

Cleanliness is next to Goddessliness

What is femininity?

An ad for Lysol, the "concentrated germ killer" proposes an answer. This relic from the sixties warns "a wise, considerate wife safeguards her daintiness in order to protect precious married love and happiness". It goes on to recommend regular douches with Lysol to "achieve dainty allure" and closes with an optimistic assurance. "You too, can rely on Lysol to help protect your married happiness . . . keep you desirable!"

So, the key to marital bliss is maintaining eternal perky freshness, by making sure your man doesn't have to face any of the messier aspects of being a woman. It's the next best thing to being forever young.

In retrospect, the ad is truly comical. However, when one considers the implications of women being told to be ashamed of their bodies in order to accommodate for their mates of the opposite sex are scary. It means women's most important priority is to hold on to their men.

Of course, with more women in the work force and less need to depend on men for financial security, women's roles are changing accordingly. However, the double bind lives on. The media still presents us with a barrage of images of beautiful scantily-clad women which send the men into a lust-crazed frenzy, while on the other hand, the sweet coy virgin is who nice guys like. The former conjures up images of "womanness" spilling over, while the latter is a matter of allowing the supposed inherent passivity of women to shine through.

It is important to notice that it is men who have produced the movies, novels and poetry responsible for creating our images of ideals of romance. This is significant in that there are politics associated with the criteria and expectations for women's behaviour. As long as women continue to be bombarded with conflicting images both women and men will remain in their skewed positions of power in society.

Madonna and one of her most well-known fans, Dr. Camile Paglia, have taken another approach to the various interpretations of the concept of femininity. Madonna takes on various personas in her much publicized book, *Sex*. Photos of the star clad in black leather and chains are interspersed with images of her enmeshed in soft pink, infant-like garb. She is reclaiming all aspects of the stereotypical female sex object in order to foster her fame and fortune. Meanwhile Paglia is receiving great attention for her belief that women should use the power of their beauty to the hilt, and claim their rightful superiority over men. She calls women to take advantage of their disadvantage.

Perhaps Madonna and Paglia are the right track, taking society's view of female human beings and throwing it back in its face. They are recognizing the strength of the politics associated with stereotypes of impure seductresses and ripe, clean virgins. Maybe their extreme tactics will help us to see how absurd, pervasive and dangerous, these images really are.

Miriam Korn

Erratum: Tara Hayward is Literacy Coordinator on campus. Last week's front-page story gave her name incorrectly.

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editorial

The media and the madness

"Parliament has passed a bill designating December 6 as a day of remembrance for the fourteen women slain in Montreal in 1989 and to raise awareness of violence against women at all levels of our society."

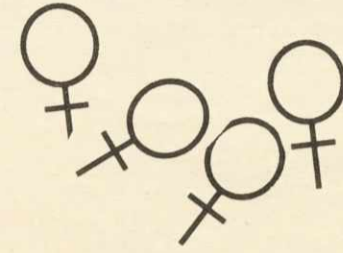
So reads the opening paragraph of a pamphlet put out recently by a coalition of women's groups in Nova Scotia. This day has been specifically put aside for a reason: as Canadians we must all pause and re-examine our position on violence against women. We must see how our society creates cultural contexts to deal with any contingency, and how we react within those imposed contexts.

A recent development has been the portrayal of women in the media as "Lethal Lolitas." This yellow-trash journalistic trend assures the front page of the tabloid (or the lead story on *A Current Affair*) is devoted to a psychotic kill-crazed woman who suddenly turns on the man in her life, or who fantasizes about a man to the point of obsession and then murders his family in a sly and desperate bid for his attention.

If this type of thing happens as often as the hype leads us to believe, we're in trouble. It would mean that at last, women have attained some measure of equality with men, in that

we're murdering them as fast as they're murdering us.

What has happened is the media has realized that male killers are boring. The headline, "Family Man Stalks and Gruesomely Murders Five Women," doesn't have the effect it used to have. Men kill women. More women die every year in Canada at the hands of every man they love and trust than die in car crashes, or from any other cause. With this accepted



as a given, the only sensational value becomes the quantity of women killed by the lone man.

Women pointed out that we are always the victim, we are always the object of the psychotic, we are somehow always targets. Instead of ending the glorification of the murderers, the media has turned the focus inside out, with women doing the killing. This is like thinking that as long as we have advertisements that

sexually exploit men as well as women, women shouldn't complain about the bikini.

It is too easy to sit back and be complicit.

An article printed in the November 17 edition of the *Arthur*, the Trent University newspaper, reads: "Sexism is societal, perpetuated by all men to one extent or another. Only upon realization of this will men begin to end the problem of violence against women."

This quote addresses the myth that only a few bad men are spoiling it for the rest of them. Men are complaining they feel excluded by the *Week of Reflection*, that there's no way men and women can work things out unless they're allowed to work together. Men say they need to be educated by women.

Every day in every walk of life since the beginning of time men and women have evolved working together. The results are in.

Men need to educate themselves to control their own violence. As reprinted here from C. Stockwell's article in the *Arthur*, "If you're looking for women to help you end your violence, you're looking for a mother."

Jennifer Beck



LETTERS

The *Dalhousie Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication. Letters may be submitted on Mac or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Scenes from the class struggle

To the editors:

Re: An Enviro-Friendly Campus (*Gazette*, Nov. 19): this initiative should be one in which we all eagerly participate. Regrettably, a key ingredient of Sustainable Development - involving the prospective clients or beneficiaries in all stages of development - has been neglected. The result is that the announcement of a new class in Waste Management and waste audits (*Gazette*, Nov. 19) prompts a number of questions and concerns, rather than unqualified approval. Some of mine:

As a professor, I wonder whether hiring consultants to develop this class marks a new approach to course development at Dalhousie. Was there a contract involved that was tendered and reviewed? Was it proposed initially by the consultants? Will the consultants be paid at rates similar to those for sessional appointments? Apparently it is expected that the class will be taught mostly by faculty after

the consultants have developed it; however, the class was proposed and approved without inviting feedback from those departments which would presumably be called upon to contribute to the class in the future.

The consultants' formal (Bachelor level) qualifications are, I suppose, adequate for teaching positions. Of more concern to me are their biases in regard to waste management issues and public participation in Sustainable Development. The consultants' firms were involved in the development and promotion of the (hopefully) ill-fated incinerator option for Metro waste management; one of the consultants has argued vigorously that the public could not be educated sufficiently to make a source-separation/composting option work. A major criticism of the Metropolitan Authority's position, voiced by independent waste management consultants, was that the Authority had not conducted a waste audit for the metropolitan area!

Finally, as a resident of the Biology building in the LSC complex, I would be much happier if Environmental Audits (of which Waste Audits would

be a component) rather than Waste Audits alone were being proposed. An "Enviro-friendly campus" surely refers to our immediate social and physical environment, as well as to the environment "out there". Poor environmental quality in the Biology building has been the subject of repeated, and largely ignored petitions for the last 15 years. Conducting Environmental Audits would be a good way to get the prospective clientele for Sustainable Waste Management on side! Components that could well be included in an Environmental Audit of an academic institution are discussed by Christopher Frid, p. 214 ff in vol. 25 of the *Journal of Biological Education* (1991).

The concept of introducing a class in Waste Management is a good one wherever it came from. It is a pity it wasn't shared and developed with the community as a whole from the beginning. Frid's first Guiding Principle for environmental auditing is "Open Communication".

David G. Patriquin

(Professor of Biology)

The *Dalhousie Gazette* is Canada's oldest college newspaper. Published weekly through the Dalhousie Student Union, which also comprises its membership. The *Gazette* has a circulation of 10,000. As a founding member of Canadian University Press, the *Gazette* adheres to the CUP Statement of Principles and reserves the right to refuse any material submitted of a racist, sexist, homophobic or libelous nature. Deadline for commentary, letters to the editor, and announcements is noon on Friday before publication (Thursday of each week). Submissions may be left at the sub Enquiry Desk c/o the *Gazette*. Commentary should not exceed 300 words. No unsigned material will be accepted, but anonymity may be granted upon request. Advertising copy deadline is noon Monday before publication. The *Gazette* offices are located on the third floor of the SUB. Come up and have a coffee and tell us what's going on. The views expressed in the *Gazette* are not necessarily those of the Students' Union, the editors or collective staff.