

The uncool "F" word

ANTIGONISH, NS (CUP) — Right now being a feminist, much like listening to Ace of Base, is not cool.

I was introduced to the ropes of being cool in grade seven. I quickly learned that a necessary part of being cool is coming across like you have your shit together, especially when you don't, and acting different without claiming to be anything at all.

On my grade seven yardstick of coolness, feminism does not rank too high.

You see, feminism doesn't have its shit together — far from it. It is diverse and different;

certain feminist perspectives contradict others and most times they are entirely incompatible.

This incongruity requires a feminist to declare where they stand within the chaotic realm of feminism.

This is no easy task. I know enough about feminism now to declare that I really don't know much at all.

It amuses me, whereas before it hurt my feelings, to watch and hear people bitch about feminism and feminists as though we are one huge, stupid, unionized claw, ready and able to rip their large intestines out of their

body centimeter by centimeter.

The reason I find this funny is that I am a feminist and am not part of any union. Actually, there is no one "ultimate" union within feminism to be a part of.

Feminists are often grouped off into different categories, such as Second Wave, Third Wave, Socialist, Marxist, Liberal, Environmental, Artist, Lesbian, Maternal, and so on.

These subgroups work within their own particular perspective to make social and political changes towards the betterment of women's lives.

Therefore my point: Femi-

nism as a whole is hard to understand. There is no whole, no common sisterhood. This in turn means that there are no neatly defined boundaries or one-size-fits-all statements.

It is so simple to make fun of feminism. What isn't so simple is figuring out why.

I have been asked why I don't call myself a humanist if I am unclear of which part of feminism I believe in. After all, I am striving for human rights and freedoms.

My answer — I will proudly wear a pin emblazoned with flashing neon pink letters that spell out HUMANIST when women in our world are all seen and treated as humans.

What I mean is, I don't believe it is human for a middle-class, nine-year old girl to starve herself and waste her childhood so she can look like her idol who is a model.

By now we all know that

even Cindy Crawford doesn't look like Cindy Crawford.

I don't see where freedom exists in poverty. What is human about mothers starving, struggling to feed their kids?

And what human rights do third world women have when they are North America's medical test projects, when they want water and we want Internet banking?

Yes, it's not cool to fixate on the negative, but I already came to the conclusion — using my grade seven mentality — that being a feminist is not cool anyway.

But I believe we need feminism to change things such as sweatshops, rape, eating disorders, medication-therapy, wife beating, pollution and poverty.

Feminism recognizes these things as social problems that can be resolved. And that it is very cool.

Laurie Dawson

National Coming Out Day

Coming out of the closet for a gay, lesbian or bisexual person is a lifelong endeavour. It is an ongoing experience, and it ranges from liberating to traumatic to tiresome.

In my life, coming out happens every time I walk into a new group of people and decide to disclose my sexual orientation. It's not about flaunting my sexuality (contrary to popular belief). It is about how I choose to field questions about my "boy-friend" or lack thereof. Initially, coming out is often both traumatic and liberating. But constantly having to come out just boils down to being tiresome and/or amusing. The reactions that I have received have varied. I have been threatened on occasion, but I wouldn't consider that the norm. Mostly people just look scared or embarrassed, or it doesn't phase them at all.

National Coming Out Day is October 11th. It's a symbolic day, a reflection of the daily process that queer people go through. And it's a nice symbol — we get to celebrate our own coming out and the coming out of queer people past, present, and future. October 11th is the celebration of our past accomplishments, and a reminder of the struggle we still have ahead.

For me, it's also a reminder of NCOD last year, when we waited to find out if Matthew Shepard, a gay university student in Wyoming, would live or die. Our celebration of coming out left us feeling emotionally mixed, even as we reminded the Dal campus of our presence, we were horrified by the implications and causes of Matthew's beating. He died the very next day.

Matthew Shepard's death quickly became a paradigm of homophobia and gay-bashing. The media did their best to paint Matthew as a good victim (young, weak and in the closet) and to paint Matthew's murderers as monsters — people that were far from average, an isolated anomaly. It seems strange that the media washes over countless other significant bashings and murders that occurred before Matthew Shepard's death, and are still happening today.

But I need to voice my objections to all of these incidents, and to discourage people from passing them off as isolated. They are in no way isolated from each

other, nor are they removed from other hate-induced crimes based on race, religion, gender, gender orientation or sexual orientation. Crimes of hate are interwoven to form a terrifying fabric of our society.

Homophobia is the cause of self-hatred among queer people, and the high suicide rates and addictions within the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. Hate-motivated people use statistics on these issues to prove that homosexuality is inherently wrong and unhealthy. When we remember Matthew Shepard's death, we often remember "he was gay" as the cause and conclusion of the story; but what we don't always remember is that "his murderers were homophobic" was the true reason for his death.

Coming out is only possible and necessary in a homophobic and heterosexist society. If it was not expected and assumed that everyone was straight, there would be no need for queer people

to assert that they weren't. And if we, as queer people, hadn't internalized a whole lot of homophobia, we wouldn't have to come out to ourselves first.

Coming out, for me, is still both liberating and frustrating. It is great to find the strength to be true to myself and to express my full identity. But it's hard to have to gage people's reactions, to filter my words and actions, and to constantly justify my reasons for coming out instead of keeping quiet. Talking about whom I spent my weekend with can become radical queer activism.

I'm proud of who I am, and I'm proud to come out over and over again. I do it as an act of love and truth, and as rebellion against hatred. But I do hope that it won't always be necessary — that people will be given the freedom to be who they are, instead of it being assumed that they fit into society's only mold.

Kate Greenaway

NOTICE TO GAZETTE CONTRIBUTORS & STAFF:

The SUB will be closed Monday Oct 11
The regular monday meeting will be held Tuesday Oct 12 instead.
So don't come on monday.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



Shine on harvest moon: Unique weddings and full moons in Burlington, Ontario.