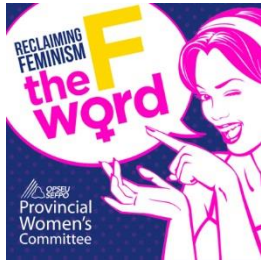


**The F-Word: Reclaiming Feminism
OPSEU Women's Conference 2015**



Opening Remarks: Shana Shipperbottom and Janet Heyman

Welcome! Bienvenue! to the 2015 OPSEU Provincial Women's Committee Conference: "The F-Word: Reclaiming Feminism"

Hello everyone, I am Shana Shipperbottom, Region 2 Provincial Women's Committee representative and conference Co-Chair and I am Janet Heyman, Region 4 PWC rep and co-Chair of this incredible conference.

On behalf of the Provincial Women's Committee, and the staff in the Equity Unit and in Training and Development, I want to welcome you all and let you know how excited we are to open the conference.

And on that note, we open the conference with a word—the F-word. Certainly, the word—feminism—evokes one of the most powerful movements in the world. Many of us are familiar with the feminist slogans popularized by the movement:

- The personal is political
- My body, my choice!
- Women Unite! Take back the Night!

These slogans are unforgettable. If you look around the room, you will notice many more slogans and ideas that have inspired and moved us all. If nothing else these words demonstrate that there are many ways to think about, understand and conceptualize feminism.

One of the earliest discussions we had in planning the conference was a debate about Beyonce's feminism. Surely, Beyonce appearing at the 2014 MVA awards with a huge "feminist" sign blazing behind her silhouette was one of—if not the most spectacular declarations of feminism. The image alone was projected into an estimated 12.5 million households. The tweets following her performance was at one of the highest volumes for conversations about feminism since Twitter began tracking the issue. But was this simply feminism enjoying a celebrity moment? Did this mean that feminism was now main-stream?

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The committee also discussed the ways that women who identify as feminist have always been the targets for harassment and violence. With changes in technology, social networking sites and blogs have especially become a breeding ground for explicit attacks on women, especially for members of racialized or traditionally marginalized communities. In 2014, a popular technology conference SXSW cancelled a panel on gaming and harassment because of the threats of mass shooting that targeted Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist cultural critic who had been working to challenge stereotypes of women in video games.

On the other hand, recent campaigns have mobilized and organized masses of ordinary people using on-line platforms. Campaigns such as “Am I Next?” --a campaign that raises awareness of missing and murdered Aboriginal women-- and “Say her name” a Twitter campaign that incites us all to name the racialized women who have been subject to police brutality. And let's not forget the Canadian journalist who started the hashtag: ‘Been raped never reported’ in response to the criticism being levelled at women who had come forward to accuse Jian Ghomeshi of assault. This spawned tens of millions of tweets about why women do not report harassment and sexual assault, and created a space not only for women to speak about their experiences, but to demand change.

Recently, our newly-elected Premier, Justin Trudeau has also taken to espousing on social media and in interviews that he is a feminist, yet the recent elections were almost absent of any substantive debate on women. There was very little said:

- about violence against women and the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal women who are missing and murdered every year
- the systemic de-funding of women's organizations such as the National Action Council on the Status of Women or the Court Challenges program—a program that funded women and other marginalized groups to bring claims under the Charter of Rights and Freedom.

Almost nothing was heard about:

- Pay inequity and the ways in which women's work is precarious—especially the work performed at lower rates and with less security by racialized, Aboriginal, disabled and trans women.
- A federally funded Childcare plan

What's worse—and we will hear more about this in tonight's panel discussions—during the discussions leading to the elections and under the guise of gender equality, Harper and other prominent conservatives, declared their support for a ban on the Niqab. In response, there was a rash of incidents, including an assault on a pregnant, Muslim woman in Montreal.

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This is all to say that in the next three days, we hope to build together a critical discussion about how we can all engage in activism in an age of fight back to reclaim feminism. Through panel discussions, workshops, poetry and theatre, we want you to know more about the key feminist issues confronting women—about the global violence against women, women's economic inequality; the discrimination women face-- racism, homophobia, ableism. We want you to be able to self-reflect on what it means to be a feminist, confront the stigma and the stereotypes and myths surrounding feminism and women's misrepresentation. And most of all, we want you to feel inspired by stories of feminist activism and organizing and build solidarity with other women and feminists.

Tonight's panel will:

- Identify new feminist movements/issues (such as celebrity feminism)
- Understand new sexism/misogyny (i.e. Twitter Trolls; misogyny in computer gaming; the "men's movement")
- Key issues confronting feminists today
- Understand what the feminist fight back looks like today

Tomorrow's key note—Judy Rebick--will explore the history of feminist organizing and examine how the context has shifted. Judy will speak to us about what successful strategies feminists have used in the past. Is Feminism still relevant and are our strategies still working? What are the challenges and opportunities for women and for the labour movement?

These same questions will also be central to the two special presentations at the Conference. On Saturday night, the play—Women Strike at Eaton's 1984-85-- and Sunday's screening of the film, She's Beautiful When She's Angry, both explore specific moments in feminist organizing that we hope will:

- Enhance our understanding of the power of feminism and the strategies to transform/change the lives of girls/women
- Motivate us to individually and collectively draw on the variety of feminist methods and strategies
- Help us develop feminist tools to take back to locals, regions and our communities

We also encourage you to write on the sheets of paper we have placed on the walls around you. We are most interested in knowing about how you engage in feminism--what does feminism mean to you? What was your favorite feminist moment? What are your impressions of the conference? We also encourage you to visit our video booth, located at Mountbatten Lane, just behind the plenary, to let us know more about what you are learning at the

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conference. Please also check out our fabulous vendors and mobilizers also in the Mountbatten Lane.

Before we energize the room with a few e-polling questions, please join us for a short video on OPSEU's Statement of Respect.