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Aix-en-Provence, France

April 15, 2019

Individual Expression Versus the Submissive Woman in France

I decided to interview one of the students I do an internship with at YNOV, a school of technology and business. Her name is Tiffany, and she's a second-year graphic design student. She told me about how some students in France are very aware of what they are wearing or how they present themselves. She says some people would be shocked if, from one day to the other, someone decides to dye their hair a weird color like pink or blue. She also was very annoyed that it'd be very uncomfortable for everyone if she decided to show up in her pajamas or sweatpants. This is something that I told her is completely different in Oregon where everyone pretty much wears what they want to school and, as long as it's not inappropriate, no one actually cares. Overall, I noticed that this is a trend that most people in Aix-en-Provence would agree with, but since it is a very bourgeois town, I cannot overgeneralize with the people all over France.

Finally, we talked about how most people see the Hijab in France vs. the U.S., which happened to be recently scrutinized all over the country. She explained to me that to some older people and to some younger people, the hijab portrays an image of a submissive woman. For the most part, people in the U.S. do not care about what one wears, but here in France, a sports hijab was heavily criticized to the point where they stopped selling it. The claims people made, she explained to me, was that the hijab portrayed an image of a woman that certain French people don't support. They claim that because a woman wears a hijab she is not free. However, several of my American peers and I agree that true freedom lies in letting a woman decide what she wears or doesn't.

All in all, although France claims to be a liberal country, it still seems that certain feelings or views are rooted in some sort of conservative view. It may not always be a bad thing, but sometimes these conservative views get in the way of people being able to express themselves. The one thing I loved about this interview is how easy it was to talk to this student about our different views in such an entertaining and conversational way. So far, I look forward to keep having these conversations with other students that may come from different parts of France.