

F-Word Panel Sheds Light on modern Feminism

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It was back in the 1960s, during the Women's Liberation Movement, that women spoke out and demanded respect in all aspects of modern society. Women wanted equal pay for equal work; free access to abortions, funded child care, same-sex rights, but the bigger picture was they wanted to change the portrayal of women in the media. The mass media has been portraying women as these stick figure housewives for more than 50 years. Back then, the women thought it was their duty. But, in today's society it is not this way. Thirty-five years ago, feminists were demanding a change in media portrayal. Well they didn't get what they wanted – so no wonder we do need a feminist revival today.

Women wanted to break free from the traditional "housewife" image and show that there is more to a woman than "serving the man of the house." But women wanted careers, and wanted to be seen as strong people without a man beside them all the time. Most importantly, women wanted to be seen as individuals. Commercials back then saw women working in the households, taking care of the kids, but a specific commercial comes to mind when thinking of the 1960s. The Folgers commercial in the 1960s shows the man "demanding" a good cup of coffee from his wife. The wife, who then talks to her friend, says, "You know if only I could make a decent cup of coffee I could relax." This was a common trend in the 1960s. Many people today ask themselves, "Have things really changed?" Commercials today may not say this in so many words, but the hint is still there.

At Laurier Brantford, a group of faculty members collaborated on the event called The F-Word. It was a day set aside for staff and students to be informed about feminism, and the aspects of feminism. The one aspect that caught everyone's attention was not only the panel of Laurier-affiliated persons, but the Barbie table. Everyone in attendance was able to make Barbie the way she should be portrayed. Dr. Bruce Arai, Dean at Laurier Brantford, said, "It's pretty remarkable what you can do with a Barbie doll. So I congratulate you for being very imaginative and expressing all kinds of different ideas with those Barbie's." Barbie has created this image for women, and through the attention the mass media gives "her", women, both young and old, are impressionable to what these things have to say.

During the F-Word event, there was a panel of four Laurier-affiliated persons, Bryn Ossington, WLU Waterloo student and president/CEO of WLU student publications, Lyla Miklos, broadcaster and publicist, Alicia Sayers, Laurier Brantford student, and Margaret Toyne, WLU Waterloo assistant professor of Women and Gender Studies. Each person answered various questions about feminism, and gave their opinions on what feminism is. The panellists also gave their take on what is wrong with the world today in the eyes of a feminist. Lyla Miklos said, "My personal annoyance isn't so much with the political movement, but with our media. It's gone totally to trash and it's completely run by corporations... It's disgusting to me."

The panel showed Laurier Brantford students not only what it is to be feminist, but what is it to be a strong, proud person for being a feminist. Jane Tracey, a Smithville resident, says, "I may not be a feminist myself but many of my friends are. They are all strong women, who stand up for what they believe in." Today, strong women are still feared in society. Most commercials and television shows portray women

as “helpless” without a man. Brenda Walker, a Smithville resident, feels differently. “I don’t need a man to get me where I want to go!” Walker is a successful real estate agent, and she got there by herself. Jane Tracey goes on to mention, “My husband and I divorced, I have and am raising three kids by myself, and showing that a woman can do what they want without a man. This should be empowering to women everywhere.”

Feminism isn’t a topic that should be taken lightly and society needs to come to that conclusion soon. Throughout the panel discussion at Laurier Brantford, the panellists talked about the feminist stereotypes, which are completely incorrect. But, most people are afraid to associate themselves with the label of “feminist” because they don’t want to be stereotyped. It is stereotypes like feminists are angry, short haired- lesbians with a lot of pent up anger, that make society believe things don’t need to change.

Television shows like Desperate Housewives on CTV show the image that needs to be changed. If people don’t take a stand now and start to change how the media portrays women, society will end up back in the 1960s, with women catering to mans’ every need and want. Women need to stand tall and proud and say loud, “I may not be a feminist but we need to make a change!”

Its women like Betty Frieden, author of The Feminine Mystique that make a difference in today’s society. People like the panellists, Ossington, Toye, Miklos, and Sayers, as well as the co-ordinators of the F-Word Event, Dr. Sue Ferguson, Bruce Gillespie, Dr. Kate Rossiter, Dr. James Cairns, Dr. Tarah Brookfield, Dr. Rebecca Godderis, and Maija Saari, who take the time out of their busy lives to stand up for women, and to show their feministic sides.

Stand up and say what you believe in. Media is ruining what the Women’s Liberation accomplished back in the 1960s, and everyone needs to show their support, just like Laurier Brantford did. The F-Word event should be an annual event at every university across Canada. That would make society change!