

THE FEMINIST WORD

EXPRESSIONS FÉMINISTES



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REMERCIEMENTS

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women respectfully acknowledges our presence on Aboriginal territories and recognizes the legacy of colonization upon the Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

L'Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes reconnaît respectueusement notre présence sur les territoires autochtones et reconnaît l'héritage de la colonisation sur les peuples autochtones au Canada.

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Founded in 1976, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women is a not-for-profit charity, encouraging and producing feminist research for the advancement of women.

Fondé en 1976, l'Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes est un organisme à but non lucratif et de charité qui encourage et produit de la recherche féministe pour l'avancement des femmes.



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Front page artwork by Taryn Read-Hobman
Oil on wood/ Self-portrait
See page 4

INTRODUCTION

The Feminist Word (aka *The F-Word*) is produced by a team of young feminists working and volunteering for the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) from locations across Canada. The need and desire to elevate the collective voices of young Canadian feminists inspired this publication. We are thankful for the support and encouragement CRIAW has provided to *The F-Word* team for this project. *The Feminist Word* gives today's generation of young feminists a platform through which they can express their thoughts and priorities regarding women's equality in Canada. Our overarching goal is to provide a meaningful space in which young women can contribute to the women's movement.

The F-Word is published tri-annually, in the winter, spring, and summer. It is comprised of articles, poetry, and art submissions collected from women aged 15-29 around Canada. We welcome new submissions all year long! Send us your opinion pieces, research, reviews (of literature, film, music), and stories, and your submission could be featured in an upcoming edition of *The Feminist Word*!

La publication *Expressions féministes* (soit *The F-Word*) a été produite par une équipe de jeunes femmes travaillant et faisant du bénévolat à l'Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes (ICREF) à partir de divers endroits au Canada. La publication est inspirée par le désir de cette équipe et un besoin de magnifier les voix des jeunes féministes canadiennes. Nous sommes reconnaissantes envers l'ICREF pour le soutien et les encouragements qu'il a offert à la publication de ce projet. *Expressions féministes* offre aux jeunes féministes d'aujourd'hui une plateforme par laquelle elles peuvent exprimer leurs pensées et leurs priorités concernant l'égalité des femmes au Canada. Notre objectif primordial est d'offrir un espace significatif dans lequel des jeunes femmes peuvent contribuer au mouvement des femmes.

Expressions féministes est publié sur une base trisannuelle, en hiver, au printemps et en été. La publication est composée d'articles, de poésie et de soumissions artistiques provenant de femmes âgées de 15 à 29 ans et de partout au Canada. Nous vous invitons à nous envoyer vos soumissions pendant toute l'année! Envoyez-nous des textes d'opinion, de la recherche, des critiques (de littérature, films, musique) et des récits; et votre soumission pourrait être présentée dans une prochaine édition d'*Expressions féministes*!

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COVER PORTRAIT

BY TARYN READ-HOBMAN

Self-portraiture innately goes beyond the surface in its description. We see this with artists such as Francis Bacon, Van Gogh, and especially Frida Khalo. The thing about portraiture, especially as a women painting herself, is that we are often looked upon and painted to represent the ideal, conforming to the male gaze of that time. We see this in the main message by the Guerrilla girls (1989), the idea that museums are filled with paintings of nude women, yet there are hardly any women artists represented. Women are the object of the male artist's affection, without the tools to influence their own representation. It is an extremely visceral and almost alarming experience to paint myself, for myself. In the context of art history, that is pretty freeing. And how strange that it felt uncomfortable to paint myself without some



measurable standard guiding my brushstrokes. It opens up a world that I think a lot of women are uncomfortable in; representing ourselves through our own gaze.

Taryn Read-Hobman is a public servant and artist who currently works and resides in Ottawa. Taryn studied Fine Arts at Western University and produces work that explores a variety of feminist themes.

LE TDA/H CHEZ LA FEMME : UN DOUBLE HANDICAP

PAR ALEXANDRA NEUFELDT

Le trouble de déficit de l'attention avec ou sans hyperactivité (TDAH) est une maladie peu comprise par la majorité de la population Nord-Américaine. L'image stéréotypée d'une personne vivant avec un TDAH c'est celle d'un petit garçon perturbateur, toujours en train de crier ou de se bagarrer avec les autres. C'est une image qui sert à renforcer les présupposés courants dans notre société au sujet de la maladie; que c'est un trouble inexistant, dont les « symptômes » peuvent être attribués à un problème de comportement et l'incapacité des parents de bien élever leurs enfants. Pourtant, le TDAH n'est pas du tout inexistant, ni dû à un problème de comportement; c'est une maladie provoquée par une anomalie cérébrale génétique, qui cause des difficultés à gérer l'attention et le comportement. De plus, ce ne sont pas seulement les petits garçons qui sont affectés par le trouble; la majorité des enfants qui sont atteints d'un TDAH

continueront de vivre avec la maladie à l'âge adulte, et elle affecte aussi souvent les femmes que les hommes. Cependant, les normes de genre dans notre société empêchent les femmes d'être diagnostiquées d'un TDAH, ce qui leur cause un double handicap dans la vie quotidienne. Elles sont moins aptes à se faire diagnostiquer pour deux raisons : l'absence chez les femmes des symptômes les plus connus et la stigmatisation de ces symptômes quand elles se présentent chez les femmes.

D'abord, les femmes avec le TDAH éprouvent souvent des symptômes du trouble qui diffèrent de ceux des hommes. Il existe trois sous-types de la maladie : le type inattentif, le type hyperactif, et le type combiné (qui comprend des caractéristiques des deux autres sous-types). Les femmes souffrent le plus souvent du type

inattentif, qui inclut des symptômes tels que : la distraction, la désorganisation, le rêve éveillé, et la procrastination. Quant aux hommes, leurs symptômes sont pour la plupart hyperactifs : le besoin de bouger constamment, les problèmes de gestion de colère, le comportement impulsif, etc. Puisque les symptômes de l'hyperactivité sont plus perturbateurs, ils sont plus facilement reconnus. Les hommes ont donc de meilleures chances d'être diagnostiqués d'un TDAH que les femmes, qui éprouvent des symptômes moins évidents. Des experts croient que le trouble se manifeste de façon différente chez les hommes et les femmes largement à cause des attentes sociales différentes pour les deux sexes: les femmes sont socialisées dès l'enfance d'être gentilles, douces, et calmes, tandis que les garçons sont encouragés d'être actifs et agressifs. Donc, il est logique que ces normes de genres, profondément enracinées, aient une influence sur la manifestation des symptômes du TDAH.

Cependant, le sous-type hyperactif du trouble n'est pas réservé exclusivement aux hommes; il y a des femmes qui éprouvent aussi des symptômes de l'hyperactivité. On pourrait croire que la manifestation de tels symptômes perturbateurs signalerait aux femmes, à leurs proches, et aux professionnels de la santé qu'elles souffrent probablement d'un TDAH et qu'elles bénéficieraient d'un diagnostic et d'un traitement. Malheureusement, ce n'est pas souvent le cas : les comportements qui caractérisent le sous-type hyperactif de la maladie sont très stigmatisés chez les femmes, puisqu'ils sont vus comme étant « typiquement masculins » en raison du modèle étroit de la féminité qui domine notre société, donc l'hyperactivité chez les femmes est souvent attribuée à un problème de comportement et non à une maladie mentale.

Malheureusement, l'invisibilité de la maladie chez les femmes a un double impact négatif sur elles dans la vie quotidienne; non-seulement sont-elles handicapées par la maladie elle-même, mais elles sont aussi handicapées par les rôles traditionnels des femmes dans notre société. Par exemple, on

s'attend souvent à ce que les femmes prennent soin des autres; qu'elles soient des bonnes mères et épouses, qu'elles fassent le ménage et la cuisine et en plus qu'elles aient un emploi à temps plein. Répondre à toutes les exigences imposées aux femmes est difficile pour la plupart d'entre nous, mais pour une femme qui souffre d'un TDAH sans traitement, c'est quasiment impossible, puisqu'elle ne dispose pas de l'organisation et la concentration nécessaire pour tout gérer. De plus, les femmes qui éprouvent des symptômes d'hyperactivité souffrent de la stigmatisation de ces comportements et intériorisent souvent les critiques d'autrui en pensant que leurs actions sont liées à un échec moral au lieu d'une maladie, ce qui peut provoquer des bouleversements psychologiques et conduire à d'autres maladies mentales, telle que la dépression. En conclusion, le handicap causé par un TDAH est très sérieux, mais celui d'être femme dans une société malade et misogyne l'est aussi.

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Alexandra Neufeldt est une étudiante de 18 ans en science politique à l'Université d'Ottawa. Elle s'engage passionnément à démanteler l'oppression systémique dans la vie quotidienne, surtout les systèmes du sexisme et du capacitisme. Lorsqu'elle n'est pas en train d'abolir l'oppression, Alex adore dessiner, écrire, aller au gym, participer à des simulations de l'ONU, et faire du ski, la danse et le théâtre.

THE NEW NORMAL

BY KEHINDE ADENIYI

Big hips!
 Thick thighs,
 Bubble butt,
 Voluptuous breast.....
 Inexistent hips,
 Scrawny legs,
 Flat butt,
 Boobs...what boobs!?
 The shape of my body,
 The size of my 'womanhood',
 Has been dictated by society.
 It tells me what I should look like,
 The 'perfect ideal' type : 'Tall, slender, long silky straight hair, shapely endless legs, thigh gap' ---
 Everything I was not.
 Everything I was – short, curvy, nappy hair, dark skinned,
 Was depicted as the lesser other, not beautiful.
 Where was the mirror image of me?
 Who was representing me?
 Everywhere I looked – TV, billboards, magazines,...
 Nobody looked like me...
 I internalized this reality and thought that I was the problem –
 My skin tone,
 My sensual curves (that I thought meant I was fat),
 My short frame ----
 I was the problem.
 As I grew older,
 Surely I would be wiser,
 Surely I would see the reality that I wasn't the problem,
 That society's messed up notion of the 'ideal type' – the 'world's most beautiful woman' –
 Was exactly that – "ideal" ,
 Not reality...
 But a notion, constructed and marketed to make me think that I was the problem,
 To make me think that I could buy this ideal,
 Buy my hair – to make it straighter, smoother, longer,
 Buy my breast to shape them into the perfect size,
 Buy creams to perfect the right shade – Not too light, but not too dark.
 Buy my way out of the problem,
 Because I was the problem and society told me the only way to solve it was through constant consumption.
 So, I bought my hair, my breast size was beautifully perky, my skin tone, the perfect shade...
 But as I became this person I no longer recognized,

I realized my problems were still there,
My body was still problem-ized.
And as I looked around,
I realized we are all struggling – one way or another – to reach this “ideal” type.
I have aged again,
Although I am not the wisest,
I am seasoned in the way society functions.
My eyes are opened,
And I have realized and internalized that
Regardless of what the media dictates,
Regardless of the lies society repeatedly screams at me about what I should look like,
I now know that I am *not* the problem,
But part of the solution.
The solution to realizing this truth, in the midst of lies.
The solution to dismantling this ideal type,
The solution to a *collective* movement,
Changing the discourse and the images;
The solution to embracing my body – imperfect perfection.
The solution to changing the new normal:
By raising my voice;
By erasing the constructions and distorted truths about what it means to be beautiful.
Let’s be part of the solution, creating a new normal,
A truth that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes,
A truth that beauty is more than the outer surface,
True beauty is defined by my actions,
My words,
My inner self.
Regardless of my shape,
Regardless of my size,
See me for who I *really* am.
Let this new normal define us.
Let this new normal be part of the solution to the problem.
Let this new normal embrace our imperfect perfection.
Let this be the new normal.

As a naturalized Canadian born in Nigeria, Kehinde Adeniyi identifies as an African woman in the diaspora. Adeniyi expresses herself about the various ails of society, the beauty & tenacity of the human spirit, and life in general through poetry.

PERFECT

BY NICOLE CHITTLE

I can't remember the last time I didn't feel self-conscious about my body. As a child, I grew very fast. I was always the tallest, towering over my friends and even many boys. Then, around 12 years old, I developed very quickly. In one year I got my period, boobs, and a butt, and along came the bullying. High school was just as bad. My boobs got bigger, I grew some love handles, and at 5'8" and 140lbs, I was labelled "fat".

I promised myself I would never go over 150lbs. It worked...until I entered university. The freshman 15 piled on and now, in my fourth year, I'm pushing 175lbs. The other day, I looked down at the scale terrified, thinking, "How did I let myself get this big? Why didn't anyone tell me?" The fact is that realistically, I'm not that big, and my family and friends all tell me I'm beautiful. Though somehow I've convinced myself I am fat and my family and friends are lying. Like me, so many young girls and young adults are faced with what I believe to be body dysmorphia. No matter how small or big we are, we never view ourselves as perfect; there's always something wrong. The media doesn't help.

It's as if accepting ourselves for who we are isn't an option.

Movies and television are littered with one dominating type of girl – the skinny, perfect, pretty girl with perfect hair and a perfect smile – then there's always the one "bigger" girl of the show, but never anything in between. I have yet to see anyone my size in a movie or on TV. I'm between sizes 10-12 which should be perfectly acceptable, and yet, it's not. I'm forced to walk into stores,

always picking up a "large" and being scared that the next time I walk in I'll have to go to the plus size section. I look at some of my friends' clothes, who are both around sizes 2-4, and I say, "Wow, your pants could maybe fit ONE of my legs." Yet they look to me and say, "well, at least YOU

have boobs." At a 34DD, my boobs are VERY noticeable, but I've learnt very quickly they're a curse more than a blessing. Since clothes are seemingly tailored to a one-bust-fits-all type, I rarely am able to find clothes that fit my bust line, usually having

to go up a size or two. Then you have some of my friends, who are crying about being in a size "small" because they don't have big boobs. When they complain, I get angry...really angry. I think, "How can they POSSIBLY be complaining about being a size two?!"

It's then that I realize we're all comparing ourselves to the same person: the photoshopped,

So it begs the question, what is perfect?

size zero models in magazines with big breasts and no stretch marks; the actress with a hair never out of place and seemingly perfect acne-free face. There's one word I've used throughout this article too many times: PERFECT. So it begs the question, what is perfect? Or even better, why can't we ALL be perfect? In today's society, we've grown so accustomed to being judgmental and comparative. It's as if accepting ourselves for who we are isn't an option. But what if it was? What if you could wake up every morning and say, "I love ME!" Think about how amazing, how different, how supportive this world would be if people just stood up and decided to screw the brands and the

labels. Think about if actresses and models were of all shapes and sizes and if photos in magazines were untouched and something with which you could actually relate. But how do we accomplish this? How do we make the change?

First, we have to accept and love ourselves. You're not ugly, you're not dumb, you're not too fat or too skinny, YOU are perfect and original because there's only ONE of you! Second, it's time to stand up and stop judging. Sure, sometimes I think it's

in our nature to judge, but why are we really doing it? Do you really think that girl is too skinny or are you really just jealous and insecure with yourself? If we work to stop this now, the inflating amounts of depression among teens and young adults may cease in the next generation. It's time to stand together and make a difference or let this continue and kiss any hope of self-acceptance goodbye. It's your choice...Choose wisely!

Nicole Chittle is a 23 year old, 4th year History major university student at the University of Windsor. She comes from a small rural town east of Windsor and lives with her mom, a nurse and single mother, and her sister, who is living with both mental and physical disabilities. They didn't have the easiest life but they did have a good life full of love. Chittle has a great family and great friends who have supported her and she dedicates this article to them and to all the other women and girls who ever feel overwhelmed by society's pressures and panicked when they look in the mirror. It's time to make a change or be left with a world of heartbroken girls who will never be able to love the person the most important in their lives - themselves!

HE TOLD HER, SHE WASN'T LISTENING

BY NATASHA BAGHDASARIAN

Her hands won't stop shaking
And she's crying.
He told her she wasn't listening.

Her hands won't stop shaking
And she's crying.
Then she felt a sharp pain
When he slapped her face.
He told her she wasn't listening.

Her hands won't stop shaking
And she's crying.
He cups his hands around her face,
As if she was a china doll he didn't want to break.
He whispers in her ear, "I'm sorry".
He told her she wasn't listening.

Her hands won't stop shaking
And she's crying.
Because she believes him
When he tells her he loves her,
She doesn't walk away
When she felt a sharp pain
When he slapped her face.
He told her she wasn't listening.

Natasha Baghdasarian is a 20 year old student majoring in Women Studies at Mount St. Vincent University. Some of her hobbies include photography, activism, reading, traveling and writing. Her dream is to help other women who have experienced domestic violence know that their stories are valid and what happened to them was never their fault.

THE CASE FOR SNARKY FEMINISM

BY STEPHANIE CLARK

Feminists have productive and civil conversations. We bear the burden to explain, demonstrate, and prove that sexism exist and if this angers us, then we are hysterical. Feminists do not feel, do not rage at the constant uphill struggle; Feminists explain productively.

This “productive and civil” rhetoric is harmful. Sometimes Feminist discourse comes off as offensive, insulting, condescending or patronizing, and it’s time for people to accept this.

1) FEMINISM ISN’T GENTLE

I can’t always be gentle. I hope I have offended you – my aim is to offend. Pull yourself out of the comfort you have with the status quo and see all of the offensive things that happen around you. Some of these offensive things come from you. I need to shock you in order to move my mission forward and I can’t always be civil about it.

Telling me I am offensive is telling me to soften my Feminism. You are telling me to calm down and play by your rules. But I hate your rules; your rules got us into this mess. Your rules get me and my friends harassed on the street. My rules say: never shut up, never soften, never calm down. There is so much to be angry about that I can’t worry about pandering to your feelings.

I am lucky to know many Feminists who can address hateful, privileged and derogatory comments with poise and eloquence. I am not that person – I get flustered, I get angry, I want to curse and scream.

But think about it for a second – if you really think Feminists should only be allowed to express their views within a civil, carefully constructed rubric so as not to offend you, then you are telling

all of the passionate, flustered Feminists like myself that our voices are not valid. Is that really the message you want to send? Because if you really do want to silence me, I really do not care if I’ve offended you.

2) FEMINISTS ARE HARD AT WORK

The Feminist is offended and insulted every day. The other day, I was walking through the metro, and a man yelled out to me. I ignored him.

He approached me, grabbed me, held my arm, pulled me towards him and turned me to face him, so that he could look me in the eye and tell me what he thought of my body. I was in a crowded, public place and no one batted an eye. I was insulted.

My rules say: never shut up, never soften, never calm down.

I was insulted because the man saw me as nothing. He was entitled to grab me, because he was entitled not to be ignored.

Feminists know what it is to feel insulted, and we channel that feeling into working really hard to avoid feeling like that again. Personally, I try to affect positive change. I support my allies and contribute to initiatives when they happen in my community. But when you feel insulted, you turn my positive change into a discussion about your feelings. You are in the way.

3) FEMINISTS ARE SMART

Feminists come from communities of strong, smart, reasonable people. Feminists debate, wonder, and provide support together. Feminists speak to you from a reasoned position. A Feminist expects (but hopes not to find) certain kinds of backlash from the world at large. Because of the conversations and debates that Feminists share, we can articulate how harmful that backlash is. So if a Feminist tells you you’re being oppressive, it’s because you are.

The next time a Feminist insults you, be glad; the Feminist just gave you the tools to affect positive change around you! The Feminist is not only showing you that you are not an ally, but is pointing out how you can contribute positively to a Feminist discussion. Think about what the Feminist is calling you out on, question it, then engage in the discussion. Listen to your neighborhood offensive Feminist, and you can become more informed about Feminism.

I am a snarky person, and my Feminism is snarky. If you tell me the way I express myself is not “nice” or “civil”, you’re telling me how to express myself. You’re indirectly invalidating the experiences and feelings that make me a Feminist in the first place. I will express my ideas the way I choose because my choice is my right, and your feelings are not my responsibility.

Stephanie is a law student at McGill University, where she contemplates feminism and the law by working on Contours, a student-run magazine. This piece was inspired by conversations about feminism with law school classmates, noticing how often the conversations were derailed by focusing on how “nice” feminist discourse should be.

HOW SEX EDUCATION LEAVES WOMEN BEHIND

BY DEVON PAOLINI

Ontario’s Liberal government has an important opportunity in the rewriting of the sex education curriculum. Will it be an agent of change?

The perspective of women’s sexual health used today is harmful to young women’s developing sexuality. In a world wherein sexual development is problematized, with particular intensity towards women’s sexual development,¹ the emphasis in girls’ Sex Ed classes on sexual health as reproduction and absence of women’s sexual arousal and pleasure is meaningful.² As boys learn about their sexual arousal and pleasure we ultimately impress upon young people that pleasure is irrelevant to women, unwanted by women, and always wanted by men.³

The World Health Organization’s report “Defining

Sexual Health: Report of a Technical Consultation on Sexual Health” claims that the environment for girls’ sexual development is dangerous. It found that there is pressure on young women to behave exactly the right way, sexually active or not.⁴ The report asked what it means for women’s sexual empowerment if a young woman cannot be allowed to make sexual mistakes for fear of social discipline. It is no wonder adolescent women feel that a former sexual partner talking about a woman’s sexuality is “the biggest downside” to sexual exploration.⁵

With insufficient education and an unhealthy environment, young women fall into traditional sexual scripts and gender stereotypes. One such script is obviously seen in an older, but very relevant, study of New Zealand women by Nicola Gavey.⁶ She found that women fit themselves into

1 World Health Organization, “Defining Sexual Health: Report of a Technical Consultation on Sexual Health,” accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf

2 Susan K. Pastor, “Education for Sexual Intimacy and Agency,” in *Women’s Health: Readings on Social, Economic, and Political Issues*, 5th ed., ed. Nancy Worcester and Mariamne H. Whatley (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2008), 440.

3 Ibid

4 WHO, Sexual Health, 4

5 Jennifer Livingston et. al., “Mixed Drinks and Mixed Messages: Adolescent Girls’ Perspectives on Alcohol and Sexuality,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37(1) (2012): 44

6 Nicola Gavey, “Technologies and Effects of Heterosexual Coercion,” in *Heterosexuality: A Feminism & Psychology Reader* (1993): 15-16.

the role of a passive sexual object. She describes this role-playing as self-surveillance and acting as self-policing subjects. In this role, not voicing an opinion of whether sex is going to happen, or how it is going to happen, becomes affirmative submission.

This passive role is troublesome, but becomes dangerous when girls and women feel they do not have a voice in the decision-making process of sex. Researchers discovered that women found difficulty in bringing up safer sex to male partners in conversation.⁷ One participant wanted to fit into the normalized role for women, and expressed that talking about condom use meant a woman is intending to have sex – an act for men to intend, and women to concede to – and is therefore not a “nice girl.”⁸

The “nice girl” role is linked to the role of the sexual gatekeeper. There is considerable pressure on young women to repress sexual desires as a way to guard their sex and sexuality from men who are unable to control themselves. It also offers women social worth and the visage of moral fortitude.⁹

The complexity of the pressure on young women’s sexual expressions and behaviours continues with the model of a woman who is sexually ready, knowledgeable, and, supposedly liberated.¹⁰ Authors describe young women’s struggle with contradictory messaging as a “complex knot of multiple, seemingly opposed normative injunctions: to abstain, to resist, to comply, to seduce, to express, to arouse, and to perform.”¹¹

The importance of education and fostering of sexual empowerment is clear when looking at the impact

sexual relations can have on young women. The report “Young Women’s Adolescent Experiences of Oral Sex: Relation of Age of Initiation to Sexual Motivation, Sexual Coercion, and Psychology”¹² found that when young women explore sex for

intrinsic reasons, like desire and personal or mutual satisfaction, they are more likely to have greater well-being, higher self-esteem, and low instances of depression and poor physical health than their counterparts.

These counterparts, who explored sex for extrinsic motivations such as cultural pressures, peer pressure, coping with negative emotions, and avoiding relationship conflict, were found to have poor mental and sexual health and high-risk sexual behaviour.¹³

Young women must be given a supportive environment in which they can make mistakes without scorn, shame, and humiliation. They must be taught the ability to reason in abstraction and weigh consequences to make a decision – with all of the knowledge possible. It is apparent that it is necessary to teach young women how to think about sex, sexuality, and themselves. We need to give them the tools to critically consider what they are told and what they are presented with. A cultural shift is necessary for women to have the space to grow and explore sexuality for themselves to construct their own sexual empowerment.

Devon Paolini is in her third year as a student of Social Work and Women’s Studies at the University of Windsor. A Windsor native, she is active both in the community and on campus. Paolini hopes to continue in academic writing in the future.

7 Catherine Cook, “Nice Girls Don’t: Women and the Condom Conundrum,” *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 21 (2011): 538.

8 Ibid.

9 Livingston, 39.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Nicole M. Fava and Laina Y. Bay-Cheng, “Young Women’s Adolescent Experiences of Oral Sex: Relation of Age of Initiation to Sexual Motivation, Sexual Coercion, and Psychology,” *Journal of Adolescence* 35 (2012): 1192.

13 Ibid.

FEMINIST BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA: GRAD STUDENT ACTIVISTS' EXPERIENCES

BY BRITTNEY ADAMS, ANASTASIA SEREDA, KARISSA PATTON,
JESSE COUTURE, AND KRISTINE ALEXANDER

Southern Alberta. When I moved here just over a year ago to teach at the University of Lethbridge (U of L), the reaction from my friends and family was a study in regional stereotypes. "Aren't they all rednecks out there? You know, ultra-conservatives who want to de-fund public services while trying to recriminalize abortion?"

Unfortunately, these generalizations do contain some grains of truth. In 2013, the provincial government slashed millions from post-secondary education funding in Alberta, and Premier Jim Prentice has recently warned that further cuts are likely. At the U of L, I've already watched my students have to walk past graphic and offensive displays of anti-abortion propaganda, and my partner and I have received multiple taxpayer-funded mail outs in which my local Conservative MP insists that abortion "is not a human right." As a socialist, a feminist, a citizen, and scholar, I believe that these political acts are harmful – both to women's rights and to the future of our province and country.

But I've also come to see that there is more to Southern Alberta than anti-feminism and short-sighted fiscal conservatism.

This is why the work being done by U of L graduate students is so important: it challenges the regional assumptions that many Canadians continue to hold, while bringing about positive social change.

The stereotypes and challenges described by Dr. Kristine Alexander show how the social, political, and religious conservatism of Lethbridge and Southern Alberta provides a different and sometimes challenging environment for feminist activism. This paper describes the specific

experiences of feminist graduate students within the unique environment of Southern Alberta.

The four of us will discuss the various spaces of, and reciprocal relationships between, local and university communities' feminisms and activisms. Our hope for this paper is to challenge the notion of Southern Alberta as an impenetrable conservative space separate from larger provincial, national, and international feminisms and activisms. In doing so, we highlight the counter-narrative of the existing broad and active feminist community in Lethbridge that often goes unrecognized.

PENETRATING CONSERVATIVE* BOUNDARIES: FEMINIST RECIPROCITY AMONG UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

BY BRITTNEY ADAMS

Feminist activity seems invisible in Southern Alberta because the political environment of Lethbridge has come to be known on a national level as politically and religiously conservative.¹

Indeed, this political conservatism has been represented by Lethbridge Members of Parliament such as Jim Hillyer, who

have advocated against the legalization of same sex marriage and actively pursued the recriminalization of abortion. However, by conceptualizing local

***...there is more to Southern
Alberta than anti-feminism
and short-sighted fiscal
conservatism.***

* Note that "Conservative" in this title refers to small 'c' conservative as an ideology.

¹ The Lethbridge riding has elected right or center-right candidates dating back to the 1930's.

feminist organizations as politically salient, I argue that local feminist activism and organizations in the Lethbridge area dispute some aspects of conservative rhetoric.

...collaboration among the feminist community and campus groups creates a larger niche for feminist activism to flourish...

In disrupting this political conservatism, reciprocity among feminist organizations in the Lethbridge area is crucial, not only for the purposes of solidarity, but also for making visible feminist activism. To this end, building positive relationships between organizations such as the Campus Women's Centre (CWC) and the YWCA Lethbridge are crucial. The U of L campus is sometimes perceived as a bubble that is isolated from the rest of the Lethbridge community due to the lack of student involvement in the broader community. However, the formation of positive relationships between university groups such as the CWC and community groups such as the YWCA not only increases the visibility of feminist groups and organizations in the spirit of activism, but also gives voice to feminist movements that do not conform to politically conservative ideologies.

However, despite efforts to foster positive relationships among feminist organizations, representation of feminist voices within these organizations remain largely based on a monolithic feminist voice; one that is white, middle class, and middle-aged.

While this perceived lack of diversity is undoubtedly problematic, I argue that collaboration among the feminist community and campus groups creates a larger niche for feminist activism to flourish and give voice to issues such as Sisters in Spirit²

that would otherwise go largely unaddressed by Lethbridge Members of Parliament.

THE WOMANSPACE RESOURCE CENTRE: THE UNRECOGNIZED BOUNDARIES OF WOMEN'S SPACES IN LETHBRIDGE

BY ANASTASIA SEREDA

Similarly, Womanspace Resource Centre³ (est. 1985) provides services to women in need and their families that are more accessible and understanding than bureaucratic government facilities. A feminist grass-roots organization in Lethbridge, Alberta, Womanspace works for women's political, social, and economic equality in the region, and serves a wide range of clients from different racial, class, age, ethnic, educational, and demographic backgrounds. Today, Womanspace works to ensure economic security for women in need and their families through very basic, yet necessary services, including free identifications and free tax services. These services allow women to access necessities such as banking and transportation, as well as government services such as child tax benefits and low-income housing. As the services provided are very basic, many community members do not realize identification and tax-services may be inaccessible due to specific economic and social situations such as fleeing domestic violence.

Additionally, Womanspace partners with other local feminist organizations to bring awareness to social and political inequalities that affect women and womyn-identified people, regionally and nationally. Collaborative efforts and events such as "Take Back the Night," an annual demonstration protesting violence against women and womyn-identified folks, and, more recently, the Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic fundraiser, which was organized in support of access to abortion in New Brunswick following the closure of the only abortion clinic in the province, where money was

commemorate missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

³ <http://www.womanspace.ca/>

² The Sisters in Spirit Vigil is held yearly on October 6 to

sent to the clinic in an attempt to keep it open. Although Womanspace organizes many feminist events and their identification and tax services are used by hundreds of women and their families each year, the organization suffers from a lack of visibility in the region. I argue that this lack of

In fact, sometimes I wonder if the Lethbridge feminists are hiding.

visibility is due to the invisible and marginalized nature of the clientele that Womanspace serves, the physical space of Womanspace's office, and the ebb and flows of the volunteer-run organization; issues that are then compounded and perpetuated by the deep funding cuts implemented by the federal government to Status of Women Canada in 2010. Despite the lack of visibility and funding cuts that create barriers to the organization, the determination of Womanspace board members and volunteers with a broad range of backgrounds and experiences keeps the doors open to women in and around the Lethbridge area.

"WE ARE NOT THE ONLY FEMINISTS IN LETHBRIDGE:" SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND RESEARCH

BY KARISSA PATTON

Womanspace is not the only feminist organization or activism that lacks visibility in Lethbridge. In fact, I sometimes wonder if the Lethbridge feminists are hiding. The lack of visibility or, I would argue, the assumed lack of feminism itself in the region is an idea that the radio show *Those Feminists!*⁴ tries to challenge.

This assumption that we are in a post-feminist era stems from various media sources and political figures claiming feminism has not been needed in

North America since the 1980s.⁵

Time Magazine's 1998 cover asking "Is Feminism Dead" illustrates the popularized notion of "achieved gender equality." This post-feminist attitude contributes to the lack of recognition of feminist activism in Lethbridge and beyond as indeed, feminist. I will highlight the assumption of a post-feminist society and the assumption that feminist activism is lacking in Lethbridge and beyond – especially in the case of youth – through my discussion of *Those Feminists!* At *Those Feminists!* the hosts try to contest the claim of a post-feminist society and attempt to highlight and recognize the variety of feminist

As "young" feminists there is sometime an assumption that we are not "activist" enough.

activism and research in our local community. Every week we address this notion of post-feminism through our sign on: "We are not the only feminists in Lethbridge; we are not the only feminists in general/Canada/ the World." In fact, the majority of the show includes guests from the university and local communities who participate in feminist activism and/or research.

While the show tries to promote and highlight the various feminist activism and research at the U of L and within the Lethbridge community, we also attempt to illustrate the new ways activism takes form. As "young" feminists, there is sometime an assumption that we are not "activist" enough.

However, *Those Feminists!* argues that we are indeed activist, but perhaps new methods of activism are not being recognized, such as activism through social media. We maintain that if we do not recognize activism through social media (specifically, the activism around the local Bordello

⁴ *Those Feminists!* was established in 2012, the show runs every Thursday night on CKXU, the U of L student radio station.

⁵ Pamela Aronson, "Feminists or 'Postfeminists'? Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations," *Gender and Society* vol. 17 no. 6 (2003), 906.

Controversy in January 2014)⁶ we are ignoring some amazing feats accomplished through laptops, tablets, and smart phones by several individuals in our communities.

Although these feminist communities and their activisms often go unrecognized, they do exist and they are strong. It is the mandate of Those Feminists! to refute the assumption that we are in a post-feminist time and to bring recognition to local and campus activisms, week by week, through our assertion that we are indeed, not the only feminists in Lethbridge

(RE)FRAMING FEMINISM: THOUGHTS ON
LETHBRIDGE AND LEGITIMATE 'VOICE'

BY JESSE COUTURE

Much like the assumption that feminism is absent or limited in Southern Alberta I am often faced with the assumption feminism is for women. The idea of male feminism, of men as feminists or as allies, has elicited a variety of popular and academic responses.

By exploring some of the ways in which my being male has worked to complicate my feminism and, too, the ways in which my feminism has complicated my being male, I give a voice to some of the questions and contradictions I have experienced in negotiating a newly (dis)embodied subject position as a critical feminist researcher.

My self-identification as feminist has been met with a mix of curiosity, confusion, and questioning from both women and men, each of whom have (in different ways) questioned my intentions

and motivations for doing feminist research. This frustrated me at first, but has ultimately worked to foster a greater level of reflexivity on my part as I seek ways to better understand and articulate my subject position. Specifically, with respect to my current research, there happens to be a gap in the academic literature and, as a critical sport scholar, I am guided by the belief that sport is an arena wherein progressive and/or potentially transgressive gendered bodily politics can emerge. More broadly, and perhaps more importantly, my engagement with feminist theories and methodology works to challenge and expand the boundaries of feminism, both on our campus and in Southern Alberta.

I have come to understand my feminism as one which seeks to disrupt, provoke, and re-define rather than defend, protect, and reify dominant narrative of patriarchal privilege.

It is important to acknowledge that no matter how sincere or sympathetic my position might be, my male identity carries with it implications of domination and appropriation, those very things that, as a feminist scholar, I seek to challenge and disrupt. This does not mean that as a man, I have neither agency nor the ability to expand upon, respond to, or change feminist ideas but I must

understand and accept that I cannot pretend, no matter how well-intentioned, to know as women know, nor to write from 'where they are'.

By self-identifying as feminist and a man, I understand my work and my voice as helping to reshape public discourses around feminism, including

the seemingly still contentious idea that men can be real or legitimate feminists.

Are we, as Southern Albertan graduate students, recognized as real or legitimate feminists in our

⁶ See http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/01/29/theatre-outre-lethbridge_n_4689596.html for details on the controversy.

CONCLUSIONS

local, regional, and national communities? If you believe most stereotypes about Southern Alberta, we shouldn't exist at all. Or if we do exist, it might only be as invisible feminists, completely hidden by political, social, and religious conservatism. We hide in plain sight; our activism and advocacy demonstrates that we are indeed feminist, and that we are indeed active in our southern Albertan communities, despite the stereotypes or invisibilities that we may face.

We assert that our various activisms on and off campus, personally and collectively challenge regional stereotypes of Southern Alberta.

Adams, Sereda, Patton and Couture all met in 2013 during their MA course work at the University of Lethbridge. As they discussed feminism and activism in Lethbridge and Southern Alberta, they noticed particular barriers and stereotypes as feminists and as Albertans. This paper comes from a presentation taken to several conferences and speaker series including the U of L's Meeting of the Minds (March 2014), the Women & Gender Studies et Recherches Feministes Annual Meeting (May 2014), the U of L's Women's Scholar's Speaker Series (October 2014), and the Rural Women Studies Association's The Local is Global (February 2015). Dr. Alexander is a professor and mentor at the U of L who acted as commentator for the Women Scholars Speaker Series presentation.

FEMINIST CONVERSATIONS WITH POP CULTURE

BY DANIELA ZUZUNAGA

As I find myself watching old reruns of *Sex and The City*, where some episodes do not even pass the Bechdel Test, I ask myself about the relationship between popular culture and my identity as a feminist.

The rallying cry of the 70s, "the personal is political" is instilled in my consciousness, and its meaning informs my day to day decisions; from buying non-gendered pens,

to expressing my political and social views when faced with oppressive behaviour. I make choices in a dominant patriarchal culture, and those choices have the power to change not only the way I see my life, but society as a whole, by disrupting societal norms that only serve to oppress.

In the panoptic society that we live in, choosing to watch a documentary on human trafficking versus

watching a fluffy television show matters, as that amounts to a vote. The idea of 'voting with your dollar' prescribes to the basic supply and demand model. If you consume a product, production of

that product goes up while production of the alternative goes down.

I am challenged by a desire to challenge the gender-normative messages that are promoted by pop culture, while simultaneously consuming it's output.

Thus, when we tune into *Toddlers and Tiaras* rather than a documentary on human trafficking, it

sends a message to the producers that they ought to produce more shows akin to the former, and commission less shows akin to the latter.

What does this mean for me, on a Saturday night when I really want to re-watch *Never Been Kissed*, where Drew Barrymore's character is portrayed as a successful career woman that does not care about her appearance, and has no love life? As

a romantic-comedy (rom-com), we will cheer when she meets a handsome guy that inevitably writes her path towards being a 'proper feminine' woman. I struggle because this perpetuates a tired script that tells impressionable young minds that if you want to catch a guy (which you obviously do), you better not be smart and career focused! Sigh.

***As feminists,
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As feminists, we struggle to end injustice, making personal choices in the context of structural limitations. As we hum along to a song that calls women 'bitches' or 'ho's', the context in which it happens – a nightclub versus a classroom, can significantly change the meaning of our actions. Meaning then is contingent on context and interaction. I struggle with whether it is "okay" to watch that rom-com to relax, or listen to rap music while out with my friends. I am challenged by a desire to challenge the gender-normative messages that are promoted by pop culture, while simultaneously consuming it's output.

Being critical of pop culture all the time can be exhausting, and ultimately it means that we cannot consume it at all. I think that we need to choose our struggles – but how do we choose what to criticize? I have this conversation with myself each time I hum along to a Snoop Dogg song on the radio, or watch *Gilmore Girls* on *Netflix*. Knowing the role of pop culture in the perpetuation of systems of injustice makes it hard to engage with it in ways that do not make me feel like a fraud. What is the extent of our responsibility as feminists when we consume pop culture?

As an evolving feminist, this struggle is important. I do not think there is a clear-cut answer. As we navigate the world we try to apply our knowledge

of macro social theories to affect change in our day-to-day lives. How we do this is dependent on our individual intersection of identities and our personal goals. What is empowering to us as individuals, such as wearing or not wearing makeup, might be in conflict with our own ideals of social justice. Our choices have consequences, but not all consequences carry the same weight. Watching *Never Been Kissed* at home will result in *Netflix* suggesting I watch similar movies, while actually believing the message of the movie may result in larger consequences to the way I perceive others, live my life and analyze society.

Being a feminist in a patriarchal society is a life-long journey, not a monolithic state that we occupy. Our ways of being a feminist will, and perhaps must, change according to our social locations, age, socioeconomic status, and stage that we are at in our lives.

***Being a feminist in a
patriarchal society is a life-
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How we decide what is worth actively critiquing will depend on us, and it is our choice. Whether or not we choose to engage in the activity is not the fundamental stage in the driving of change. The process of critical thought that surrounds our decisions is in fact, that fundamental first step in challenging the status quo. Of course, at this stage in my journey, this is how I navigate my feminisms and pop culture. How about you?

Daniela Zuzunaga is a Peruvian born sociology student at Vancouver Island University, BC. She enjoys long talks about intersectional feminism and decolonization. She lives with her two orange cats, to whom she is indebted for their unconditional companionship and support.

A FAULT IN OUR SYSTEM

BY TIERRA HOHN

What are some of the things you think of when you hear the word Canada? Besides beavers, maple leaves, and Parliament, perhaps one of the things you think of is “free healthcare”. Canada is often promoted as a country that offers free healthcare to its citizens, but for someone like myself, I have learned early that this “glorious” system contains many limitations.

Let me tell you about eating disorders. Eating disorders are the most deadly of mental illnesses. The most common types are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating.¹ Roughly, between 600,000- 990,000 Canadians suffer from an eating disorder;² and these are merely estimates, as this only includes cases that have been reported. Eating disorders are dramatically increasing.

As a person of a visible minority, I can also confirm that this illness is one that does not discriminate. Eating disorders affect both women and men of all ages, all ethnicities, and all socio-economic status.

One of the most disturbing issues concerning eating disorders is that so many cases go unreported.³ As both a university student and citizen of my community, I have come across

many people with clear signs of an eating disorder who have never received treatment.

Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that eating disorders are still highly stigmatized and rarely discussed. Another reason, from my experience is that Canada has yet to implement a proper system that provides all general practitioners with basic training to even identify signs and symptoms of an eating disorder. Repeatedly, I have gone to the doctor's office and repeatedly, I was told, “You should eat a chocolate bar”. Not only is this unhelpful, but it is also inexcusable.

From my experience, I have learned that although there are specialists designated for treating eating disorders, the only way to access them is if you are deemed “sick enough”, or perhaps more poignantly, close to death. You might also access care if waiting up to six months is acceptable, or if

I could barely find the strength to even pick myself up and go to school...

private care can be afforded.

When I was at my lowest, I experienced heart palpitations, dizzy spells, severe panic attacks, extremely low body temperature, excessive hair growth, and general soreness. I could barely find the strength to even pick myself up and go to school, but still, I was not considered “sick enough” to be admitted for treatment. In the end, it took three months of waiting, suffering, and my family scrambling for help until I was admitted into an eating disorder treatment program.

...eating disorders are still highly stigmatized and rarely discussed.

1 J. M. Holm-Denoma, T. K. Witte, K. H. Gordon, et al., “Death by suicide among individuals with anorexia as arbiters between competing explanations of the anorexia-suicide link,” *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 107(1-3), (2008), 231-236.

2 Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Status of Women, *Eating Disorders Among Girls and Women in Canada. 4th Report*. 41st Parliament, 2nd Session. (2014, November). Available: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/>

3 M. D'Abundo & P. Chally, P., “Struggling with recovery: Participant perspectives on battling an eating disorder. Qualitative Health Research,” 14(8), (2004), 1094-1106.

Looking back, I was extremely fortunate, as I could feel my body slowly shutting down. But what about those suffering who were not lucky enough to be admitted in time? Or what about those who are still waiting for help, before it is too late?

When I was eventually released from the hospital, I was finally at a healthy weight, but mentally, I was still fighting the illness. I felt like I was being released into the wilderness, as I had to fend for myself without any support.

Within a few months, the inevitable happened, I relapsed. This time it was much more difficult to find help. I felt alone, and it felt like I was being told, "You screwed up your opportunity to get better, so now deal with it yourself". Thankfully, I had a supportive family who has been, and continues to be, there for me.

Their caring however did come with a price. My mother had to struggle in order find the money to pay for help. Although she never complained, I knew this took a toll on her as she had to work two jobs, including night shifts, in order to provide proper care for me. On top of caring for me, she had to tend to my injured father, my other siblings, and with what was left, find time for herself.

Eating disorders not only affect the individual suffering from them, but also, the entire family emotionally, physically, and financially.

I am a person in recovery because I do have moments when I am feeling better and then I have moments when I feel much worse. Eating disorders are a battle. I literally fight for my life. But I will continue to fight because I owe myself the opportunity to have a life, a full life.

I literally fight for my life. But I will continue to fight because I owe myself the opportunity to have a life, a full life.

As a survivor, I created *Untouched Beauty*⁴ in order to create an open platform where young women could come together to support one another and learn methods of adopting positive body image and self-esteem into their lives. However, a lot more of this is needed. What our country needs is a pan-Canadian strategy for tackling eating disorders.

Last year, Canada's Standing Committee on the Status of Women conducted a study on eating disorders, but focused only on women and girls, rather than including men and boys who also suffer.⁵ I am apprehensive, as the Standing Committee on Health did not conduct the study. I am also outraged by the results of this study, which were released in November 2014. Despite the many pleas and testimonies made by Canadians begging the government to create a pan-Canadian strategy for tackling eating disorders, no concrete action was taken. There was no decision made to increase resources and funding available for eating disorder treatment and no national plan to tackle this subject matter. As a result, Canadians are continuing to suffer as they anxiously wait for help that may never come.

So to be honest, when I hear about Canada's "amazing" health care system, a large part of me is skeptical because my question is, if we have such a great system, then why has it failed to save those suffering from eating disorders?

Tierra Hohn was born in Toronto, Ontario. She is 22 years old and and currently completing her final year of her undergraduate degree at Carleton University in the Public Affairs and Policy Management program.

4 For more information www.tierrahohn.com

5 Standing Committee on Status of Women, 2014.

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FROM SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN.

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