

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's policy not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

OPINIONS

# Forum nothing more than Playboy PR coup

The recent campus appearance of *Playboy* executive Cindy Rakowitz was a public relations coup for that business empire which was facilitated by none other than the Dalhousie Arts Society, a body that purportedly represents students on campus.

The Arts Society (DAS) would have us believe that they were acting in an 'impartial role' by inviting the *Playboy* rep to deliver a pep talk to corporate wannabes. That begs the question of why an 'impartial' mediator is required in the first place. After all, pep talks by female executives don't usually generate much controversy.

A closer examination of the pretext of this public discussion exposes deeper contradictions. Cindy Rakowitz generates controversy because her real message isn't about career advancement at all. Rather it's about peddling an ideology.

Cindy Rakowitz the female executive is inseparable from the corporation of which she is a paid messenger.

Let's unmask this event for what it really represented. Although the DAS tells us that Cindy Rakowitz is a respected public

speaker on career transitions, the fact is that she has written no books or articles on this subject.

Last semester, the *Playboy* campus reps were intellectually overwhelmed during a public forum on the topic of their campus marketing efforts.

In an effort to compensate for that disaster, the *Playboy* reps approached the DAS to do them a favour it seems. The *Playboy* reps and the DAS have apparently forged a clique on campus. That is convenient because the DAS helped to level the playing field for the *Playboy* reps by bringing in the LA-based PR heavyweight, who had the audacity to level sarcasm at tuition-paying Dalhousie students.

The DSU and DAS elected officials seem to have lost sight of the fact that these campus organizations are not at the disposal of those who seek to exploit them as a political vehicle.

Elected student representatives would be well advised that *Playboy* is not a neutral topic and that persons who are opposed to the ongoing efforts of this conglomerate to establish a beachhead at Dal are not

reactionaries.

Moreover, the organizers of this event didn't take into account the diversity of the student body on campus. Otherwise, the event would have been held at a wheelchair-accessible location.

No one is suggesting that *Playboy* be censored or that freedom of expression be restricted. *Playboy* marketers have wide latitude in which to promote and

revel in this product. Just don't shove its racism, sexism and heterosexism in the face of tuition-paying students.

Meanwhile, officials at the DAS and DSU should invite a speaker to Dalhousie to respond to the representations put forward by Ms. Rakowitz.

Finally, it is regrettable that Dalhousie has been portrayed as an oddity in the media because its

students do not mimic the responses of their counterparts at other Canadian universities.

As a Dalhousie student, I see no reason to apologize for the fact that we have independent thinkers who can muster the energy to combat the likes of Hugh Hefner. These debates are a source of institutional vitality, not weakness as some would have it.

MARY MACDONALD

# Censoring Playboy would be undemocratic

You would think that university students, being intellectuals, would be open-minded and much more willing to accept other points of view. This is why I find the *Playboy* controversy so confusing.

Why would the Dalhousie Women's Centre, and other groups, be so vehemently against something that employs women in its top executive levels, and allows women to physically express themselves.

I would have thought that the women's centre would take such a public stance on a subject that is of some importance to women, such as unequal pay in the workforce; job opportunities; sexual harassment; or even sexual assault. One would have thought that these issues would warrant public exposure, rather than devoting time to such frivolous issues, as *Playboy* on campus.

It seems as though the controversy stems from some people believing that *Playboy*

presents women in an unfavourable light — as sex objects or subservient to men. These people have a right to their beliefs. They do not, on the other hand, have the right to impose their beliefs on the rest of society.

Those who find the magazine offensive should not read it or attend its functions. What they should not do is try to ban the magazine from campus or censor it in any way. This controversy has made *Playboy* much more popular and well known than it ever was before. By continuing on this course of action, opposing groups are giving *Playboy* more and more free publicity to attract new readers. These opposing groups should realize that with controversy comes popularity and interest from people who never would have given the magazine a second glance.

We live in a democracy where it is not necessary to agree with our peers. But we should respect the freedom our peers have to exercise their legal rights. There is nothing

illegal about *Playboy*, and to censor or forbid its becoming a society because of one group's views is undemocratic.

Where would it stop? Would it mean that if a group of Dalhousie students are in the Liberal society and publicly criticize the Conservative society, that they should automatically be disallowed? Or if the Dalhousie Christian Coalition society does not approve of the Jewish of Hindu society, that they should be prohibited? Where is the line to be drawn at what is acceptable, and what is not?

If we are not careful, we could lose our rights to be able to choose whatever it is that we wish to participate in. We are all different and have different interests. One group dictating its will to another, over something that is legal and does not discriminate or hurt anyone, is sabotaging free will and freedom of expression and thought.

CATRIONA MACFARLANE

# Miramichi has lovely salmon keychains

Was there a reason for Shelley Robinson's mean-spirited editorial about Texas in your Mar. 4 edition, or were you just really hard up for copy? I find it rather difficult to believe that she could really have formed any useful opinions about life in that state simply by spending time in the airport gift shop looking at cheesy souvenirs and evaluating the drinking habits of travellers who may be Texans or may just be passing through.

Here's a clue, Ms Robinson: enter any gift shop in my home town of Miramichi, New Brunswick, and you will be deluged with salmon artifacts. Never mind that the salmon population in my river is in as much trouble as anywhere else. We will be happy to sell you salmon-adorned key chains, shot glasses, and bumper stickers. We also have a regional accent. So, in fact, do most Canadians, we just can't hear it. Mocking Texans' "thick draws" and habit of calling people "ma'am" (instead of "dear" as many Maritimers do — and as far as I can tell do not mean it either) is pointless, not to mention narrow-minded and rude.

And if Ms Robinson thinks that Texas is the only place where total strangers try to influence your spiritual life, all I can say is she has indeed led a sheltered existence — and certainly does not walk the same length of street I did to get to work all summer (I estimate that I was evangelized once a week by people without the slightest vestige of a Texas accent.) Many Canadians are also interested in whether Ms Robinson has a church, and some

of them would be pretty darned pushy about offering her one.

I do not have Ms Robinson's extensive experience with the state of Texas — I have never spent six and a half hours developing my view of Texas culture via the Houston airport. (And I suspect that there might, maybe, be more to the state than meets the eye — or at least meets the eye from the airport.) However, if anyone told me that they had learned everything they needed to know about New Brunswick by wandering around the Saint John airport or some cheesy souvenir shop in Miramichi, I would be outraged. I see no reason why Texans reading her pointless rampage would not be equally annoyed. I certainly am, if for no other reason than the quite ridiculous one that I still want to believe that Canadians are polite, nice people. Ms Robinson has clearly proved that not only are Canadians not all polite or nice, some of us are deeply suspicious when other people try to be.

Truly, Ms Robinson is proof that travel does not necessarily broaden the mind. Perhaps she should make her next excursion to some place she will find a little easier to cope with — the Bayers Road Shopping Centre comes to mind. Perhaps she could find some nice little gift shop and write another editorial about how Nova Scotians think about nothing except lobsters and the Bluenose.

Or, she could always come up to Miramichi and stock up on salmon keychains.

SHELLEY MCKIBBON

