My clothing, my choice by Shad Elbushra

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Shahd Elbushra wears her hijab daily in practice with her Islamic faith.

“Aren’t you hot in that?” — the question I’ve gotten too many times to keep count. Here’s the highly anticipated answer: Yes, I am hot in my hijab — but I’m much hotter without it.

Monday Feb. 1 is World Hijab Day, an annual event dedicated to recognizing the millions of Muslim women who wear a hijab and live a life of modesty. Additionally, this day invites non-Muslim women to try on a hijab for a day to experience what it is like to be a Muslim woman.

After 9/11, the perceptions of Islam drastically changed. Now, with Islamophobia increasing worldwide, a symbol of modesty and devotion gives a completely different impression. It has become a safety hazard for Muslim women, as people with negative perceptions of the religion sometimes harass them by physically harming them or pulling off their hijabs.

These instances have occurred because of countless misunderstandings and a large social distance between both groups. Many people feel hesitant to ask questions, so let me address some common misconceptions of the hijab.

“Hijab” in Arabic means “barrier” and can refer to any barrier, physical or spiritual. Colloquially, “hijab” is often used to refer to the headscarf worn by Muslim women.

A common misconception with hijabs is that Muslim women are oppressed because they cover up. In a recent interview on “The Tonight Show with Trevor Noah,” Dalia Mogahed, director of research at the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding, said hijab is an act of devotion to God and explained that oppression is the taking away of someone’s power.

“What hijab does is basically privatizes women’s sexuality. So what are we saying when we say that — by privatizing a women’s sexuality — we’re oppressing her? What is that saying about the source of a woman’s power?” Mogahed said.

Yasmin Mogahed, author and Islamic instructor at the AlMaghrib Institute, said, “We live in a society that has limited beauty to parts.”

Beauty has been attributed to parts of a woman’s body. From the multi-billion dollar makeup industry to the hundreds of diets to plastic surgery, society has constructed an unattainable standard of beauty for women.

In Islam, Allah (the Arabic word for ‘God’) tells us that modesty is beautiful and the rest is clay — not as important. Our bodies should be our treasures, not our source of self-worth. As a society, we tend to greatly focus on perfecting our exterior — which will one day deteriorate. Why not perfect and beautify something worth more than our bodies: our character?

Personally with my hijab, I feel liberated. With hijab I’m reminded that I don’t exist to please the creation but rather the creator. By covering up, people can get to know who I am by my actions, my thoughts and what’s in my mind and heart rather than my physical body. I’m reminded that my worth isn’t determined by what others think of me. You can never please everyone, so why not please the one worth pleasing, God?

Another misconception is that Muslim women are forced to wear it. A hijab is technically required for Muslim women after puberty. However, every woman has her own relationship with God and it is a very personal matter. Islam doesn’t force worship or acts of devotion; acts of worship should be done voluntarily. Hijab is a choice, it is a symbol of virtue, and it should never be a burden.

It is also often believed that only women are required to cover in Islam. Contrary to popular belief, both men and women are required to dress modestly. If you look at how Muslim men and women dress in predominantly Muslim countries, the styles are similar. For example, men wear a thobe, a long, white, loose-fitting dress-like garb, and women wear abayas, long, black, loose-fitting dresses.

Lastly, I want to say modesty isn’t limited to a headscarf. Hijab is a source and expression of modesty for some Muslim women — however it isn’t the only way to express modesty. Modesty extends to one’s actions, character, speech and the treatment of others. And despite how a woman dresses, Muslim or non-Muslim, all women deserve respect and to be treasured.

Have any questions? Interested in trying on a hijab? Stop by the MSC today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and visit the Muslims Students’ Association’s hijab booth.

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Clip

<http://www.internazionale.it/video/2015/07/15/il-mio-velo-e-femminista>

**Reading Comprehension** *Up to 45 mins*

Through her Facebook community, ‘My Stealthy Freedom’, Masih Alinejad has been encouraging Iranian women to post photos of themselves without the mandatory hijab, or veil, to protest the restrictive policies of the Islamic government. Since she started the page in May 2014, it has garnered over 897,000 likes.

She’s been admiringly profiled in Vogue and honoured by the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy. But at the same time, she’s been slandered by Iranian domestic media, leaving her in the unique bind of being a powerful voice for Iranian women while being unable to set foot on Iranian soil.

Alinejad grew up in Iran — not in Tehran, but in a small village called Ghomikola, she is quick to point out — and was forced to wear a veil from the day of her birth. She was imprisoned at 19 for student activism protesting the regime’s human rights record, was released early to give birth to her son, and moved to the U.K. in 2009 to study journalism at Oxford Brookes University.

She now lives in Brooklyn and works at Voice of America, the official broadcast institution of the U.S. government, alongside Iranian-American satirist and journalist Saman Arbabi. Arbabi, dubbed the “Jon Stewart of Iran” because of his hit satirical news show “Parazit,” is helping Alinejad create a 15-minute weekly video series called “Tablet” based on the My Stealthy Freedom community.

Alinejad and Arbabi have an easy rapport, and when she gets excited, she sometimes runs rapid Farsi phrases by him for translation. They met in 2009 in London, when she was a guest on his radio show. Alinejad had taken to wearing hats around town, recalls Arbabi, because she was transitioning out of the hijab yet still uncomfortable with a fully bare head. “My body was there, but my soul was still in Iran,” said Alinejad, who is diminutive and has a prodigious head of curls.

While still an Oxford Brookes student, Alinejad had organized a social media campaign for the Iranian student activist Majid Tavakoli. In 2009, Tavakoli was arrested for protesting, and Iranian authorities forced him to wear female dress including hijab, in an attempt to humiliate him. Alinejad organized a social media protest called “men wearing hijabs” in solidarity with Tavakoli, by writing a call to action that was taken up by several young activists in Iran. In a subversive (and prescient) twist, Alinejad also suggested that men’s discomfort with the hijab underscored how unfair it was to force women to wear it.

That viral protest, along with Iran’s “green movement” protesting then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, helped Alinejad realized the power of social media. Its revelation, for Alinejad, is that one doesn’t need to be a celebrity to effect change. Alinejad is reticent to self-promote (“I don’t even like selfies”) and even says she doesn’t “want to change the world” so much as the lives of the women affected by her very specific cause.

*Answer the following questions in your own words as far as possible. Write complete sentences and include all relevant information. (15 marks)*

1. What is the ‘My stealthy freedom’ Facebook community project about?
2. Write a few lines about Masih Alinejad’s background.
3. Why was Tavakoli arrested and how was he punished?
4. What did Alinejad do to support him and why was her action subversive??
5. What did the protest say about social media?