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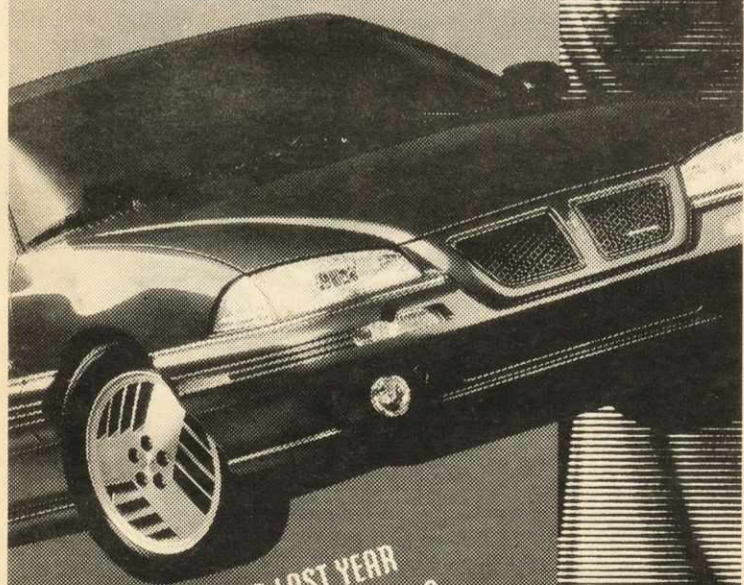
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# opinions

## REAL women not victims

"Excuse me, I didn't quite grasp your reasoning in that..." This seemed the basic sentiment remaining after a presentation delivered by Gwen Landlot, guest speaker at the Weldon Law Building on Thursday morning, September 23.

Gwen Landlot is the vice-president of an organization which has titled itself REAL Women of Canada. Landlot explained firstly that it is simply meant to be a cute, quirky name, and not meant to exclude (although the letters each have a significance of their own).

In any case, Landlot introduced herself as a graduate of the University of British Columbia Law School. She was called to the BC Barr, has been a prosecutor, a specialist in immigration and native rights, and involved in private practice, as well as co-founding REAL Women of Canada.

So, what is the purpose of her organization? The law student who introduced her described it as "an alternative perspective on women's issues." This organization feels feminism should not speak for all women. Landlot says they believe in equality, but they do not take the same stand all feminists do on women's issues. Although there does not exist a singular, dictatorial voice that speaks the synchronized opinion of all feminists. Landlot firmly believes that voice does exist. In order to extricate themselves from the "oppressive voices of feminism," REAL Women created their own group with their own platform. So far this reasoning makes sense, right?

Next, Landlot introduces the basic pillars of REAL women ideology, traditional but creditable. They believe

in the intrinsic value of the traditional family, in Landlot's words, "Mom, Dad and the kids." They feel this is the best way to ensure a strong, well-balanced child. She claims they believe in female equality. In order to promote this, her organization filters their efforts towards "integrating a woman's role in the family with her role in the workforce."

How do they feel on different women's issues? Despite commendable efforts on the part of Dal law students, it is hard to get an answer to this question because Landlot stated rather what her organization was not. REAL Women's individual ideology was primarily left open to speculation. She did add at two different points that they were "against the murder of innocent children" (ie not pro-choice) and against government-run daycare. She then began an all-out critique on the invalidities of feminist theory.

This is when the grasp on her reasoning slowly begins to slip away. Her arguments are based on her interpretations of the "three pillars of feminist ideology: 1. a shared common experience 2. the belief that women have been historically oppressed 3. the idea that women are victimized."

First of all, Landlot states, "There is no such thing as commonality of experience. My experience is different than yours, and my daughter's experiences are different than mine," true, but she seems to have interpreted the idea of common female experience in an extremely literal sense. As one Dal law student suggests, "...you say that no two individuals have the exact same experience. Well, I hardly think that feminists believe any two women have the

exact same experience. There is a whole women's spectrum of thought and feeling; sometimes these come together, and sometimes parts of them don't — so, this creates a common experience that is different from men." Still, Landlot would not be persuaded.

Next, Landlot does not believe that women were historically oppressed. As she puts it, "History is not so simplistic as a simple issue of oppression of women by men...that's just not true." One law student decided to counter this by referring to her reference as being one of four women in a class of 110 law students, (and this was the 1950s). Landlot responded, "That was because females did not take advantage of the opportunities provided. They chose to believe in the stereotypes of the time." She does not see this as oppression.

Finally, there was her belief regarding victimization. She does not believe women are victimized, because every experience is individual and unique. Actually, she does not believe that systemic discrimination exists in any case. Not towards people of color, aboriginal, immigrant, lower income, different sexual preference, minority religions. "You can't just lump them all together. Some women are victims. Some people of color are victims. Some Jewish people are victims. But not all."

Her critique ends with an interesting revelation about the eventual takeover of the judicial system by women in a tone that seems to contradict her former assertions, which leaves the audience to contend with that first question, "Excuse me, I didn't quite grasp your reasoning in that".

Meg Murphy

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