

OPINION

In the diversity corner

Muslim women seek liberation from Western misconceptions

By Fariha Andaleeb
editorial columnist

Common Western thought tends to lean towards pity for Muslim women, especially for those who wear hijab. Head scarves and hijab, which were originally intended to free women from male objectification, is now viewed as a prison which confines them to a primitive culture, run by uneducated fundamentalists.

The true purpose and beauty of the veil has been twisted by religious fanatics for political and domestic control over women, and by the Western media, which judges the civility of a nation based on whether or not their women wear halter tops and mini skirts.

I recently spoke to several Muslims on campus at Behrend, a few of whom wear head scarves. No one imposes this on them here, and they feel no more confined or limited than any other student. I spoke particularly in depth with Lutfia Al-Busaidi, a transfer student from Penn State at University Park. She wears a head scarf by her own choice, and is by no means suppressed by her religion or culture. She is studying computer engineer-

ing, and plans to work in her native country of Oman after graduation.

The status of women in Islamic countries is often questioned as well. We tend to think we are so much farther in our progression towards gender equality, but we forget women had minimal rights just this past century, and couldn't even vote until 1920. From the establishment of the United States in 1776 to this day in 2004, the United States has not had a female president, or vice president for that matter. Despite our enthusiasm about our strong and 'equal' women (who still get lower salaries than men for doing the same job in several occupations), we are still not ready as a society to accept them in positions of national power.

Several Muslim countries on the other hand, have had women leaders. Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, for example, led Pakistan for nine years. Bangladesh has been run by women for years. Its current Prime Minister is Khaleda Zia, who recently won the election from the woman who led Bangladesh before her, Sheikh Hassina. These are strong and powerful

women. They are the leaders of men and women, and they are also Muslim.

This is not to say that Muslim women are free while western women are confined. The gulf between the two, however, may not be as wide as one would think. Muslim women have done great things, and have had pivotal roles in massive movements. Just as all Christians should not be judged according to events such as the Oklahoma City Bombing, all Muslim women should not be judged according to the subjugation in countries such as Saudi Arabia. Their situation is more political rather than religious.

Walking through the streets of Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country, it struck my attention to see hijab clad women driving mopeds or walking to work; scarf on head, brief case in hand. They don't wear head scarves because they are oppressed. They wear them because they are liberated from objectification, as the result of a culture that promotes modesty so that they can be judged for their minds and not their appearances.

American Perversion Level: Red

Is our society oversexed? There was recent discussion of national media outlets and the appropriate level of sexual expression on public television. Specifically, "Monday Night Football," the Philadelphia Eagles versus the Dallas Cowboys, the pregame skit presented Eagles receiver, Terrell Owens, seduced by a young blonde woman in a towel. The skit ended with the woman losing her towel but finding her way into T.O.'s arms.

Also discussed in terms of inappropriate sex was Fox television, the broadcasters of "Married by America," was fined for more than one million dollars when whipped-cream-covered strippers with digital-obscured nudity were shown during a time slot that many children are known for viewing.

For most college viewers such behavior is considered accepted and is even applauded, especially by males. You can find more inappropriate situations than you could count on both hands and feet—just switch to MTV. Those concerned are parents who allow their children to view Monday night football assuming that no females will be losing their towels and jumping into a man's arms. Is this a legitimate concern and complaint? Or has this raunchiness become part of our American culture?



Bradley Stewart
news editor

We are all aware that sex sells. Television programming continues to push the limits on sexual exposure in order to outdo their competition and attract loyal viewers. At your local grocery store, while standing in line for check our patrons are surrounded by the smiles of scantily clad women on magazine covers—covers that advertise content that include sex tips, how to please your man or woman, sexual positions, sexual escapades, sex stories. These covers illustrate the extent to which many companies rely on sex to sell their products. Are America's children being exposed to an oversexed culture? Is this what America wants its children to accept as a normal

part of our society?

Of course, there is a degree of responsibility that parents must claim. Corporations air programs that are understood to be sexually risky and are intended for a mature audience. Programs such as these are usually aired during later hours, and parents who are concerned with inappropriate television shows must be aware and regulate their child's viewing.

In a time period where morally pure role models are hard to find, who do we blame? Do we blame the morally corrupt individuals? The broadcasting companies? Or do we blame ourselves and the culture we have created? Is it our acceptance or morally questionable material, our curiosity and fascination in the vile actions of others that tainted our society forever?

I guess the bigger question is, do we care? Has youth been robbed of its ignorance of sex too soon? It appears to me that more young people are sexually aware sooner than I was at their age. It appears to me that more young people are dressing and acting and modeling what they see on television and in movies. Why are we in such a hurry to hear about and engage in sexual activity? Our culture is quickly headed in a direction from which there may be no return.

Rosie needs to get a little stronger

I've been thinking a lot about what it means to be a feminist lately. I've looked at Rosie the Riveter posted next to my James Dean calendar and thought about how most people think that in order to be a feminist, you cannot be feminine. Then it occurred to me; that's crap!

My dear Rosie is de-feminized. As a symbol of female strength, she dresses like a man, poses like a man and wears her hair short like a man's. Are we supposed to believe that in order for a woman to be strong, she has to act like a man?

Some of the strongest women I know are housewives and they are also some of the most respected. Take my grandmother for example; she raised two little boys, while pregnant and without a driver's license, on a farm for 18 months while my grandfather was overseas in WWII.

I'd like to see some of today's feminists pull that off. Even Rosie had help with her kids while she was working in the factory. She even had people make her supper to take home and reheat.

I think we need to redefine feminine strength. We shouldn't diminish such



Lacy Buzard
copy editor

chores as cooking, cleaning and child-raising or the women who choose to make that their life work. Just because these housewives don't have jobs, we shouldn't treat them like they are too stupid to work.

As a feminist, I want to go into a career and know that I am able to support myself. I know that I am capable of doing whatever my sweet little heart desires. But if one day I start a family with

the man of my dreams, I may want to stay home and take care of them.

This is where feminine power is truly defined: A woman's right to choose what she wants and stand by that decision. Butched-out feminists should not belittle her for her decisions. As women, we all have to work together or else we will always be fighting against the glass ceiling as a group that isn't even able to unite itself.

Men need to remember, too, that women have a choice. We should not be forced to stay at home or to join the workforce. If we decide to join the workforce, it isn't fair to expect us to take care of everything at home by ourselves.

What's the moral of this story? In short: feminism is equality. If two people are putting out the same effort and achieving the same comparable amount, then one should not be better than the other. Luciano de Crescenzo said, "We are all angels with only one wing; we can only fly while embracing each other."

The Behrend Beacon
published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College.

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Penn State Erie,
the Behrend College;
First Floor, The J. Elmer Reed Union Building,
Station Road, Erie, PA 16563.
Contact The Beacon at:
Telephone: (814) 898-6488
Fax: (814) 898-6019
ISSN 1071-9288.

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