

Defending feminism: it is not reverse sexism

Everyday in my work as a woman who helps and advocates for other women, I face the institutional systems which are in place that continue to oppress women and discriminate against them. This is a difficult challenge because these are the systems (medical, legal, political, educational, etc.) that are supposed to be in place to help everyone; yet they do not. However, the most disheartening challenge that I have to face is that of other women who do not feel that my battle is a worthy one, that is, the battle for society to change and "get it" when it comes to issues that face women.

Pam Wentzell's letter in the Oct. 22 issue of the Gazette is part of that disheartenment. The fact that a woman can even have a letter published is due to the work of the "feminists" she puts shame on and calls sexist. The fact that she is a student is because of what feminists did before her time. The fact that women are "persons" under Canadian law is a direct result of feminism. Care to talk about the vote?

Of course, Ms. Wentzell is commenting on the "crap" article that appeared in *the Picaro* a while back. Ms. Wentzell says accusations of racism are "ridiculous" because no mention of ethnicity took place. The "Southern 'coon hunt" has a direct implication for those of us who know a little bit about history, and I'm not talking ancient history. So I must disagree on the "no racism" implication.

Sexism is not "far-fetched" as she says. "The term 'sexist' characterizes cultural and economic structures which create and enforce the elaborate and rigid patterns of sex-marking and sex-announcing which divide the species, along the lines of sex, into dominators and subordinates. Individual acts and practices are sexist which reinforce and support those structures, either as culture or as shapes taken on by the enculturated animals". This is a definition given by a well-known feminists author, Marilyn Frye,

Ph.D. Using Frye's definition, Stephen Brown's article was extremely sexist. "Resistance to sexism is that which undermines those structures by social and political action and by projects of reconstruction and revision of ourselves". These are also the words of Marilyn Frye. Women are resisting, Ms. Wentzell, have resisted in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

I do not feel that women have "sexist attitudes" towards men, as Ms. Wentzell states in her letter. Her claim of reverse discrimination does not hold water with myself, nor can I think of any other politically engaged group that may hold that opinion. By women standing up for their rights, it does not mean we want to take the rights of men away, which would be what "reverse discrimination" was about. Most feminists that I know would never dream of taking anything away from a group of people, only allowing everyone to have the same rights and privileges. So, how is that "reverse discrimination" and how does that implicate sexist attitudes of women towards men?

The fact that all the copies of the student paper were gone from the SUB could indicate that people picked up the paper once word spread of the "crappy" article being in it, not that the paper was removed. I take the insinuation that the paper was removed as a personal one, because I was one of the "maybe fifteen" people who complained about the article. In a previous issue of the Gazette, I have already stated that the Dalhousie Women's Centre *did not* remove the papers from the SUB, and I do so here again now. I have asked around to see if anyone else removed the papers, to which the response was "no". If Ms. Wentzell wants to make accusations about the paper being removed, I hope she has something to substantiate her remarks. Ms. Wentzell says "removing the paper was unjustified" but does she have anything to justify saying that the

papers were removed? Or is that just speculation?

A note on the "fifteen people" number. People are sadly mistaken if they think only 15 people were offended by this article, because I know of a lot more than that. And the number of women's organizations in this city that were offended and saddened by it is also very high. Just call a few local agencies that deal with women and ask them if they agree with the article. I think their response may enlighten Ms. Wentzell, Stephen Brown, Tim Boudreau and Mark Sitter.

With regards to the "shameful response" that Ms. Wentzell took from the Gazette and posted on her door below the "crap" article, I can only assume she refers to "Women defending themselves, again", which appeared a couple of weeks ago, since she does not indicate exactly what response she is talking about. Again, when women speak up and defend themselves, others get nervous. Why this is so, I do not know. Is it that by coming together, women realize the realities of their lives as not an isolated incident, but part of a systemic problem, and thus have collective strength and energy that helps recharge us in our fight for formal and substantive rights? What was so shameful about that article? The truth to it? That's what I find shameful; the fact that what was

presented in that piece has been documented over and over, yet people still don't get what fighting for women is all about. The article was a response to the backlash that is in existence worldwide, and Ms. Wentzell's opposition to the article is also part of that backlash.

December 6 — where to begin to explain the meaning of that day, as if I should have to do that. Marc Lepine separated the men to

women killed by men every year is astounding (I have a list of femicides in my office for those of you interested — it is just for this province, but I can assure you it is very upsetting).

Ms. Wentzell asks must we dwell on Dec. 6. I think as long as men kill women, simply because they can, we have to dwell on Dec. 6. I think as long as women are beaten in their homes, we have to dwell on Dec. 6. I think as long as women are re-victimized when they report that rape, we have to dwell on Dec. 6. I think that as long as Stephen Brown continues to brag about his conquests on Dec. 6, we have to dwell on it. And I think that as long as attitudes towards women, attitudes towards women helping women and attitudes towards those that stand up and tell it like it is to be a woman in a patriarchal society exist, we must dwell on Dec. 6.

For me as a feminist to be pro-woman does not mean I have to be anti-man. To afford women the same rights and privileges as men, does not make me, as a feminist, sexist. And I'm not "afraid" of standing up for what I believe to be right. And standing up for the injustices done to women is something I believe to be right, unheard and ignored by most of society. Until the voices of women are not quieted and people turn to hear them, I will continue to be unafraid of speaking out against the patriarchy, the Stephen Browns and the Pam Wentzells.

I'm not afraid to stand up, but it does get me down when I have to justify being a feminist, wanting the world to be a better place for us all to live in, to other women. But Ms. Wentzell, if you ever need help through any of the institutional systems which continue to victimize, traumatize and trivialize women, please come and see me. Because being the good feminist that I am, I would help you.

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CUP GRAPHIC James Mejia, The Link

one side of the classroom, women to the other. The men were allowed to leave unharmed. The women were killed because they were women. Because Marc Lepine felt they were "taking jobs away from men". Ms. Wentzell writes, "the point is, life goes on". Not for those 14 women in Montreal it doesn't. The fact that the federal government declared Dec. 6 as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women is proof that it is not "just another night". The event has not been "inflated", rather it is used as a way to remind us all that the number of

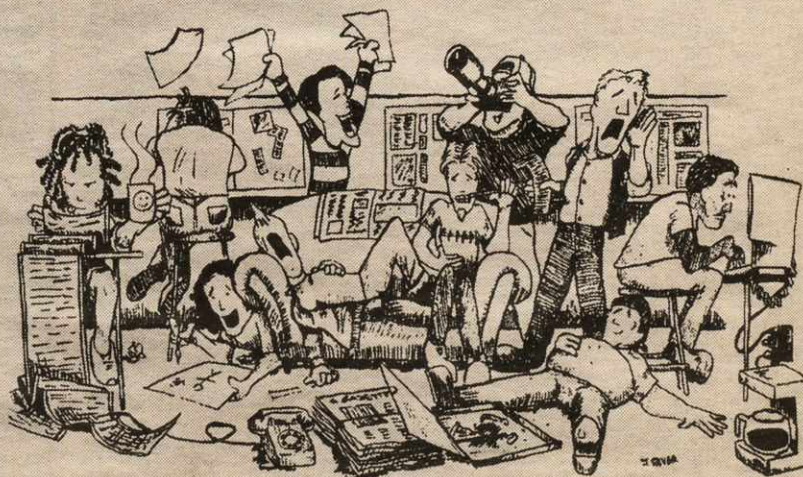
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