

“I’m a cool girl”: *An epidemic, explained*

SHAROSE ISLAM

As a young woman, I am constantly exposed to tropes in television and media who model the “cool girl” behaviour. If you haven’t heard about *The Girl Next Door*, you are surely familiar with the iconic “I’m a cool girl” quote from *Gone Girl*.

The whole idea behind being the cool girl is to strip yourself down from everything that makes you a woman; whether that be your own femininity or your preference to be friends with other women. A “cool” girl is hot without trying, chill without being a pushover, and has a dark sense of humour that “other girls” just don’t understand. Because obviously, the coexistence of all these traits is unimaginable.

At a glance this may seem innocent, and even funny, until we actually dig into the root of where this phenomenon stems from. “You’re so funny for a girl” – is a phrase I am all too familiar with. And I, like you, had considered this to be a huge



compliment for the longest time without realising the backhandedness of it. The reason is that I belong to a patriarchal society where men’s preferences are preferred and women’s likes, fantasies, and interests are shunned.

Traditional gender roles suggest that women are to look good, dress well, and speak softly. However, it is ironic that the originators of these very gender roles have labelled one set to be boring and uptight

and the other to be fun and edgy. So, for many women, the only way to feel validated and empowered is through compliments which would be a result of them rejecting all of the stereotypical girly traits, better known as, practicing internalised misogyny.

As a society, we are guilty of always creating dichotomies based on extreme traits and framing them in boxes. We then go on to try and fit every person we come

across into one of those boxes without realising that most of us are, in fact, laying somewhere in between. The cognitive dissonance of wanting so badly to fit in and at the same time stand out, leads us to rebelling over things that, in an ideal world, should not matter at all. Being funny and being feminine are not mutually exclusive but the patriarchal norms imposed upon us often make us feel that they are.

The question is whether our need is to be different from other girls or be different from other people in general. We often end up identifying with traits which we believe are perceived by others as unique or quirky. Our need for social validation is so deep rooted that it ends up clouding our vision as to what really matters — that people are allowed to be themselves.

Sharose Islam is currently seeking rehabilitation in order to recover from her near lethal over dosage of milo. In order to set up an MAA meeting, reach out at facebook.com/sharose.islam

The Secret Life of Women in Ramadan

RASHA JAMEEL

Ramadan for women has never been the same as that for men. Women are constantly weighed down by oppressive patriarchy and it’s no different during Ramadan. In addition to carrying out their regular rest of the year duties, the women are also expected to shoulder chores around the house, whilst fasting. I thought things couldn’t get worse until one of my friends brought to my attention the decades-old practice of women concocting elaborate ruses to keep their periods a secret from men, during Ramadan.

What?!

Dear readers, did you know that a significant number of women in our country have to consume sehri and pretend to fast so as to keep their periods a secret during Ramadan, owing to the menstrual cycle’s taboo nature?

I didn’t. At least not until recently.

Here’s what happens – when menstrual calendars of all the ladies in a specific household strike that dreaded “Day 1”, they all immediately get to work trying to somehow cover it all up. The preparation that follows is no less than those taken by a criminal covering their tracks. Every precaution is taken so that the issue does not attract attention in any way, such is the taboo nature of periods. To ensure their covers are not blown, the women of the house create a ruse, by sitting down for sehri with the rest of the family, pretending to fast alongside them.



An elaborate ploy, no doubt. But is it a practice to be normalised? Absolutely not.

Menstruation is not something to be swept under the rug, it must be dealt with appropriately. Encouraging the practice of the aforementioned

activity will only enhance the taboo surrounding the menstrual cycle, which can result in adverse consequences for women. Due to its taboo nature, the schools in our country, co-educational or otherwise, refrain from studying the

menstrual cycle in detail. Girls end up feeling awkward in studying the topic and instead choose to rely on misinformation surrounding menstrual hygiene.

Health problems related to the menstrual cycle, namely polycystic ovarian syndrome/polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD/PCOS), premenstrual syndrome (PMS), dysmenorrhea, etc. can often go unreported or undiagnosed due to the patient’s reluctance to discuss her menstrual cycle at length. Even more so, underprivileged women in our country often resort to using crude substitutes for sanitary napkins, rather than buying the cheap, locally-produced pads. They feel too embarrassed about menstruation to treat sanitary pads like a basic sanitary necessity.

While my parents have never enforced such irrational practices within our household, I can’t say the same about that of my friend’s. She and her mother have to sneakily scarf down food in the kitchen, in between cooking iftar meals for the rest of the family. They are made to feel ashamed of their periods, like many other women oppressed by the patriarchy.

At the end of the day, menstruating is a bodily function. It’s a process that removes waste materials from the human body, or, specifically, the female body. Nothing taboo there.

Rasha Jameel is an overzealous Ravenclaw who often draws inspiration from mundane things such as memes. Send her your thoughts at rasha.jameel@outlook.com