

Why we still need booster shots of feminism^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

True or false: Young women today don't need a booster shot of feminism because so many women are achieving more than their mothers (or fathers) ever dreamed they could.

In Canada we now - suddenly! - have four female premiers. Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin heads our Supreme Court, and there are three other women on the country's top bench plus another nominated this month.

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So why would any young woman need to worry about equal rights or - groan, cue the retrospeak - the confining demands of "the patriarchy"?

She would need a feminist booster shot because women, however much in the ascendancy, have new problems (the hypersexualization of young girls, economic viability in a global recession, creeping conservatism) and many of the same old problems (domestic violence, poverty and unequal pay). If they don't know their own recent history, they won't know how to solve these problems.

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It could be, with marriage rates dropping like a stone, that educated women will miss out on marriage, but this also sounds suspiciously like a variant on that famous 1986 Newsweek magazine scare story. It warned that a 40-year-old college educated woman had more chance of being killed by a terrorist than finding a husband.

It wasn't true then, and it isn't now. In fact, New York Times health reporter Tara Parker-Pope wrote in 2010 that studies confirmed that "women who drop out of high school are the least likely to marry, and college educated women are the least likely to divorce.

So young women, be proud of your educational achievements.

And know thy history. If you don't know that abortion was once illegal in Canada and that, eventually, after a public battle, the Supreme Court struck down the law, then you can't be ready for the next assault on that right. It's already here - Conservative MPs such as Saskatchewan's Brad Trost, who despite Prime Minister Stephen Harper's assurance that this issue will not be reopened, are vowing to put an end to reproductive freedom.

I got my own booster shot this past week at a rollicking and inspiring book launch for feminist activist Michele Landsberg's latest book *Writing the Revolution*. The book is an eye-opening collection of some of the 3,000 columns she wrote for the Toronto Star from 1978 to the early 2000s in which she took women's issues and turned them into human issues so fearlessly, doggedly and articulately that it still makes my head spin.

From equal pay to sexual harassment at work, child care to false memory syndrome at home, from a tax on tampons to a pox on lap dancing, Ms. Landsberg passionately pulled apart each issue and then denounced politicians, judges and even the media if she thought they were holding women down.

-reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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gender^[4]

mother's labour force participation^[5]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142>