

# S.P.E.R.M. speaks out, draws critical comment

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- in cases of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, men have no rights, only responsibilities. If a woman has an abortion, he has no say. If she keeps the child, he must pay support. S.P.E.R.M. acknowledges the primacy of the women's rights; however, it feels the present system could be more just.

- S.P.E.R.M. supports joint custody.

#### Social responsibilities

- S.P.E.R.M. does not necessarily support a military draft but feels both sexes should bear the burden of serving in combat.

#### Equal dignity and concern

- S.P.E.R.M. feels the rhetoric of extreme feminists poisons the atmosphere between the sexes. One example is "all men use the threat of rape to control women."

The pamphlet acknowledges the many areas where women have suffered from mistreatment and prejudice, but it says that discrimination against men is no less real.

They hope to "promote awareness and discussion of the foregoing issues" and to make both sides of the issue heard.

"If they are seriously attempting to address the issues then good-peed to them," said Dr. E. Salomon, who teaches a sex roles course through the sociology department. "However, if they are merely doing this as a joke, they would be better off to crack open a book and learn something about the issues. Otherwise they're wasting people's time."

Dr. Frank Trovato, also of the sociology department, said he agreed with the spirit of the document. On the particulars, he said, "there is a need for a responsible debate on the methodologies in those areas that may be potentially explosive."

The most explosive question S.P.E.R.M. raises involve its statements on sex roles, human sexuality and pornography.

Salamon said the majority of sexual behavior is learned and that using a biological or genetic basis, gives the wide variation of sex drives between individuals, even as an average basis, is wrong. She also felt women have been socialized not to show the sexual side of their being.

"Society places pressures on men to live up to a masculine image," agreed Salomon. "Men should not be repressed by rigid sex roles, which is what a biological explana-

tion implies."

She also said that as a feminist, she had no problem with simple nudity, but argued that violent pornography is destructive because it compartmented women into objects of sexual gratification.

Salamon took exception with Christensen's definition of pornography, saying there are too many variations of porn to allow it to be covered by one definition.

She dismissed the claim that porn is no more degrading to women than romance novels are to men.

Two other women, Eileen Crookes and Ellen Long, both actively involved in women's issues on campus, said even romance novels depict the man playing a dominant role and the women in a submissive one. They added that men in those novels are rarely victims of sexual violence by women.

Salomon said that in her experience, working with child abusers and their victims, kiddie porn was a common factor linking offenders.

She added, "As a practicing criminologist, I'm more concerned with pornography's effects on people rather than semantic arguments about its definition."

The application of divorce laws is another controversial area, affecting support, property division and child custody and support.

Several organizations have been started in the United States to press for more equitable treatment of men in divorces.

Pedro Schuld, a board member of the Alberta Human Rights and Civil Liberties Association, said several of his male friends have suffered terribly both financially and emotionally in their divorces.

Mac Walker, president of AHRCLA and a practicing criminal attorney, adds that in a putative suit to determine paternity, a man can be compelled to give evidence against himself and is required to pay court costs of approximately \$600.

However, Prof. Christine Davies of the faculty of law said messy divorces are a two-way street, primarily because the corollative of love is hate and it is very hard to pay someone you hate. She added that some people prefer jail to meeting the court's terms.

Davies said there has been periods in history of bias towards either men or women but the courts are reacting to changes in lifestyle and society. She mentioned the Alberta

Appeals Court decision regarding *Roebuck vs. Roebuck* which stated: "There is no rule of common sense where a woman should get custody."

Davies said the best interests of the child is the guiding rule. Hours of work, plans for upbringing, the parent's lifestyle and who they are living with are the rules for determining custody.

Money plays a very small role, primarily because economic differences can be eliminated through child support.

Davies said those principles mean more men will be taking custody of their children because more women are joining the workforce and changing their lifestyles in other ways.

On the issue of spousal support, Davies said it is slowly falling out of fashion because of greater economic equality and opportunity between the sexes. Davies claimed it originally came about to protect spouses who were economically disadvantaged by the marriage.

"In most of those cases," she adds, "it has been women."

On the issues of economic equality, Crookes and Long took exception to S.P.E.R.M.'s stand on maternity leave and pensions for women.

"If S.P.E.R.M. is going to attack maternity leave, they should also attack medical or dental care," said Crookes and Long. They also support the concept of paternity leave.

On pensions, Crookes and Long said that Canada Pension Plan benefits are calculated on earnings gained between the ages of 18 and 65. They claim this disadvantages women because of the wage gap with men.

Nobody saw a problem with women joining men in combat duties, although some expressed reservations about the concept of a draft.

Crookes and Long also dispute S.P.E.R.M.'s claim about "certain feminists" discouraging women from seeking traditional jobs or marriages. They cite feminist efforts to improve daycare and institute home-makers pensions as examples of support for traditional roles.

On the issues raised in the equal dignity and concern category, Salomon felt S.P.E.R.M. was taking out-of-date examples of statements by a very small minority of radical feminists.

Salomon also said, in her opinion, a feminist should be defined as

"one who wants equal opportunity for individuals to fulfill their human potentiality, unfettered by circumscribed parameters that truncate or delineate the conduct of a man or a woman."

Christensen agrees with the above definition and some comments and points made in criticism of S.P.E.R.M.'s pamphlet.

He said he wrote the pamphlet to help foment debate on its contents.

"I am very much in favor of equal rights and dignity for everyone," said Christensen. "It is very easy in debating details to lose sight of general principles, and that is the main point to be stressed."

Christensen felt that men's rights groups should complement feminist groups.

He also said, "I wouldn't say anything if couldn't back it up."

Due to the limitations imposed by only having two pages on which to put forth his views, Christensen felt he may have over-relied on context to put his views across.

He felt that full-scale position papers on each of the issues raised should be researched and written by S.P.E.R.M. or others especially in view of the complexities involved.

He raised some issues not dealt with in the pamphlet, such as differing life insurance rates and statutory rape laws, where older men but not older women are charged for having sex with willing minors.

He also had some positive criticism for the members of S.P.E.R.M.

"When I first met them, they had a lot more enthusiasm than background knowledge" said Christen-

sen, adding the name was "kind of dumb."

"They could also use some more diversity in their somewhat Libertarian political base," he said.

Salamon said when she mentioned the name to her sex roles class, the initial reaction was titters.

That will pose problems for their organization because it is difficult to foster serious debate when mere mention their name provokes laughter.

"That's part of our strength though," claims their social VP Richard Thomas. "We have the ability to laugh at ourselves but more importantly, you'll remember us."

Thomas also said they are "a very young club with a lot to learn" and felt the production and distribution of their pamphlet and questionnaire was "a major achievement."

"We're not a joke group and were never intended to be a joke group," said Thomas.

If S.P.E.R.M. is serious about generating discussion and hopefully solutions to the issues they raise, they will best serve themselves and the university by working hard to bring in speakers and prepare position papers on these issues.

As S.P.E.R.M. concludes in its pamphlet: "The idea of truly equal rights will take great dedication to achieve."

#### Note:

In the next Gateway, two prominent U.S. men's rights groups, the Coalition of Free Men and Men's Rights Inc. will be profiled.

## Women Artists Week

*Feminism from a positive angle is the goal of "Women in the Arts" week.*

by Ann Grever

The Women's Centre has planned a number of events this week to celebrate the work of women artists and to address their issues.

Three lunch-hour films featuring women artists Margret Laurence, Lynn Johnson and the McGarrigles will lead up to the main event Thursday night, a panel discussion with guest speaker Sandra Thomson, president of "Celebration of Women Artists."

Celebration of Women Artists is an organization formed to promote awareness of women in the arts

and to supply financial backing, both nationally and locally.

The purpose of the week-long low budget event is, according to organizer Sue Melnychuk, to present feminism from a positive angle, although women artists are often "at a serious disadvantage."

Issues to be discussed include balancing roles of wife, mother and artist, national trends and financing.

The first film was shown today. The panel discussion on Thursday night (7:30 Education North Room 2-115) will also feature a photographic exhibit in the lobby and a question and answer period. For more information call the Women's Center.

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