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Interview with Sheetal Sheth

Posted by [Bridget McManus](#) on March 31, 2011

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Actress **Sheetal Sheth** is no stranger to controversy. She made her debut in the film *ABCD*, playing a promiscuous young woman struggling with the ties of family and tradition. It garnered a lot of attention from press and audiences, both positive and negative. The Indian American beauty held her own against **Albert Brooks** in *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World*, she fell in love with actress **Lisa Ray** in **Shamim Sarif**'s beloved films *The World Unseen* and *I Can't Think Straight*. She also bested me during a pillow fight on my Logo show *Brunch with Bridget*. (I totally let her win!)

Sheth is dealing with controversy once again with her latest film, *Three Veils*. The film follows three Middle Eastern women and who deal with abuse, rape and struggles with their sexuality. The script was originally boycotted but was saved thanks to the efforts of the film's director and producer.

I spoke with Sheth about her powerful new role, where she lands on the Kinsey scale and why she seems to be drawn to controversy.

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AfterEllen.com: Tell me about your new movie, *Three Veils*.

Sheetal Sheth: The film is a touching film that follows three women who are dealing with their own issues and struggles of where they have come from, who they are, and what they want. My character Nikki is battling demons from her past that continue to haunt her in ways that stifle her from having a normal life. She is lost, lonely and quite troubled.

AE: The movie has had a lot of controversy surrounding it and you said the script was boycotted. Can you talk about that?

SS: Yes, when the script was being shopped around, once investors, etc. came to know the issues the film dealt with, they didn't want any part of it. It was very difficult getting the right people to back it as so much of the subject matter is taboo in many parts of the world or people just don't want to deal with them — which, by the way, is even more reason, the film needed to be made and seen by as many people as possible.

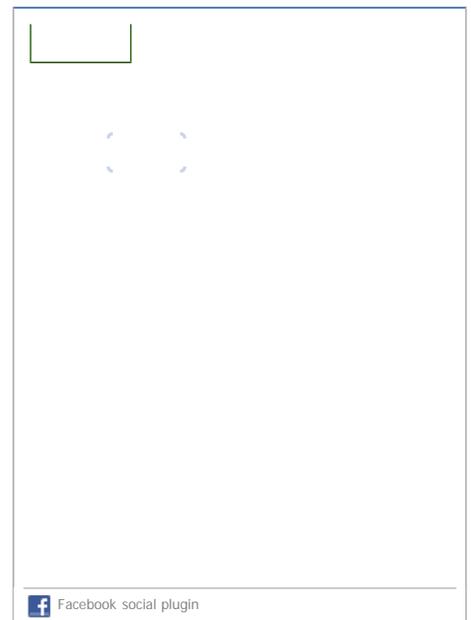
Unfortunately, many are scared of the "fire" they think will ensue. Thankfully, our director, **Rolla Selbak** and producer, **Ahmad Zahra**, pushed forward and believed in it.

AE: You seem to be drawn to controversial stories, why? What's wrong with you?

[Laughs]

SS: Ha! Funny, I get that question a lot and I laugh because I never sought out particular "controversial" films. And, honestly, I personally don't find them "controversial" — I find them interesting, honest stories that I haven't seen done before and that's rare in the film world. Finding complex stories and strong female characters is hard, so when I see a script as special as this one, I jump on it.

In the process, I come to know the issues around it and am even more proud to be a voice in the nonsense of ignorance and taboo topics. I grew up having very strong opinions about things and always being involved. I have never stood on the sidelines of anything, let alone a debate. I also don't want to be in a film that's mediocre or stirs mild reaction. Good films illicit strong responses, albeit positive or negative but that's what I love. I say, bring it. Let's talk. There is nothing we shouldn't talk about. No fear!



AE: What has been the most surprising response to *Three Veils*?

SS: Well, I saw it with an audience for the first time in Portland and I was so excited to see how people responded. I wasn't surprised as much I was thrilled that people seemed to want to know more. They were moved by it and just had so much to ask and talk about after. And we won the Audience Award! For our premiere screening, that's not bad, huh?

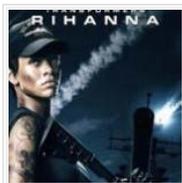


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AE: You recently joined Twitter. What took you so long? Who would your ideal Twitter follower be?

SS: [Laughs] I know! I resisted as long as I could which is funny, as I seem to resist a lot of things, which I end up giving into soon enough. Like cell phones, CD players and then iPods, the list goes on and on! I am silly and old school about a lot. Twitter just seemed too close and I am very private, and think I was afraid I would lose some of that. I have to say though, I am enjoying it and love the interaction with fans that I wouldn't get to know otherwise. That's the best part and I feel like I am finding balance. I also think it's good for me to share a little more than I'm used to. It's been quite lovely and better than I would've believed. I would be stoked if **Howard Stern** followed me. I love him and that would be a thrill for sure! Come join me at [@sheetalsheth!](#)

AE: Nice self plug! Oprah has her own network, called OWN. (Pretty original, right?) If you could have your own show on OWN, what would it be and what would you call it?

SS: Oh boy, that's tough. I would actually love it but to come up with something new in that realm would be hard at this point. I would really have to think about it. Hold please.

AE: All right, you ponder that and I'll ask you again during our next interview. In *Three Veils*, you play Nikki, the wild child of the bunch. How did you prepare for that role? Did you discover anything new about yourself by playing her?

SS: I went straight to her heart and why she was acting out. Going to that dark a place was hard as it's so heartbreaking, but I fell in love with her over and over again. She was fighting herself more than anyone, and I was mostly just working on the truth of how she would react in the moment with all the baggage she has. It would've been easy to go over the top, but I think she is such an intense, vulnerable girl, I wanted to stay with what she really wanted and needed. And yes, always discover things about myself with every role. I would hope that doesn't change as that's part of the joy of the work for me.

AE: In the film, Nikki and Amira have a lesbian love scenes. Why do you think the media and audiences get so worked up about that aspect of the film?

SS: Well as far as audiences, I think it's because you don't see two women together like that too often. In such an honest way. The mainstream media sometimes tries to make it sensational but, honestly, I think it's just a matter of time until it becomes more common.

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AE: In Portland, at the women's film festival where *Three Veils* was the opening night film, did anyone from the audience approach you after the screening to discuss it?

SS: We won the Audience Award and had an amazing turnout so that was fantastic! And yes, so many people shared their thoughts and feelings about the film. I was struck at the number of people who had driven for hours to come see the film because they weren't sure if there would be another opportunity to see it anytime soon. That's as lovely as it gets but also sad, because in that truth, it's knowing that these smaller films are rare and harder to get out there.

AE: I know you're not really a lesbian, but you play one so well! On the Kinsey scale from 0 to 6 what number are you? (The Kinsey scale attempts to describe a person's sexuality. It uses a scale from 0, meaning exclusively heterosexual, to 6, meaning exclusively homosexual.)

SS: [Laughs] I hadn't heard of this Kinsey scale! Interesting. I think it's best to leave it at that.

AE: What is one thing you haven't accomplished yet as a performer that you're eager to do?

SS: Oh my goodness, so much but I will tell you a secret: Direct. And even saying that right now gives me goose bumps as I know it's in me, just feel like I'm not ready yet.

AE: You dance, act, model — you're a daredevil crazy person who jumps out of planes. What other secret talents do you have?

SS: I wish I could rattle off a bunch but, alas, I think the more appropriate question for me is "What are you trying to learn?" I am trying to learn the guitar. It's not going well.

AE: I'm probably the worst guitar player in the world. After eight years of strumming I've almost mastered the G chord. Almost. Do you have any vices?

SS: Oh yeah. Lots. I find myself having to think before I speak, a lot. I am so up front that it can be hard for some people, especially if they don't know me and trust I am coming from a kind place. And I would hate to alienate someone. I also spread myself too thin at times and end up mad at myself because I can't do everything and be everywhere. I procrastinate. I don't sleep enough. I give advice when not asked to at times. I am an impatient driver. I overeat. I am going to stop before I fully expunge.

AE: Does anyone really sleep enough? Besides Rumpelstiltskin, wait, no, I mean Rip Van Winkle. What am I talking about? Anyway, do you have any plans to work with *The World Unseen* director Shamim Sarif again anytime soon?

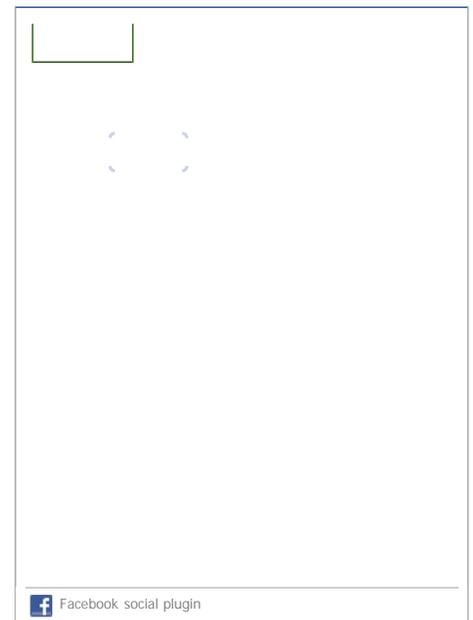
SS: I would love to work with Shamim again as I think she is very talented and I am proud of the work we did together. If the right project were to come up, especially given the shorthand we would have, it would be fantastic. Doing things in threes is always a good thing, right?

AE: Yes! Many AfterEllen.com readers are big fans of you and your *The World Unseen* co-star Lisa Ray. Have you spoken with Lisa Ray recently? How is she doing?

SS: Lisa is doing great. Our schedules are nutty but we do email from time to time and she is thriving! I'm so happy to see her doing her thing.

AE: So what's next for you?

SS: I have shot several films in the past year, so as they finish up, hope to share them with you:



Stalemate, *The Wisdom Tree* and *Reign*. Also, I'm producing a couple of projects myself and working with the organization [Women's Voices Now](#). It's an incredible, hands-on non-profit doing extraordinary work.

For more information on *Three Veils*, including upcoming screenings, check out the [official website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for the film.



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