

Meet the TikTok star, Helin Doski, who is breaking boundaries

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The influencer, who has just hit a huge milestone on TikTok, sits down with ELLE to discuss navigating being an ethnic minority in the beauty industry.

“Fight for what makes you happy, live your life authentically, everything else is just noise,” says the Leeds born TikTok star, Helin Doski on breaking beauty boundaries. Doski, 24, a clinical immunology graduate, took the plunge to commit to social media, despite fears on how she would be perceived as a Kurdish woman, due to societal and cultural pressures. She started her TikTok account in 2020, moved to Manchester and has since hit two million followers this week. “There really wasn’t anybody that was doing what I was doing,” she says. “So am I prepared to break that barrier?”

She sports the clean girl aesthetic makeup whilst keeping it casual in a navy hoodie, as she speaks of her anxieties. “I was 100% worried about what the community would think of me. What would my parents think of me? Doski feels guilty, because she says, “my parents came here to give me a better life, and my dad has supported me so much with my education.” Her candidness about her struggles and authenticity resulted in her gaining 25,000 followers a day at one point and creating a positive community. The space for ethnic minority content creators is opening as seen with the emphasis on inclusivity, with brands like Fenty and Rare Beauty spearheading the movement. However with 1 in 6 UK people identifying as an ethnic minority, there is still work to be done.

Doski originally kept her content secret from her dad, due to the Kurdish conservative culture. “I was so afraid to tell him because I didn’t want to let him down honestly,” she says. “A good Kurdish girl is meant to be in the background, you don’t want her name in people’s mouths too much. That is a respectable Kurdish - no one talks about you because there’s nothing to talk about. And you do your studies, get married and that is your path.” She goes on to say, “this isn’t the view for every family, but it is definitely the general one.”

“Imagine what your dream life is. Then imagine suddenly being told well actually, we don’t like it. We’re gonna rip it away from you,” Doski says as she looks outside of the window to the

miserable, grey clouds characteristic of Manchester. “I want to make my parents proud but also fight for my passion. Many live their life for other people, they don’t actually live for themselves.”

“It was honestly such a relief,” says Doski after her dad found out. “It’s fine if I’m receiving backlash from the community, as long as my immediate family is okay.” After having struggled initially with her dad, the two are now in a great place after a conversation where Doski takes part of the blame for keeping him in the dark, but standing her ground as she prioritises her happiness. Doski affectionately calls him “Baba”, as she jokes “he didn’t even know what influencers are and he thought I would need bodyguards as he took the follower count at face value.”

The greatest sign of growth came after Doski finally went by her own name on social media, @helin_doski, after previously hiding it by going as @HXLINDX. “I didn’t want to be searchable, I didn’t want anyone to know my name as Doski originates from my city, Duhok in Kurdistan,” she says. “I faced a lot of backlash going by my real name from the wider community but if I conform to being a traditional Kurdish woman, and I don’t try to do anything differently, then nothing will change. It’s breaking that barrier and putting my foot down, and saying no.”

Reflecting on her journey, Doski says, “in hindsight, going public with my socials seems easy but it was probably one of the most difficult things I’ve done to be able to have that self confidence to know that I’m not doing anything wrong. Just because you don’t like it doesn’t mean that I have to stop doing what brings me the most joy and happiness.”

Doski smiles with a glossy pink lip colour as she says, “I remember speaking with someone, and telling them about how I kept my socials secret. And they said, would you ever share this with your followers? And I said no. Never. I would never dream of it because it’s so vulnerable and personal to me.” She goes on to say, “but now I want to talk about it. I want everyone to know that this is completely fine and normal.” Her face beams as she recounts the positive support she’s received, especially from the Kurdish community who look up to her.

Entering the beauty industry as a woman from an ethnic minority comes with challenges and imposter syndrome, especially at tailored events. “There is definitely a lack of representation of ethnic minorities in beauty,” says Doski. “With getting jobs, going to events and on trips, the attendees will be predominantly white rather than a diverse range.” Doski cites Alix Earle as an

instance of how it is easier for a white influencer to achieve fame rather than a woman of colour. “She’s a pretty, white girl and instantly girls support her and she blows up. It is easier for a white woman to succeed in this industry.”

“I guess the space for ethnic minorities in the beauty industry is really determined by the consumers and also the brands; who they push and choose to work with. Also platforms like Instagram and TikTok as essentially whoever they want to make it will make it as it’s determined by an algorithm, which is determined by whether the average person will want to interact with you,” says Doski. “It’s just a cycle of things, but it is getting better.” However, Doski stresses, “even though I’m from an ethnic minority, I have not faced the same issues as a black woman has, for example, as I can come across as racially ambiguous. I feel like I’m representing minorities, but it shouldn’t end with me. There’s people that deserve more.”

After a recent television collaboration with Maybelline, Doski’s focus lies on creating content that will resonate with her community. “I feel like for the first time, I’m unapologetically who I am on social media,” she says. “I go by name, I’m being vulnerable and candid.” When questioned on her top piece of advice, Doski grins and says, “if something is your dream, and it makes you happy, no one can tell you not to do it. That’s it. Like I said, everything else is just noise.”

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Sources:

Helin Doski - contact@helindoski.com