

I Feel Like A Woman!

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Tanya's Travels Blog

Dec 12, 2010

The community buzzed with excitement when word spread about Laurier Brantford's F-Word Forum held on Thursday, November 18th, at the University's new Research and Academic Centre. The members panel brought their own perspectives on Feminism, touching on topics as controversial as religion. The panel included Laurier affiliated residents from surrounding areas: Alicia Sayers, Brantford campus student, Bryn Ossington, Waterloo Campus student, and President and CEO of WLU student publications, Margaret Toye, professor of Women and Gender studies at WLU Waterloo Campus, and Lyla Miklos broadcaster and publicist. A full house of students and locals listened to stories of the ups and downs of the Feminist movement, and opinions on the current issues that still exist for women today, from the members of the panel.

Leslie Cooper, the Acting Principle and Vice Principal of the Brantford Campus opened the discussion of how her life began and what it has come to. She talked about the restrictions put on women in a variety of areas including: career choice, clothing choice, unfair wage amounts, home life and much more. Cooper explained how women were not allowed to have contraception until they were 21, this would also allow women into bars as an identification, and proof of their age. She told the story as if it was a long time ago, about a forgotten past, but then revealed that these restrictions were put on her as she was growing up, "All I can say is I'm very, very thankful to the women's movement, for changing my life in a positive way." Cooper took part in 'women's liberation,' and takes a practical view on feminism versus an academic view of feminism, but is thankful to those who do take an academic approach to feminism because it has brought her to be the woman she is today.

The panel was asked what they believe feminism is, and whether or not they consider themselves feminists.

Bryn Ossington brings an opposite perspective to feminism, and is a valuable member of the discussion panel because he is a male talking about feminism. On the topic of whether or not he believes he is a feminist, claiming "feminism is a struggle for men and women alike," Ossington considers himself to be a feminist. Trying to reach a variety of men about a number of things he feels are feminist matters, Ossington talks about such issues as body image, relationships, sexual assault, and more. He understood he was a feminist after a year of living with his friends who were taking Women's Studies classes and would debate the issues of feminism with him. Beginning to believe that "feminism transcends gender," Ossington eventually began to study Women and Gender studies at WLU, and find the feminist within himself.

Margaret Toye, did not realize she was completely feminist until she was older, and began to learn and understand that feminism is a personal opinion, thereby learning what feminism meant to her. Toye discussed the stereotypes of feminism, and how she overcame these stereotypes, and learned, when she became a professor what feminism actually means to her. Toye feels that in order for the F-Word to

become more effective, and less frightening to society as a whole, more people need to become comfortable with the word, and understand its meaning in a more personal sense.

Alicia Sayers has a large surrounding family of predominantly women, and has struggled with finding herself in the big word feminism. Sayers described her opinion on feminism as not having figured it out yet.

Lyla Miklos, knows that she has had “a feminist gene in my body, and I’ve had it since birth.” Miklos has always felt that she should “know her place” in her religious community from the time she was a child. Eventually Miklos realized her strong feminist view, and moved away from her where she was brought up, to a place where she felt she could speak her mind; a place she could make a difference.

Toye brings about the important point of the stereotype of a feminist, being a woman with unshaved legs, Birkenstocks, a lesbian, with short hair, and a lot of anger. She says people think that, “All feminists are lesbians, and all lesbians are feminists.” People do not understand that any person can be a feminist, regardless of sexual orientation, sex, or any physical appearance.

To show how people still had disrespect against women, Toye brought up the Montreal Massacre (1989), and how people asked how it was an offence against just women, it is not an offence against humanity?

Ossington, as a man believes that he should not involve himself in the March for Women’s Rights, and considers it an honor to walk on the sidelines, and help with the behind the scenes parts of taking part in the march.

Miklos discusses the importance of religion in the Feminist movement, and how, “as a feminist, as a queer woman there are religious spaces I don’t feel welcome in,” but she also believes that religion is such a personal choice, that it cannot be disputed. Many people still have faith in some way but have different beliefs than she expected. Toye furthers the point by saying that specific experiences of certain people allow a negative reaction to feminism, whereas some religious beliefs do support the movement.

Ossington believes that “What we want as feminists can exist in these religions, but we have to be trying to change it.”

The panel came to an overall consensus that the word feminism has no definite meaning, and that every person can be a feminist to their own degree. Miklos further explained by saying, “I am a feminist because I believe women can do anything.”

The event was extremely important to have, especially for students who are in university, not knowing exactly what they want to do, it brings issues to the table that can be argued, and can spike some interest in the student body. “I didn’t even realize how badly the progress for women has been,” explained Laurier Student Christy Kim, “I think that the forum is extremely important to have because it shows people how not a lot has really changed.”

Miklos finished the conference, by saying that “religion isn’t the problem with the issues of feminism: people are the problem.” Leaving everyone wondering what their own views on feminism are.