

Cultural Differences 101

Undressed from the neck up

Becky Weindorf



Think about where you live right now. Yes, you, Ms. or Mr. Reader. Where do you live, anyway? The United States? Erie, Pa? The Behrend campus? Whatever you consider the place of residence, chances are you don't realize the reason why you don't marry your first cousins or why you've never considered having multiple wives or husbands. Or maybe you've never wanted to consider the benefits of cannibalism.

These ideas are called taboo; in our American culture, your cousins are considered blood relatives, direct descendants from your parents' generation. And having multiple spouses is also illegal in the U.S.A., but not in other cultures. Cannibalism is strictly forbidden here, but some tribes consider it a great honor to devour the remains of their dead kin.

Anthropology is not one of my strengths, but our taboos look ridiculous to some other cultures. We are laughed at because we are restricted from marrying those we know best; we are forced to look outside the family and mate with unfamiliar people from strange families and bloodlines. We bury our dead in far off cemeteries or destroy their remains altogether by burning them to ashes. What, they might ask, is your freaking problem?

I'm not telling anyone to go get jiggy with their sister or brother or first cousin or eat their... well, you know. Even I will admit that I have accepted that "inbreeding" (another American term) is not right and I can't stand the thought of our culture eating each other's dead remains. I don't agree with any it. But let's delve into some more taboos, shall we?

*Where we eat cows, chickens and various parts thereof (what do you think sausages are?) others eat cats, dogs and insects and various parts thereof (monkey brains are actually delicacies). Okay, yes, it sounds gross. Indiana Jones with his candied monkey brains and all those damn Americans that keep ordering escargot can start either a) avoiding their adventures or b) turn on the TV and find out what escargot really means. Maybe it is gross, but these people have been living with monkeys and snails all their lives.

*Sexual taboos are becoming a thing of the past (first dates are perceived as test drives in bed). Yet America still stands for one partner in a marriage and strictly enforces fidelity within that marriage. This is not so in other cultures. Some celebrate the use of sexuality to find a husband or wife, and others (particularly male-dominated societies) use sex as ownership rights to a woman.

*Since we're already reviewing marriage, America practices strict monogamy: marriage to one partner. But upon this Earth, there are other marriage practices; polygamy is very common (this is only a general term for multiple marriages). You think polygyny is the only way to go, men? There is still one known tribe that practices polyandry: the marriage of one woman to several men (usually the first husband's brothers). Take that, chauvinists.

I think I've made it clear that America here is merely one nation on Earth. You and I aren't perfect because we are American. We do not encompass the perfect standards of living, or the ideals of living, or the only right way to live (another vocabulary word: ethnocentrism). And since some of you may still think that way, I'll point out this about America: if we're so perfect, then why do we have anti-discrimination laws in the land of the free?

Your call.

Weindorf's column appears every three weeks.

The Hot Debate of The Week

"Is giving up a five-day bender worth getting a 10-day bender?"

Should Penn State discontinue fall break in favor of a week-long Thanksgiving break?

I'm as big a fan of breaks as anybody, but two breaks are not necessarily better than one. The current fall semester incorporates a fall break, which consists of two days off, and a Thanksgiving break, which is two and a half days off.

Four days isn't much time to actually go anywhere. If you live a couple of hours away, fine. But if your home is far away or you're planning to relax in an exotic location — if any college student has that kind of money — your travel will take up half your vacation time, not to mention trying to cram some time in for homework.

In addition, other schools and colleges do not operate on a synchronized fall break schedule. If you're going home for fall break, chances are most of your friends will be at school. However, everyone has a Thanksgiving break. It's a great opportunity to get together with old friends and visit relatives because it's a holiday and you all will be free at the same time. With a week to spare, there will be plenty of time for travel on both ends, and it shouldn't be too much trouble to find some time for studying.

The only problem I can see with switching to a week-long break in the fall is that it would come just a few weeks before the end of the semester with no break except for Labor Day preceding it. If only Halloween and Thanksgiving were switched... However, even with the less than perfect timing, I contend that Thanksgiving is the ideal holiday to coincide with such a break.

Given the choice between two short breaks and one long break, I'll take the long one. Give me a week!

-Erin McCarty

Every week, two editors from the staff will debate a topic that is hot. Students, faculty and staff are encouraged to email suggestions for the hot topic. Send ideas to behrcoll2@aol.com

Recently, the Penn State administration has floated the idea of discontinuing our annual four-day fall break weekend for a week-long vacation around the Thanksgiving holiday. This plan stands on faulty ground for no other reason than the timeliness (or lack of it) created would be beneficial to almost no one.

What do I mean by timeliness? Well, if this plan were to go into effect in 2003, we would essentially have three months of school without any days off. This means all our time off is piled at the end of the semester, a time when we are winding down the year with 10-page papers, class projects, and finals. If we all of a sudden were given a week off shortly before the semester ends, would we really use that time wisely?

Let's face it, it only takes a few weeks for us to feel stressed out from school work, extracurricular activities, and paid work all thrown in the mix. To have to wait three months just to enjoy some time off would be even more stressful. With a fall break, we can relieve ourselves from the first month of school (since we get Labor Day off), a point in which our nerves are really on edge. Then we head back for a month and a half before getting a break for Thanksgiving, a time again when the past few weeks of non-stop academic work have taken a toll on us. We don't get too lazy during this time (it is only four days off), and we thus finish the semester out still in the academic state of mind.

Spreading out our days off during a semester is better than loading ourselves up for the first three months. Putting a longer break toward the end of the semester will cause us to slack into a lazy state for the most important time of the year.

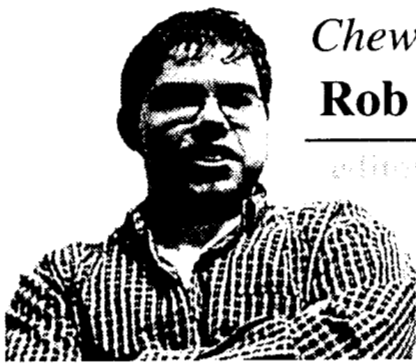
-Mike Bello

Reasons why my Mac is better than your PC

Oooh, I bet that headline struck a chord with a lot of people here on campus. Don't run home crying to mommy after you're done reading this, because let's face reality, the Macintosh is the superior computer. Yeah yeah, so it's not the dominant platform — now. Just give it a little time. My G4 already eats Pentiums for breakfast; I'm scared to think of what it wants for lunch.

Okay, PC user, now that I have your adrenaline soaring, let me talk to you about a few issues (even some on campus) that prompted me to write this column. Although my introduction was a little harsh (even though the breakfast thing is true), I'd be an idiot to say that IBM platform is useless, because it is not. That brings me to a very important point. Recognize it or not, our generation is the first to be brought up with a digital desktop and mouse that clicks instead of nibbles. The older generations have caught on quickly, but we will be the true masters of the computer world. So, let's not make a mistake early on, let's not start a new form of discrimination.

Often times I receive funny looks when I say I prefer Macintosh computers. I get responses like, "Oh, I'm sorry," or the more common, "Macs suck." Now, while I'm sure for all practical applications of your daily lives, your PC serves you well, perhaps you were not given a choice from the start. Here are some things



Chew on this Rob Wynne

to consider.

There are a reasonable number of communications majors here on campus. Eventually, I'm assuming that some of them would like to work for a newspaper or magazine. What would you say if I told you that the Mac platform is the preferred platform of the publishing industry? Well, they are. The Behrend Beacon is put together every week for you via two G4s, a G3, and an iMac. The Erie Times News uses Macs as well as PCs. The Cory Journal, our publishers, use Macs. Now, Erie isn't some anomaly that harbors the only Mac users in the world; it's just one of those (gulps) hard facts to swallow.

I was very disturbed recently when I heard the head of the school for Humanities and Social Sciences here on campus outlawed the purchase of Macs for the H&SS staff. From

what I understand, the university purchases a computer for each staff member every couple of years to keep everyone up to par. The Mac, however, will no longer be an option. I'm sorry, but ignorance is no excuse for an action like that.

If you don't trust my comparisons, then go do the math yourself. The average personal Mac computer, the iMac, can be bought for typically between \$800 to \$1,000. Now this is about \$400 to \$500 cheaper than some of the average PC systems (e.g. Gateway, Dell) that are popular amongst the staff. Memory upgrades are way cheaper, and the best part of all, Macs are virtually immune to almost all of the viruses that infect the computer world today. My Mac can read files from your PC, but it doesn't work the other way around.

Last time I checked, this college runs like a business. So, in terms of computer costs, labor, and other fun financial jargon, wouldn't Behrend be actually saving money, technologically speaking?

Another major feature of the Mac systems is the ease of use. They practically scream "user friendly." I'll share a story from personal experience. Last week, the Beacon received its new G4 computer for the office. Some of the staff members (and our advisor) questioned my statement about having the system up and

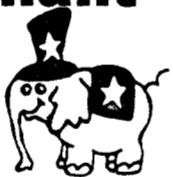
running within just a few hours. After hearing horror stories about PCs that took weeks to set up and work the right way, I thought, "Hmm, actually, I think I'll make it the new file server for the office." So, what was the total time before I had the other four computers and two printers all linked to the new server with all of the necessary software installed? About four hours. Not bad. And yes, I had a gateway router, IP addresses and TCP/IP interfaces popping their faces in my computer window with alert messages. They were quickly remedied. If I hadn't taken an hour break for dinner, set-up time would have been quicker.

I could go on and on praising the Mac, but that's only part of the reason I chose this editorial topic. There are people now deciding what kind of computers you can use, which could ultimately affect your job skills (or lack thereof) someday. Become a well-rounded computer user. I was forced to adapt when I came to Behrend, and I'll admit I'm a frequent visitor to the library computer lab here on campus. Also, keep your eyes open for a new Behrend Mac Users committee. Besides, you'll have to admit, the Macs are the best-looking machines.

Wynne's column appears every three weeks.

Next Week:

The Elephant says...



The Donkey says...



Every two weeks members of the College Democrats and the College Republicans will debate a partisan topic. Send your suggestions to: BEHRCOLL2@AOL.COM



"IS IT POSSIBLE TO FEEL 'SAFER' AND 'CREEPED OUT' AT THE SAME TIME?"

Don't hate the Karl, hate the game

Where to start? My girlfriend, and I broke up Nov. 4. She was the first girl I ever loved. She was so special. We ended up breaking up mutually, though. Why? She had some past issues she needed to fix, plus, she needed to mature.

We broke up on Sunday night; however, I wasn't very upset about it. But on Monday, (the day of hell when everything went wrong for me) I found myself feeling lonely and wanting her. When I returned to my room, I saw she left me a message on my voicemail.

I wrote a note for her and called her back later that night. I was torn. Part of me wanted to talk to her every day, yet part of me wanted to walk away.

I received advice from my roommate, my mother and my fraternity brother, Jim. I came to a decision. I had to tell her how I felt. Here is what I said in the letter:

"Sorry things couldn't work out but you have a lot of growing up to do. You're a very special girl but you need to sort a lot of things out. I think we should stop talking to one another until you sort out your problems. You have my parents' number. Keep it. When you feel as if you've matured you can call me. Heck, maybe in a few years I'll stop and visit you if I hear nothing from you, I'll always love you. I'm sorry. Please talk to me when you're ready. Keep my coat and remember me. Maybe it will work out someday. Only time will tell. I love you, Karl"

This was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I cried the whole time we were

talking and by the end of the letter, she was crying too.

I'm sad and I'll miss her, but it was the best thing for me to do for both of us.

All right, moving on. What does this have to do with players?

Well, let me explain. There are two kinds of players. The first kind is the dirty perverted type. This

editorial has nothing to do with them.

The second kind of player is the nice-guy player. What's this? Well, what typically happens is the nice-guy player (or playette, which is the female version of the player) somehow hooks up with a friend of the opposite sex and the other person wants a relationship.

Why do players grow nauseous when they hear the word "relationship?"

Well, the nice guy/girl players hate relationships for one reason—they don't want to get hurt again.

I can hear a few of you now, asking me what

the hell I am talking about. But I know some of you know what's going on!

Let's take Dave from the TV show "The Real World."

Dave was on the show during the season that took place in New Orleans (two years ago). Everyone living with him thought Dave was a jerk because he was a smooth talking, muscular player.

The other housemates couldn't understand why a talented guy like David (he sang really well and was a smart guy) was such a jerk.

Let me break it down for you. David's not a jerk. He explained it this way. Before appearing on "The Real World," he was in love and had his heart broken. Too keep from getting his heart broken again, he put up a huge wall. His wall consisted of ignorance and witty remarks, plus he worked out so he could kick anyone's ass.

He was hard to get along with. So what. All his negative qualities were formed to keep people from getting too close to him.

A good guy/girl player might have feelings for someone they're with, but they don't get into a relationship because they don't want to hurt anyone or get hurt themselves.

This sometimes causes rejection and ends in disaster.

Baggage is bad. People with baggage shouldn't be in relationships. This pertains to my ex-girlfriend and millions of others.

People with no baggage are cool. I know

people who have no baggage because they dated girls for a day and broke up with them (one doesn't need traveling baggage for a day long trip either. Coincidence? I think not!).

Secondly, one must always mean what one says. People throw the word love around like it's nothing special. Heck, I did. The only girl I ever loved was my ex girlfriend. I wish she was the first girl I told that to and not the third or fourth.

If you tell someone you truly love him or her it means you'd be willing to die for that person. Always remember that.

For those of you who are truly in love with someone... good job. What you have is special. Don't mess it up and never take it for granted. I kind of envy you.

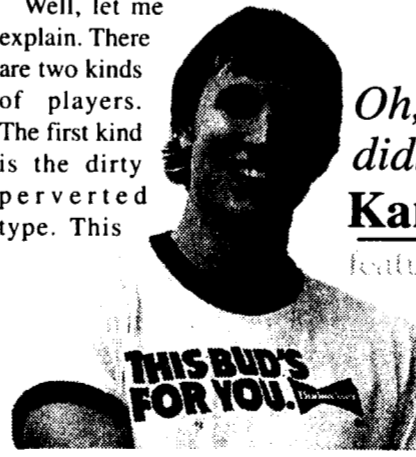
Yet the other half of me says, "Bring the single life on."

Strangely enough, for the first time since I hit puberty, I am enjoying being single. It's a great feeling and I find it odd I feel this way after breaking up with the only girl I ever loved.

Ah, I am single now. Hey, don't get that idea! I'm not a player (although some of my friends and the Beacon's very own Rob Wynne seem to think I am)! Go figure. I sure don't look like one.

How do I sum it up? Well, as "American Pie" star Chris "Oz" Ostreicher (Chris Klein) would say, I went from "How sweet it is to be loved by you" to "Do you believe in magic? Shooby doobie do wop shoo shoo sha doobie do be do be do wop yeahhhhh"

Benacci's column appears every three weeks.



Oh, you didn't know?

Karl Benacci

features page editor

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU