very reserved around me - mostly since they were being careful to not offend me in such a western-centric environment. I appreciated this - but it was also hard to get through the fact that I just wanted them to act normally around me. Another thing is that sometimes people expect me to bring my religion into everything - maybe because i'm wearing the hijab. But they assume that all the decisions I make or events in my life will have to go back or link to my religion which is not a true case.

“It gets sad and sadder, these days, I have to say. We haven't necessarily had the best reputation in the media, especially since 9/11. But it's also affected a lot of stereotypes and stigmas around muslims, which can be harmful. It's definitely not representative of the muslim community - especially considering how different and diverse the muslim communities get when you go from one country to another.”

Does your voice feel **limited** or **oppressed** as a female muslim?



How do certain **stereotypes** about Islam **affect** you?



What are your opinions on the **representation** of the muslim community **in the media**?



Raniyah Basheer

“Most people in the west would say that my voice is oppressed and silenced by my religion. However, I'm inclined to say that Muslims women's voices can be limited but it is usually by the limitations of western media and societies on allowing Muslim voices to be at the forefront of their own narratives.”

“I don't know of a single Muslim who has not been impacted by some form of Islamophobia in their lives. For me, it is more emotional effects caused by little things like family members and I being stopped at airports, the kind of reporting about Muslims that I read about in the news, the poor representation of the Muslim community in the tv shows and films that I watch etc.”

“Growing up, I never saw anyone from my religion or my culture in the media. The closest that I got was Aladdin, which is an extremely orientalist and stereotypical combination of the western view of the Arab and Muslim world. In recent years I have been excited to see Muslims and hijabs in mainstream media but these representations always end up being disappointingly stereotypical and inaccurate (the main example that comes to mind is Nadiyah from Elite). On the other hand, there have been some Muslims in western mainstream media that have been very positive and its been great to see the possibility of Muslim representation changing in the near future.”

“So far, I’ve been fortunate enough to never encounter explicit islamophobia firsthand (growing up in a muslim-majority community and then moving to an inclusive and supportive community). There are of course certain micro aggressions (aren’t you hot in there?) but sometimes when thinking about how bad people have it in some places, I don’t really mind. It does get tough when people expect not only my gender but my religion to come into play with a lot of things, though - certain responsibilities and the way I react to things - there are instances where I feel like my feelings, decisions, and things that I have to say are not acknowledged as mine but as a product of the fact that I’m a female and that I’m a muslim.”

“I’ve been wearing the hijab for as long as I can remember, that just the thought of taking it off doesn’t even really occur to me nowadays. I think it’s already a part of a safety net for me, just knowing that I’m somewhat covered all over - although it does feel like I would stand out too much sometimes because of the hijab. I’ve mentioned this earlier but it also gives an impression that I’m somewhat an expert in my religion, which I honestly am not really. However, as a muslim individual, I know at least back home it shapes me as a “good muslim” because I’m wearing the hijab, which comes with a little bit of some pressure sometimes.”

Has being a female muslim teenager in modern contemporary society imposed any challenges, prejudice or threat?



“Luckily, living in Singapore being a female Muslim hasn’t posed many challenges. Nonetheless, as I look at where I want to go after graduating thinking about the kind of prejudice, marginalisation I might face in other countries where I choose to study is definitely a factor I think about, which can sometimes feel disheartening because I question why it is something I must consider while others do not. Otherwise, sometimes there can be cultural clashes in social settings, but I don’t think that’s a unique experience tied solely to religion.”

What role does the hijab play in the portrayal of your identity and faith as a muslim individual?



“I personally don’t wear a hijab but I have friends and family who do. I want to note that in Islam, hijab means overall modesty (in addition to the actual scarf worn over the head) and in that regard, I personally interpret the hijab as a way to make sure women to not be sexualised or objectified and instead for their worth to be attributed to their character, intellect and internal identity.”

“I think people don’t truly recognise what muslims have contributed to society, all they see is just being a terrorist and I feel it takes away the light from all the great things we have done as a community. I think this should be celebrated more, as opposed to all the bad things we’ve done”

“When people think of muslims, terrorism is their first thought and it sometimes makes it hard for me which is why I feel religion is something I can’t openly share sometimes, because as I feel that’s what people will think of first, and I don’t want to fit into that stereotype”

“Even at UWCSEA I feel it’s very constrictive and I might not share that I’m muslim because I don’t want people to see me in a different light”

Anonymous

“What people see as ‘Muslim’ has affected what I share and don’t share about myself”

“The stereotypes of terrorists doesn’t reflect the islamic community as a whole especially because Islam, at the base of it all is the religion of peace”