

# A Culture of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia On Our Campus.

*With Constance Backhouse*

Many times individuals fail to realize the culture of racism, sexism and homophobia that is present on many of University campuses. To an extent that is understandable because it is typically hard to be aware of something that does not affect you directly but regardless, this does not explain the lack of awareness of this growing culture that focuses a lot of energy on hate. I personally, lived in the knowledge of this growing culture but because I never had a chance to experience it forehand I believed it was something that rarely if not did not exist on the Campus of University of Alberta. This was until the day I got a chance to sit in the Protective Services Office accompanying a friend. That day I had a chance to overhear people file in reports about sexual assaults and violence.

During Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Week an event titled A Culture of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia happened and the guest speaker was the famous Constance Backhouse. She took us through the journey of the big and unfortunate Sexual Harassment issue that occurred in the Dalhousie, School of Dentistry. Twenty- five days (years) before the facebook scandal in the Dalhousie University, in Montreal a gunman shot 6 women simply because they were women who sort to enter a male ravished industry. Then it broke out that a couple of 4th year male students in the faculty of Dentistry in Dalhousie had created a Facebook group that was used to ridicule their female classmates. On this group page they posted sexist, misogynist and homophobic remarks, that included explicit and demeaning images. One of the posts was a poll that asked the question “Who will you f\*\*\*?” and what kind of sex they would have with them. Alongside this poll they were given the option of the names of females in their classes to pick from. The terms that were used where mostly derogatory, demeaning and sexually violent.

One of the member who will then be called the “whistleblower” showed a female student who was mentioned by name under the category of hate sex, who then went on to take screenshots. These posts were considered disgusting, destructive and detrimental to the female identity and the school authority was involved. Within a week the screenshots had been leaked to the media. With the terrible nature of the content of the posts, the community as well as the victims started requesting answers from the university. Petitions were made, conversations started around the country, with lots of people requesting some form of disciplinary action. While so many argued that a disciplinary action was in a sense depriving students of their right to free speech and brought up the fact that there was worse thing that existed on the internet already. Some voices were raised saying “boys will be boys”, and it was disregarded by this group, the harm that was caused to the victims and their families by boys just being boys.

The boys were given a choice to choose between a suspension or having to do over 1450 hours of a restorative justice process; they chose the restorative justice process where they met with an array of facilitators, faculty members and experts during sessions. From getting a chance to talk to the boys, Constance Backhouse believed that the boys came out as better individuals but with the anger that most people felt against their actions, so it was assumed that whether or not they got their degrees the chances of a career was uncertain. A question that must be asked as to the reason behind such barbaric actions is why? Some believe that race plays a big role because most of the victims were of immigrant descent and part of the active visible minority while the male students were of white. Constance Backhouse, commented on how the world puts way more effort to checking sexual violence against white people rather than the violence against coloured people, hence the reason a lot of people casually assumed the victims were all white. With this assumption she laments on how the world is constantly trying to fight the coloured man

for being a sexual predator instead of the white man. This scandal only held up a magnifying glass to show all the many sexual issues that go unquestioned in the world on a daily basis and even the ones that go noticed but nobody is willing to do anything about like the things that happen in a place like the catholic church which over time has been considered "the hunting ground.”

The only thing that is clear from the whole scandal is what is happening in the world today on the matter of sexual power, is that many young men are trying to reach the high expectations of masculinity, hence they are trying to dominate; while for women domination simply means realizing one's sexual power. This makes it so that over and over again sex is intertwined with violence and how can we be surprised about this when research shows that pornography is a high commodity with males from the age of 12 and 17 and many females at a young age cling on to fashion magazines. With this when young people get to university, which in all honesty has high goals on sexuality and is a bigger community of sexually active individuals who are out there and willing to explore the concept of sexuality. With this reality, it goes to show that universities are essentially crime breeding platforms and all we ask is that they get better policies to fix issues like this that occur a lot on campuses without public knowledge.

But the question we all have to ask ourselves is how far does it have to get before a policy is implemented. Is there a way we can fight sexuality when it is bred into us from a very subconscious time in our lives. Whenever will the world realize that sexual violence is a crime against not just a singular person but a crime against us all. Instead of the universities being a breeding ground for crime can we make it one for change, as we pay more attention to perpetrators and realize that rapists are not born in a day, they are rather a product of our civil

culture. When we learn to teach our children that a feminist culture is one that comes with respect and not just anger and figure out why our anti policies are failing; we will begin to search for that one brave student. And Dalhousie proves that there can be change in the achievement of equity and that a real cultural change is possible.