

Columns & Editorials

The Argus

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The Argus is the largest student newspaper in Northern Ontario with a weekly circulation of over 3,000. Founded in 1966, *The Argus* has covered issues important to students at Lakehead University and in Thunder Bay for nearly half a century.

Editor's soapbox of influence: The real girl power

When I was a child, I thought of myself as a child. My parents disciplined me when I did something wrong; I was rewarded when I did something right; I was encouraged to study, to be curious about the world, and to be myself. I am fortunate to have two loving and well-educated parents.

When I became a preteen, I thought of myself as a preteen—though I must admit an enlightened and intellectual one. I did well in school; I participated in a variety of extracurricular activities; I had good friends and the respect of my elders. I had no doubt in my mind that at one point or another I would have a great career, and do something intellectually stimulating with my life.

What had never crossed my mind was the idea that being a female could have ever meant that any of those aspirations and fortunes could be challenged. That at one point there were these pre-set "roles" that women and men were supposed to fulfill. That somehow my male counterparts were historically somehow "above me" and were thus entitled to more options.

In fact, to be brutally honest, I had always felt the opposite. I thought of myself as strong, independent, and mature. Most of the boys in my classes made silly jokes and acted rudely; why would I ever

look up to them?

It didn't occur to me, or bother me really—probably not till grade 10 history—that "gender roles" were taken so seriously at one point in time, and that a person's genitalia could seriously determine so much of his/her life path. And it wasn't until this concept was introduced to me that I began to see that the reality of this, unfortunately, still exists to large degree in our culture today (specifically in business, education, and mainstream media).

Granted, it is much better than the 50s (and for this I am eternally grateful) but after having read the *Female Chauvinist Pigs* by Ariel Levy I feel that I would have to agree that based on the points covered in her book, some elements in culture seem to have taken a step back from the initial intent of the feminist movement.

The gist of the book works to question the inconsistency of current female behavior in the Western world, specifically the United States of America, in regards to sex and sexuality; the dilution of the core intention of the feminist movement and the dilution of what it means to be a liberated and successful woman; also the regard with which women consider their own sex and gender, as well as how they treat each other.

Specifically mentioned are: women being represented as sexual

objects and how this is accepted in popular culture by now both men and women.

"The irony that what we find sexy are stereotypical ideas of sexy, that we don't actually enjoy. Because female sexuality is complex and needs to be explored. Not to be put in a box. The way women are behaving now is not something they actually enjoy, but something that's expected and prompted," says Levy.

In the book the Levy discusses women who "sleep around" but then feel bad about it; women at the top who claim to be "like men" and go to strip clubs to fit in with men; women who degrade other women with their comments and attitudes; women who look down on "girly girls" and yet obsess about them; the rise of the TV shows like *Girls Gone Wild*, *Sex and the City*, and *The Bachelor*; and finally the rise of the raunchy culture, which devalues women on TV and in parties.

Levy writes, "There's just one thing: Even if you are a woman who achieves the ultimate and becomes like a man, you will still always be like a woman. And as long as womanhood is thought of as something to escape from, something less than manhood, you will be thought of less, too."

The author also discusses in detail the concept that girls should be able to use their minds, not only their bodies; however, the fasci-

nation with impressing men with female bodies even while at the top of a successful chain is prominent.

Levy states, "If we believed that we were sexy and funny and competent and smart, we would not need to be like strippers or like men or like anyone other than our own specific, individual selves. That won't be easy but ultimately it would be no more difficult than the kind of contortions Female Chauvinist Pigs are constantly performing in a way to prove themselves. More importantly the rewards would be the very things Female Chauvinist Pigs want desperately, the things women deserve: freedom and power."

My personal opinion is that it's a fairly well-known phenomenon that if someone is repeatedly told they aren't good enough, they will believe it. I think the technical term in psychology is called Learned Helplessness. Therefore, conditioning an entire gender to be submissive is just an unhealthy societal and economic issue.

I also think that humans—men and women—have been able to achieve incredible advances in society and technology, and to go back to judging people based on their body parts is not only puerile, but also extremely simple, boring, and in bad taste.

ELLEN STEVENS
Editor-in-Chief

From the LUSU President: Talking Mental Health

You may have heard in the media this week about Good2Talk, the new helpline geared toward post-secondary students in Ontario. Students can now call 1-866-925-5454 at any time, 365 days a year, and access a range of information and supports—everything from counselling or referrals, to campus and community services, to help finding financial or employment support.

The helpline is part of a larger initiative by the provincial government to provide mental health support to students, totalling \$27 million over the next few years. Why is mental health a priority now? The government is responding to the rising numbers of students experiencing various kinds of mental health issues. People who work with mental health on campuses across the country, like those at Lakehead's Health and Counselling Services, report that there has been a dramatic rise in the number of students experiencing a variety of problems.

All of us struggle with various personal stresses throughout our time at university. For some, this can include longer bouts of anxi-

ety, depression and a host of other mental health problems. There are extra challenges for those who are away from home, without access to their family and community support networks.

From social dynamics in residence to the pressures of schoolwork, university presents many challenges for us to navigate. The simple act of taking the time to look out for ourselves and those around us can make a real difference. Many of us feel a bit uncomfortable, embarrassed, or even downright scared of talking to others about our struggles and accessing help.

Let's challenge ourselves to take our well-being seriously. That doesn't always have to mean seeking "professional help," of course. Sometimes it might just mean opening up to someone around you or taking half an hour away from studying to go for a walk. But services like Health and Counselling and Good2Talk can be valuable, especially if you find yourself in a crisis situation.

It's positive that the government is taking this seriously and trying to provide support. At the same time,

we should be wary of seeing the issue of students' mental health on an individual scale only. If students are facing more mental health issues than previous generations, why? As students, most of us can probably volunteer some ideas.

"Students are younger now than they were decades ago, they may be less prepared to deal with the sudden independence of university life, they carry a far heavier debt load and are facing unprecedented competition for jobs once their studies are finished," speculates CTV's *W5*. "To add to this dangerous mix is the onerous and still very present mental health taboo that may make students pause before admitting a problem and seeking help."

This list is a start. Add in the experiences with poverty, racism, sexual assault, and more that some students face. Add in issues of funding and difficult student-supervisor relationships for grad students. The list goes on...

The point here is that, while everyone faces a unique set of stresses and challenges, few of them exist in isolation. The roots of mental health issues, in some

cases, are social issues. It's important to make this distinction, or we allow social problems to become normalized, shifting the focus from social change to individual treatment.

High student debt, for example, is a social problem. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to graduate with debt, and more likely to emerge from university with mental health issues like depression as a result. Is this an individual problem, or a societal one?

So while we should welcome commitments from the government and universities to address mental health issues, let's make sure we're keeping the spotlight on some of the issues that matter. At the student union, we try to recognize this balance: we provide peer-to-peer support and referrals to professional support services for students, while also organizing on issues that affect our communal well-being.

Happy Thanksgiving!

IAN KAUFMAN
LUSU President