

Journalism 101: Is the Writing On the Wall for Feminism?

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With third-wave feminism embracing the needs of a broader spectra of people, is feminism still relevant to women today? Are we a society that is no longer in need of feminists to fight for women's equality?

These are all questions that were addressed at the F-Word Symposium held for the first time at Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford campus, Nov. 18. The symposium took place in the recently built Research Centre West (RCW) building and had a wide array of booths that informed the Laurier students and others in the community about what feminism encompasses. The symposium was an attempt to break the stereotypes that hover around feminism and feminists.

"There are many many different ways and many different things that feminists are. I think myself, whom I do identify as a feminist, that feminism isn't only about women. It's about something much bigger than that, it's about challenging decisions and intolerance at all levels." Rebecca Godderis, contemporary studies and health studies professor at Laurier Brantford and one of the organizers of the F-Word Symposium, explained.

Equality for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, race and gender has been an important aspiration in feminism for the past several decades. Feminists have fought for equality for people that could not and helped lend a hand when it was needed. There has been several waves of feminism that have ranged from focusing on the legal rights of women, like voting for first-wave feminists to third-wave feminism where differences such as race, sexuality and nationality are recognized as being apart of feminism and it is not always about the middle-class white heterosexual woman's lifestyle. The idea of women being diverse and that the needs of women through the action of feminism needing to be broadened was an important aspect in third wave feminism and the attempts at the blind, and sometimes narrowed views of the 1960's and 1970's second-wave feminists who were typically white. The second-wave feminists often times attempted to encompass black women under their own umbrella of needs and rights without addressing issues that may be important to a black feminist woman. The argument was that black women, during this period, had to choose between fighting racism and classicism or fighting sexism because the combination of these issues were not on the minds of most second wave feminists because the issues did not really apply to the majority of them.

"We hope for students and other people part of the campus community to start sort of going 'huh feminism' and thinking about it in different ways" Godderis elaborated on the subject of feminism and it's relation to the campus community.

The F-word had numerous factual booths that took place between 11-3. They had a 'build your own Barbie' station (to better reflect a more realistic version Barbie) which had people attending the fair make Barbie's what they thought it should be. There were many different renditions that ranged from 'diversifying Barbie's body' Barbie and 'I'm not necessarily oppressed' Barbie 'to 'we deserve to be married' Barbie. The fair also had clips from Youtube demonstrating the diversity of feminism and some

of the issues that feminists are fighting against. There was also a discussion panel, moderated by health studies professor, Kate Rossiter. The panel consisted of self identified feminists and those who did not want any labels attached to them (because of the stigma related to feminism or because the uncertainty of what feminism is). One of the many topics discussed was the idea that third-wave feminists address the idea for equality for gay, lesbian and transgendered and recognize that feminism plays an important role in equality for this group but only if their issues are also recognized.

One of the F-Word panelists, Lyla Miklos, a queer activist and feminist was very adamant on stressing the need for equality for the gay and lesbian community. The idea of having male supporters is important but the values of women, are just that, values of women. Men cannot be involved in every aspect of feminism no matter how hard they try.

“Sorry I don’t want your penises around all the time.” Miklos explained.

She told the audience in the RCW building a story of her experience at an all female bath house night in Toronto. It was supposed to be strictly women but somehow a couple of male police officers showed up claiming there were some illegal activities going on. The officers proceeded to stick around for about two hours, killing the whole event. Was this necessary? According to Miklos no it wasn’t. It was male authority exercising their pervertedness to see “what the lesbians were doing in the bathhouse.”

Equality for those who are not white heterosexual females and are a variety of ethnicities, ages, social classes and sexualities is something that is important to many feminists today. It’s less about getting equality and more about taking what women and all people deserve to have.

“It really made me think about some of the inequalities that not only women face, but also what other minority groups have to overcome in their everyday lives.” Kiley Bell, a third-year journalism student, said. Bell added that there were many issues she did know were related to feminism or were even a concern for feminists.

The F-Word Symposium concluded with a social that had F-Word inspired cupcakes and refreshments for audience members and speakers.

“This is the first conversation. This is the introduction to the idea and the ‘let’s talk about it, why should we talk about it and why is it relevant?’ And hopefully the conversation will continue.” Godderis concluded.