



MARYAM ASSAR

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As an American Muslim who always wears a scarf, like other minorities, I am subject to mean assumptions. This once happened when a friend assumed that my father forced me to wear a scarf. She asked, “So when you get older, are you going to take it off? I mean it’s not like he can force you...” although it may not seem like a direct form of hate, it definitely felt like it. Why? First of all, she assumed I disliked practicing my religion and then guessed that my father was an authoritative figure in my household, without really knowing the littlest bit about my personal self and my family. Of course, my friend did not mean any harm, but unfortunately these are the types of insults that can cut deeper than the ones that are purposefully mean.

Even though it was just one person, I felt like the rest of the world misunderstood me and did not even make an effort to understand. Linking my religion and scarf to oppression without knowing the first thing about them seemed almost too much from one person, especially a friend. But I unfortunately at the time had no idea how to respond and how to tell her she had got me all wrong. Before words could come to my lips, our conversation was already finished, and like a pit in my stomach, I knew she would always think that way about me. Angry at my friend for asking what I thought was a stupid question, and angry at myself for not having an answer, I deeply thought about what had happened and with no solution on my mind, I pushed it aside. I decided that I just would not care about it.

But later, my mind revisited the event too often and I knew something had to be done in order for me to be at peace with myself. After realizing it was not all her fault, I realized something had to be done from my part. Despite the fact that Jill* had moved away, I decided at least to do something for myself in response to my guilty conscience. That was when I decided to volunteer at CAIR, Council on American Islamic Relations, which is an organization that challenges stereotypes of Islam and Muslims by holding and participating in interfaith programs, plus numerous types of other events. Even with the smallest action such as putting fliers on chairs, I am able to help CAPR and in the process help myself and educate others. Still, as a student, I feel a need to also educate my classmates, so I have decided to create a Muslim Student Association that can inform people what my religion, Islam, is all about. Plus, this group would interact with other groups, such as the Jewish Student Union or the Bible Study Group, who are also victims of false assumptions, and together we could work on understanding each other and stopping the hate.

**Name has been changed*