

Agency in Amman: Women and Hijab

Western media often portrays the Middle East, Islam, and Arabs in a negative and one-sided manner. Often this depiction includes the hijab as the symbol of oppressed Middle Eastern women. Such an image is flat and is not an accurate representation of women's experiences. In addition, giving so much attention to the hijab detracts from issues that are real concerns for women's health and well-being, (e.g. honor killings and genital mutilation). Much of the current literature speaks to differing reasons for women wearing or not wearing hijab—including religious, social, cultural, and political influences—but few include dialogue with women on the ground. In this study, interviews with several women living in Jordan lend more sway to the idea that women have the agency to choose what they want to wear, rather than being forced into wearing the hijab because their male counterparts forces them to do so. Women often talk about religion when they discuss why wear hijab (or not), but also frequently mention other factors, such as: situational appropriateness, comfort, mood, and etc. Most participants also had strong feelings about certain types of hijab, such as niqab; though they were always keen to express that despite how they felt about it, it was that person's choice whether she wanted to wear that or not.