
**Summaries of Presentations
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Arab and Muslim Women: Stereotypes and Misconceptions, Reality and Hopes
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Arab and Muslim women are conflated in the Western mainstream media. They are seen as one homogeneous entity that is male dominated, silenced, covered, and submissive. This presentation clarified issues related to the conflation of Arab and Muslim; discussed real issues that Arab/Muslim women struggle with versus what western feminists often discuss on their behalf; and showed brief conversations with a few Arab, Arab American, and Muslim women living in the US discussing their daily struggles with stereotypes.

Since the early writings of European Orientalists who visited the Arab world in the early nineteenth century, Arab and Muslim women have been stereotyped in western countries. Hollywood's movies for over the last 100 years have been depicting Arabs through these stereotypical lenses (Shaheen, 2001). As higher education professionals striving for social justice and the inclusion of our students, we often find ourselves to be ill equipped to understand our Arab, Arab American and Muslim students. They are treated as one homogeneous group, that in recent years has been seen as the symbol of terrorism. They can be singled out in the classroom and misunderstood around campus.

This presentation aimed at addressing the conflation issue, and the diversity that exists among members of these groups. It also offered information that could help professors, residence staff members, counselors, women centers and other administrators to see these students how they truly are despite their images in the media.

Arab and Muslim women's issues remain absent of much of the discourse on Multiculturalism, Social Justice and Women's issues. Despite the fact that there are three million people in the United States who trace their ancestry to Arab countries and 5-6 million Muslims living in the US, these two groups are seldom included in the discussions or curricula (Zogbi, 1984). For example, Arab Americans are not mentioned at all in Takaki's (1993) "A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America" that is considered one of the most respected source books on the experiences of the underrepresented ethnic groups in the US.

Arab women have been seen as "docile, male dominated, speechless, veiled, secluded, subdued, and unidentifiable beings (Sabbagh, 1996, p. xi)". At the same time, Muslim women have always been conflated with Arab women, and are also seen as exotic and sometimes as "princess from a faraway land (Afzal-Khan, 2005)". In recent years, there has been a slow shift in the stereotypes within academic spheres. The new images are affected by the perceptions of what western feminists consider as important issues for Arab/Muslim women (Sabbagh, 1996). Leila Ahmed argues that "Just as Americans "know," that Arabs are backward, they know also with the same flawless certainty that Muslim women are terribly oppressed and degraded. And

they know this not because they know that women everywhere in the world are oppressed, but because they believe that, specifically, Islam monstrously oppresses women (Ahmed, 1982, p. 522).

Mona Fayad (1994), an Arab-American academic, discusses how difficult it is for her to constantly be confronted by stereotypical images that are supposed to represent her. She contends how the west invented a certain image of "The Arab Woman" and considers each one a representative of all Arab women, ignoring the vast diversity that exists among these women.

A United Nations report published in 2004 discusses the progress of Arab women in terms of gender equality. It sites various social and political issues that are of most importance to Arab women. Because the report was conducted by Arab women mostly, it had a more accurate representation of the areas where there has been some considerable progress versus the areas that are still lacking. The report concentrated on real issues instead of what is considered "as the "hot spots" of anthropological research on Arab women, the exaggerated emphasis on all that makes Arab women different (Sabbagh, 1996, p. xi). Those stereotypical images of Arab/Muslim women have very little in common with the lives of real Arab and Muslim women, that many do not recognize themselves in them.

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