

Oppression

Society's destructive definition of women symbolized in parading them in pageants

By JUDY DARCY

"My intention is in no way to degrade my sisters. Rather, I will attempt to raise issues of sexual exploitation of women, point out that women participate in beauty contests because this society provides us with so few arenas in which we can appear, and to expose the nature of an educational system that perpetuates the objectification and dehumanization of women. To oppose you as an individual is to be anti-woman, which is exactly what I am not."

It was in this way that Janiel Jolley, protest candidate from Simon Fraser University addressed the candidates in the Miss Canadian University Pageant (in Waterloo two weeks ago) in a letter preceding the event. It was in this spirit, not of competition, but of solidarity and understanding, that we, as members of Women's Liberation, entered and challenged that beauty contest.

Janiel spoke during the week at campuses across Ontario and through the media, of this society's destructive and de-humanizing definition of women, ultimately symbolized in the parading of young women in pageants.

As a participant in the week's activities, it was my intention to experience a beauty contest as those who participate do, to speak with other women in the pageant about this society's definition of women, and to join Janiel in protest at the Friday pageant, hopefully supported by other candidates in the contest.

Although the rhetoric of the pageant denied that it was indeed a beauty contest, by the week's end their descriptions of the "chance to meet other girls", the "exchange of ideas and experiences", "the national flavour" of the pageant (one French-speaking woman from Sherbrooke) and the "judging on the basis of personality and intelligence" rang hollow.

The pressures felt by the contestants, as women well-socialized by this society and as rivals for a coveted crown, meant that they changed clothes, hair and make-up five times a day. My lack of clothes (3 dresses plus 1 sari) did not go unnoticed or the other women as by myself.

Although fully aware of the anti-human nature of such displays and convinced of the need for a movement to liberate all women and men from such inhuman structures, I experienced those pressures acutely as do all women socialized under capitalism. The effects are fully realized when two weeks later I can still not look at myself without thinking that in fact I am only attractive with



Excalibur -- Pat Bourque

make-up and a carefully-set hairdo. The realization of man's and woman's image of woman as beautiful only if plastic, and ugly if natural, is more frightening and enraging than ever before.

Because women learn to define themselves so completely through appearances and ultimately through men, competitiveness and envy most often characterize relationships between females. All the talk of the lasting friendships developed during the course of the week could not mask the reality that one girl would win the crown over all the others. The contestants complimented each other with a sincerity and enthusiasm impossible by definition of their relationships to one another in the competition. Recognizing 'beauty' or 'personality' in another woman can only be threatening if she stands between you and a crown or a man.

The girls who hosted us in residence treated us as though we were the 'queens' the pageant made us out to be. Constant offers to make tea or coffee or to

run errands for us and continual compliments and flattery were given with a mixture of awe and envy. Protest of this special treatment in an attempt to talk about the falseness of status according to 'beauty', was interpreted by the women in residence as humility or modesty on my part.

One of the many 'treats' in store for the queens that week was a concert by Stevie Wonder and Martha and the Vandellas. The connections between beauty contests and an economic system based on profit and exploitation become clearer and clearer when blackness and blindness are sources of humour and when black women are being regarded only as sexual objects — doubly exploited.

At a party given for the 'queens and escorts' by the pageant organizers, two women, not in the pageant, sat on the floor, unnoticed surrounded by the smiling contestants, sipping drinks and small-talking. The conversation between the two revealed the overwhelming inferiority and humility they experienced as women in a room full of other women ranked more beautiful and popular than themselves. The men in the room — the escorts — were their friends and former dates, but they were ignored when 'more beautiful' and 'more charming' women were in sight.

Interested men at Waterloo Lutheran apparently tried for the chance to be one of the 35 men chosen as escorts to the queens for a week. Their real respect for us or real interest in us as human beings was evident when we discovered that they in fact placed bets on us as if we were race horses or sides of beef.

(Coincidentally, the tickets for the pageant had a picture and description of a juicy beef-burger on the front, and pageant information on the reverse side).

Because women have been denied identity in this society, we are forced to define ourselves through our biological functions (reproduction and sexuality).

Beauty contests help to strengthen this view of women by grading us on how close we come to the stereotype of the plastic image of a cosmetic advertisement, rather than realize our potential in conscious creative action. Woman, the beautiful object — soft, submissive — a work of art to gaze upon, not to know, respect or understand.

Such a contest provides the perfect arena for the voice of women's liberation. The elimination of such pageants will mark an end to one of the most blatant examples of women's oppression.

"Women's liberation is human liberation."

Latest York figures disturbing

Canadian grad students only slightly on top

By GLEN WILLIAMS

Canadian students are only slightly in the majority in five important York graduate programmes, according to figures released this week by Michael Collie, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Although a shocking set of statistics to those concerned with building a distinctively Canadian university, they should come as no surprise.

It is sadly apparent that in the selection of graduate students, as in the selection of teaching staff, nationality is not an important criterion.

We have been assured on countless occasions by our liberal academics that the problem of staffing Canadian universities with Canadians would be naturally solved within the next 10 years by the expansion of our graduate programmes.

Who do they think they are kidding? Can they seriously expect anyone to swallow their medicine when they so obviously demonstrate that they do not see their primary responsibility as training Canadian scholars?

We are all aware of the basic level research which must be immediately undertaken in almost every discipline if we are to come to terms with the Canadian reality: our social relations, our politics, our economics,

our history and our position as a U.S. colony.

Until we do this research and begin to discuss it in the classrooms we are involved in committing a gigantic fraud upon the Canadian people.

They, poor souls, think they are supporting a Canadian university.

If we accept Canadian studies as being our most urgent research

priority — at least until some acceptable academic balance has been established — does it not follow that we should be recruiting those graduate students most likely to do this research — Canadians?

Or do we believe that foreign students and 'New Canadians' are better equipped to do this sort of work?

CITIZENSHIP OF STUDENTS IN FIVE GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Department	English	Philosophy	Political Sci.	Sociology	Psychology
Canadians	44 (55%)	13 (52%)	19 (50%)	25 (53.2%)	75 (61.5%)
Landed Immigrants	18 (22.5%)	8 (32%)	15 (39.5%)	13 (27.6%)	25 (21.5%)
Foreign	18 (22.5%)	4 (16%)	4 (10.5%)	9 (19.2%)	22 (18%)
Total	80 (100%)	25 (100%)	38 (100%)	47 (100%)	122 (100%)

CITIZENSHIP OF PH.D. STUDENTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Department	Political Sci.	Sociology	Psychology
Canadians	11 (47.9%)	1 (8%)	48 (58.6%)
Others	12 (52.1%)	12 (92%)	34 (42.4%)
Total	23	13	82

It is true that landed immigrants should not be lumped in the same category as students who intend to return to their countries after having completed their studies.

One would hope that the commitment of these 'New Canadians' was sincere — that they were not using their landed immigrant status as a way of gaining graduate scholarships.

No one is suggesting that we throw out anyone who is presently in the York graduate program, but from this point we must require that Canadian students must be given preference over foreign applications.

The results of York's present policies are clear and they are an insult.

These indefensible bare majorities for Canadians indicate that to the selection committees of the departments concerned, students who have struggled through 17 years of Canadian education are not 'good' enough to stand against foreign competition.

I guess that's why we have so many U.S. professors at York — they're here to raise our standards — just like the Peace Corps.

In the meantime, your chances are about 50-50 of getting into one of these graduate programs.