

Second Opinion

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Don't tolerate diversity, learn from it

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It's funny how the "d" word makes so many people squirm, huh? After all, "diversity" does carry a plethora of connotations.

Maybe that's because almost everyone has an opinion on the best way to deal with it or combat it or ignore it.

But no matter your view, diversity has become a hot topic in our nation, in our communities and in our schools. And the current trend seems to dictate that we appreciate diversity or at least tolerate it.

However, I recently witnessed several people whom I know show disrespect for people of different religions, races, sexual preferences and members of the opposite sex.

So I began to do a lot of thinking about diversity and the way we treat those who are different from us.

I first realized that compared to many people in our world, I have limited exposure to diversity. I come from a very small town that lacks a great deal of diversity. And I attend a college where there is a relatively low amount of diversity. However, I hope to travel as much

as possible in my life, and I hope to continue meeting and learning from people who are different from me.

Yet, I also realized that I am not always as open-minded to diversity as I would like to be. There are some issues to which I am still resistant.

I believe that we should strive to tolerate people and ideas that are different to us, but I also believe that tolerance is not enough. We must strive to learn all that we can from diverse people and ideas.

There are many arguments against embracing diversity. Some people believe that tolerating diversity weakens one's belief system.

As a result, many people put up a defense to protect themselves, often insulting or condemning a person who holds dissimilar views.

I respect people who sincerely believe that converting others to their own beliefs is what they are meant to do.

However, insulting someone is not the way to do it.

If someone wanted to share his or her beliefs with me, I would be much more responsive if the person asked me to explain my own beliefs and

sincerely acted as though he or she wanted to learn more about why I believe what I do.

As a child, I experienced many situations in which I was subtly chastised when I raised

relation to our own.

That goes for our stereotypes of people, too.

It is important to give everyone a fair chance and to regard each person as an individual

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questions about Biblical or faith-based issues. That response troubled me then, and it bothers me even more as an adult.

Faith, for example, is very important, and perhaps it cannot truly become real to us until we are able to question and explore it rather than simply accept it as an idea that we have been taught to believe.

I'm not suggesting that we should abandon all of our beliefs in order to embrace the latest trendy views—only that we be open to learn about other beliefs and evaluate them in

before we pass judgment on him or her. Sure, sometimes the person might fit the stereotype that we hold, but often, he or she will prove how wrong and unfair stereotypes are.

My religious, political and philosophical beliefs are often strengthened upon hearing and learning about other beliefs. But other times I process my views in light of new ideas, and sometimes I decide that I need to re-evaluate. Every experience is an opportunity to learn.

For instance, this summer I shared dinner and conversation with a friend who proudly described himself as an "old-

fashioned southern chauvinist." He believed that the role of a woman was to keep her place in the home and that women "should be placed on a pedestal—high enough to see up their skirts."

While I was offended by his views, I was able to add his sexist comments to my arsenal of weapons for defending my belief that women still face discrimination in our society.

When an opponent argues that women do have full equality and that I am merely too sensitive or am exaggerating minor incidents, I share the "women on a pedestal" comment, and my opponent almost always pauses to stare at me in disbelief.

But in spite of stringently disagreeing with his view of women, I found that he did possess a few admirable qualities.

Even more amazing was the fact that a self-proclaimed chauvinist and a self-proclaimed feminist managed to make it through dinner without breaking any dishes or causing any form of bodily harm to each other.

Few people can claim to be perfect in their dealings with diversity, myself included. However, we can all work to improve our attitudes and our behavior toward people who are different from us as we try to learn from each other.

We will likely feel threatened by some ideas that we discuss with people who are different from us. However, the most important thing is to show every person the same respect that we would want him or her to show us and to make a fair effort to get to know that person.

After all, a person's life experiences may have the greatest influence on his or her beliefs. Even if we disagree with a person's beliefs, we may discover that learning about his or her life helps us to understand where the person is coming from, and it may even reveal some common ground between us.

More importantly, it reminds us that each one of us has some good and some bad inside of us and that in spite of our differences, we are all people.

Misogyny must stop

CHRISTY KIMBALL
Staff Reporter

During my college experience, it never occurred to me that as a female, I am lucky.

There are places in the world where women cannot go to fulfill their aspirations. In some places, women cannot even aspire to be recognized as a person. One such place is Afghanistan.

The Taliban began as a reformist group in 1996. Honest, fierce and devoutly Islamic, they began capturing Afghanistan from the Mujahedeen warriors who had fought Soviet occupation. Within two years, the group had captured two-thirds of Afghanistan.

At first, the people supported them because they preached reform, and in a country tormented by war and fighting, the Taliban offered peace and

stability.

But as soon as they took power, a Muslim backlash against women began, and normal lifestyle practices—such as working, driving, generally dressing as they liked—became obsolete. Since 1996, professional women such as professors, translators, doctors, lawyers, artists and writers have been forced from their jobs into their homes.

Women are required to wear burquas, which are canvas-like drapes that cover them from the top of their head down to their toes and have a mesh-like vent allowing for vision and breathing.

If women are not properly dressed—even if the mesh is not covering their eyes—then they can be beaten or stoned.

An eight-year-old girl was beaten by religious police for not wearing a burqua while she

was outside. She was so traumatized that she did not want to leave the house.

One woman was beaten by an angry fundamentalist mob until she died of internal bleeding. The crime? She accidentally exposed her arm while driving.

Women must wear silent shoes so they cannot be heard. Homes where women are present must have painted windows, so the women cannot be seen. Even the simple action of going outside requires a man to accompany a woman.

Women are also prevented from full access to medical treatment. Depression is at an emergency level. The suicide rate cannot be determined, but relief workers estimate that it has increased since 1996 because women cannot find the proper medication to treat severe depression.

There are no medical facilities for women because relief workers have left in protest, taking their medicine and psychologists.

The main reason the United States has not yet intervened is due to the threat of terrorism by Saudi-exile Osama bin Laden, who is believed to be hiding in Afghanistan.

For now, the effort to protest the treatment of Afghan women has been led by independent organizations throughout the world.

But that isn't enough. We cannot let women continue to be treated in this way.

If you feel that you would like more information of this subject, visit www.rawa.org. Women deserve to be treated as human beings in any culture. Fortunately, our society allows us to be recognized as that.