



One of the most liberating things I found about wearing the hijab was that I was able, in a way, to become anonymous. Soon after, I decided to give up my habit of wearing a full face of makeup – it didn't seem to be compatible with modesty. Furthermore, research for my degree detailed a more shady, provocative origin of much makeup – reddening the lips and cheeks and widening the eyes are intended, through their very nature, to attract attention.

A recent article in the New York Times (entitled 'Makeup, and Feminist Guilt') highlights the contradiction between female empowerment and wearing makeup. The two just don't go together. In reality the nature of women, in general, veers towards being looked at by both sexes, whether they like to admit it or not. Makeup plays a big part in this, along with eyebrow shaping, high heels and fashion. Why, I wonder, do the female contestants in 'The Apprentice' feel the need to dress up like Barbies for the boardroom? The men aren't competing with each other in this way – it's as if the fashion industry (spearheaded by men) told women to jump and they asked 'how high'. Surely that's oppression in its most implicit form. On the occasions when I have worn the abayah at work, I have felt truly empowered, in control and respected.

Representing the more modern face of 'Girl Power' these days are the current movers and shakers in the female music scene. The Guardian recently ran an interview with a famous female rapper bragging about her determination to 'out-curse the boys'. One of her competitors recently got thrown off a farmer's field for filming her music video indecently dressed. The third ironically refers to herself as a 'Lady' but spouts obscene, derogatory and blasphemous lyrics. They encourage all women to give everything, wear anything and do anything for men, thinking doing so will gain them status. Such feisty women, however, have missed the point entirely, and find themselves in limbo; neither in a state of complete emancipation, nor happy with the differences (and bonuses) being female affords them.

In reality, it is the subtlety of the feminine personality, the uncertain, retiring, agreeable and softly spoken woman who complements the male psyche. She supports him in reaching his fullest potential and that awakens a generosity in him unmatched by any other. Earn your own money, our feminist (yet unladylike) deputy head teacher advised, so you can buy your own diamonds. How romantic (!). Any woman who has understood this issue well will realise a husband's gifts and acceptance is the coveted prize.

With regards to makeup nowadays, usually the most I wear is a bit of black kohl, but when I do, I think twice beforehand and really scrutinise my intentions and the potential consequences. Let's support one another to embrace 'dressing down' rather than criticising someone for always wearing the same thing. Don't be like those who chastised a friend of mine at a recent wedding, asking how she can go to such an event without makeup. *Insha' Allah* we women will find success when we treat each other a little less harshly and ourselves with a little more respect.