

# Obsession: A Last Look



*I feel that it was made for all the wrong reasons and will only add to the negative feelings many Americans have toward Muslims.*

by Erin Anderson

On Tuesday, March 6, the film *Obsession* was viewed at Concordia. The viewing of this film has been the source of much controversy on campus and the initial viewing was halted. After more planning and negotiating, *Obsession* was finally screened.

To show this film, Concordia had to abide by certain conditions. There had been plans to host a discussion board after the film to address the questions and concerns of those who came to the viewing. This did not happen as part of the conditions to show the film required the presence of a speaker provided by the film makers.

The speaker, a young blonde from New York, introduced the film, read off disclaimers and took questions after the viewing. "The speaker could have been better, but unfortunately we didn't really have a choice," said Matt Griepentrog, College Republicans President. "When you sign up for a campus screening, the speaker is automatically part of the package. There were a number of people who loved the speaker and there were some who didn't. I suppose you can never please everyone, but overall I think she helped us achieve our goals."

I spoke with a number of students who attended the viewing and almost all said that the speaker was atrocious. "She was so rude!" said one student. "She put words into people's mouths and shot down anyone that didn't agree with the film." Another student said, "I had many questions after [*Obsession*] and I felt like I couldn't ask the speaker anything because she would just turn it around as an attack on me."

In my opinion, the speaker was rude and abrasive, but she was perfect for

the role. Her job was to stifle any views conflicting with the film and she did that wonderfully by avoiding questions and cutting people down.

Dr. Ibrahim-Devries researched the speaker and the film ahead of time and found a number of bad reviews put out by other campuses. "I had concerns about how the message was constructed," said Dr. Ibrahim-Devries. "There wasn't a lot of context." She also worried how the film represented Muslims, that it would be generalized and how it might affect campus community. She was concerned about the speaker as well, saying that students' "first amendment rights would be decreased."

Many students say that they felt as though they were left hanging after the film, their questions unanswered. Dr. Ibrahim-Devries was able to continue discussion with a few students after the viewing of *Obsession*. Most students, though, did not have an opportunity to discuss what they saw or process the information. I asked Matt Griepentrog if the College Republicans were planning on hosting a discussion after the film. He said that the "College Republicans will always support dialogue and debate on the issue of radical Islam. There are no plans to host future events on this topic. However, if other groups hold similar events, we will encourage our members to attend."

In facing so much opposition, why would the College Republicans fight to show *Obsession*? I asked Matt Griepentrog what the goal of the College Republicans had been in showing this film. "Our primary goal was to create discussion and debate on the issue of

radical Islam. In this non-election year, [we are] choosing to focus on the issues that people will vote on in the 2008 election. The issue of terrorism and national security is extremely important to Republicans and *Obsession* exposes the radicals' agenda very effectively," said Griepentrog.

The film *Obsession* consisted of interviews and pieces of raw footage.

context, there is a lack of understanding. "[It] adds to the level of sensationalism when messages are not clarified," Dr. Ibrahim-Devries said. She went on to say that a film such as this creates a culture of fear and legitimizes treating people differently. "There is a false perception of people being treated equally," she said. "These kinds of messages are promoting a new form of symbolic racism."

Matt Griepentrog says that he "was very pleased with the turnout. It was great to see so many people interested in the issue. A lot of people thought the movie was well-made and enjoyed the event as a whole. I think our message of awareness was received well."

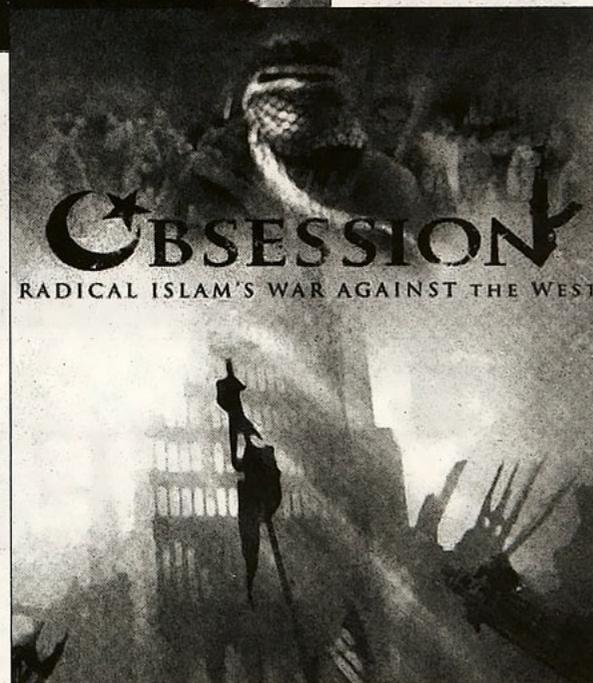


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The problem with showing pieces of footage, rather than the whole, is that the context and meaning can become skewed. Audiences are then asked to draw conclusions based on a mere fraction of information. This leads to bias and misunderstandings. "Citizens are not critical media viewers, and a film like this requires that audiences be critical," said Dr. Ibrahim-Devries.

The film claims that Arab television does three things: promotes hate speech, creates paranoia, and creates an 'us-against-them' mentality. Dr. Ibrahim-Devries pointed out that US television has done these same things since 9/11. "It is uneducated thinking to look at things in such a dichotomous fashion."

The point is that this film made many generalizations and in doing so misinformed viewers. Because the film lacks



I give credit to the College Republicans for putting everything together and fighting for their first amendment right to show *Obsession*. However, I do not agree with the film. I feel that *Obsession* was made for all the wrong reasons and will only add to the negative feelings many Americans have toward Muslims. I can only hope that the students and faculty of Concordia will not take the messages of this film to heart, but will instead recognize the inaccuracies and seek out the truth.

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