



Campus Women



Reverse sexism

by DANIELLE CHRISTENSEN

As Canadian society moves into the Nineties, the pressure is mounting to make our society a place that is inclusive of, and sensitive to, all of its members. Among the initiatives is a movement to eliminate sexist practices from society. Now, this is good, but as with many really good ideas, there are some problems with implementation. How does equality of expression translate into everyday life? There are disputes as to whether men should simply refrain from engaging in the behaviours that are unacceptable, or whether women should engage in some of them as well, thus making it an equal practice. Rampant confusion has led to reverse sexism, which depending on who you talk to, is an exercise in freedom, or just really obnoxious.

Every time the sports magazine Sports Illustrated puts out its Swimsuit Issue, a huge argument is rekindled. For those unfamiliar with the publication, this is a book of pictures of women in bathing suits. Now, for myself, I've always found this magazine to be a rather puzzling misallocation of the publisher's money. How many of SI's predominantly male readers really want to wear the bathing suits pictured? Is this really an effective sales tool for swimsuit manufacturers? (Yes, I am kidding). But Chatelaine, Canada's leading women's magazine, weren't kidding when they published an article identifying Canada's Ten Sexiest Men earlier this year. The editors of the article decided that Brett Hull, Ralph Benmergui, and Vancouver mayor Gordon Campbell, were among the sexiest men in Canada. "Gordon Campbell has a cute, boyish charm". Well, maybe he does, but surely that should be up to his significant other, or a few close personal friends to decide, not Canada's leading women's magazine. Gordon Campbell's office released a statement to the effect that he was less than flattered by his ranking, and that he felt that it was out of keeping with his job, and more than a little tacky. Right on, Mr. Campbell! Personally, I honestly cannot imagine any publication anywhere having the gall to comment on Toronto mayor June Rowland's nether regions, so why should it be all right for Chatelaine to giggle over Gordon Campbell?

This prevalent attitude of "What's good for the goose isn't good for the gander" has spread even into the offices of the X-Press. Numerous men on the staff of this newspaper would like to write a "Campus Men" column as a companion article to "Campus Women", but are holding back from doing so for fear that they will be publicly ostracized and/or found at the bottom of the

Northumberland Strait wearing cement shoes. I for one am not about to say that their fear is the result of any one group's actions, because that would not be true.

The idea that it is all right to have separate, exclusive women's groups/forums/caucuses, but that the same is not acceptable for men, is held in various forms and degrees by dozens of groups on society, which brings me to another point. I must preface these remarks by saying that I thought about whether to discuss this issue (long and hard). Expressing this viewpoint may very well result in me being found at the bottom of the Northumberland Strait wearing cement shoes. That's okay, I decided, I look good in grey. Now, readers may remember the story of Pandora, the women's newspaper in Nova Scotia which was the subject of a human rights inquiry earlier this year after it refused to print a letter to the editor on the grounds that it was written by a man. Pandora won the right to discriminate on the basis of sex because women are a historically disadvantaged group and require a forum in which to express themselves. This is true, but is it really a valid reason to not print one silly little letter? There are so many other reasons they could have used. My main problem with the argument, though, (besides the fact that it compounds victim status for women) is that it is troublingly similar to the arguments used for maintaining men-only clubs, baseball teams, and management staffs. Supposedly, men require an environment where they feel comfortable with their peers, and have a forum within which to express themselves. Having a woman "intrude" would only disrupt things. If an argument like that is a piece of unmitigable anachronistic horse manure, why doesn't Pandora's rate the same respect? To read some of the commentaries written in support of Pandora, one would think that there are legions of men out waiting to storm the offices of Pandora, demanding to have their articles printed and wanting all of the female editorial staff to leave so that the offices could be turned into a sports bar. Now, I do not blame the Pandora staff members, who are getting death threats, for feeling threatened. That is a serious problem, and I hope the assailants (yes, threats are assault) are caught and severely punished. But I think Pandora's editorial board, along with every other member of Canadian society, should think through their own policies very carefully.

If something is obnoxious when a man does it, it should be just as obnoxious when a woman does it, because it's an obnoxious thing for a person to do. ■