



A GLOBAL AND FEMINIST APPROACH TO HEALTH

In Québec, as in all the rest of the western world, the biomedical approach is the dominant approach. It is considered the only acceptable, scientific and objective approach. It dictates a manner of care that medicalizes various stages in life, birth and death. Several treatments are offered or imposed on women all through the cycles of their reproductive lives. Menopause is still perceived as a hormonal “malfunction” to be treated and not as a normal stage in a woman’s life. The medicalization of health is everywhere today.

A biomedical approach causes numerous controversies and dissatisfactions. It brings about healing, it treats the disease more than preserving health; it is interventionist, it interferes with the normal processes of life and it is costly, because it treats with the help of expensive technologies and medications. Given the presence of a

multitude of economic interests, how can questions not be asked about some medical practices? The biomedical approach very often neglects the holistic¹ and relationship approach in health care. In a system that is more and more technological and specialized, it is easier to order a battery of tests than to find an attentive ear.

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Ms Lise Goulet from the Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes (RQASF) presented a global and feminist approach to health

THE NETWORK IN A NUTSHELL

A meeting of the Women’s Network of the Federation took place on April 13 and 14, 2011 with the theme of *Pour une approche globale et féministe de la santé* (A global and feminist approach to health). At the welcoming workshop, the activists were able to deepen their reflection and destroy the myth of “l’égalité déjà là” (gender parity already achieved) between women and men.

Then, Lise Goulet, from the Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes, presented a global framework for a feminist approach to health and Nancy Guberman, from the Breast Cancer Action, made the participants aware of the presence of toxic and carcinogenic substances in our daily environment and, in particular, in cosmetic products.

Two emotional days, marked by touching accounts, notably those of Odette Mwamba-Banza and Marianne Atumbutu, from the *Clinique Ngaliema* (Congo-Kinshasa), who are two representatives of the *Ligue des infirmier(e)s de l'espace francophone* (LIEF). They spoke to the members of the Network about the reality of women in their country. These two days ended with the presentation of a film called *Attention Féministes* which gives the floor to young feminists. Lastly, Diane Lesage, writer and author of one of the Network’s favourites, came to autograph her book, *Osez être ronde*. ■

1. The holistic approach encourages individuals to seek life styles that allow them to achieve the highest level of well-being.

A GLOBAL AND FEMINIST APPROACH TO HEALTH (CONT'D)

IS THERE A SOLUTION?

First, it is crucial to switch one's outlook, to look at things from a different angle.

Here are a few possible actions to achieve this:

- Develop a critical eye by diversifying her information sources and by questioning her healthcare professional on the usefulness of her treatments or medications.
- Accept the physiological distinctions between genders, the differences between women and men, by taking into account the multiple characteristics of an individual.
- Promote self-health by taking responsibility for her own health.
- Demand respect of the individual's autonomy and the right to informed consent.
- Be vigilant and develop a critical eye towards so-called universal knowledge, often backed by economic interests.
- Apply pressure so that alternative approaches are offered by the public health network.
- Act against privatization and user fees for services, for example, be involved in an association or a coalition by asking questions and contesting the illegal incidental costs with the *Commissaire aux plaintes de la Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec* (RAMQ) and the *Collège des médecins*.

For more information, go to the website of the RQASF at www.rqasf.qc.ca. ■

News from the Status of Women Sector

THE ÉTATS-GÉNÉRAUX DE L'ACTION ET DE L'ANALYSE FÉMINISTES

(THE ESTATES-GENERAL ON FEMINIST ACTION AND ANALYSIS)

Nearly twenty years ago, in 1992, about a thousand women met together during the “*Pour une Québec féminin pluriel*” Forum to acquire a social project covering the “*transformer les conditions de vie des femmes québécoises, mais aussi celles de l'ensemble de la population*” (to change the living conditions of Québec women, and those of all the people).

This forum enabled the identification of orientations which guided actions over the last twenty years. It was a turning point for the women's movement in Québec.

Since this last big event, feminists have organized several widespread events, such as the Bread and Roses March and the 2000 World March of Women, and they have waged important battles on several fronts. However, over the last few years, the feminist movement has been faced with neoliberal policies and the rise of the Right-Wing. In addition, it has been the target of virulent attacks, while the idea spreads that feminism is passé and that “equality has already been achieved”.

Believing that the time has come to take stock in order to reconsider its battles, renew its action and to reassert its solidarities, the *Fédération des*

femmes du Québec (FFQ) has decided to call a big event – “*Le féminisme dans tous ces états : les États généraux de l'action et de l'analyse féministes*” which will take place over a three year period. This event which was launched during a symposium, “*Regards sur 20 ans d'action et d'analyse féministes*”, which began with a public evening on May 27, and continue on May 28 with a day of reflection and discussion on current feminist issues.

The wish of the FFQ is to create a place where all voices can be heard, an event that will give a second wind to feminist struggles, an opportunity to reassert feminist solidarities and the pertinence of feminism.

For more information go to the FFQ website at www.ffq.qc.ca/luttes/etats-generaux ■



Feminist struggles must be pursued and feminist solidarities and the pertinence of feminism reasserted.

In the photo:
Annie Pinard,
CSSS Champlain



Ms Nancy Guberman, from Breast Cancer Action

BREAST CANCER: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Herself a breast cancer survivor, Nancy Guberman from Breast Cancer Action, spoke to the Women's Network participants on the importance of working to eliminate the causes of cancer for real prevention.

Breast cancer is the most prevalent disease among women in North America. Most women who develop breast cancer do not exhibit any specific risk factor. This was the case for Nancy Guberman; she had a healthy diet, she had never smoked, she exercised regularly, she breast-fed her child, and yet she developed breast cancer. Wanting to understand where this disease came from, she turned to the pollutants present in the environment.

Parallel to the sharp rise in cancer cases since the Second World War, we have seen a breathtaking increase in new synthetic chemicals. "Where are these chemicals found? In the creams I put on my body, in the food I eat, in the products I use to clean my home," Nancy Guberman says.

Every day, our bodies are bombarded by a multitude of carcinogenic and mutagenic chemicals. For example, bisphenol A (used in plastics and dental sealants), volatile organic solvents (used in computer parts), X-rays (which become carcinogenic at a degree of exposure that is still unknown), and the hormones used in oral contraceptives and hormone therapy.

"We are bombarded daily with thousands of chemicals and we have no idea of their real impact," Ms. Guberman adds. Since the effects of these products are often felt in the long term, it is very difficult to establish their toxicity level and point the finger at them when a cancer develops.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

There is the pink ribbon campaign, of course. Unfortunately, only 5% of the funds raised go to primary prevention. It must also be known that some of the campaign's corporate sponsors use potentially carcinogenic ingredients to manufacture their products.

For real prevention, Breast Cancer Action is calling for serious research on the links between the environment and breast cancer. This group also invites the public to pressure the government to ban the use of carcinogenic substances in manufacturing cosmetics, plastics and cleaning products. As Nancy Guberman says, our objective must be to ensure that our daughters do not have to experience the trial of breast cancer! A public awareness effort is necessary so that the population knows about breast cancer's potential causes. ■

The members of the FIQ Status of Women Committee, from left to right: Claire Alarie, Rita Lamothe, Véronique Foisy, Annie Pinard, Line Mercier and Patricia Lajoie



FAVOURITE READING OF THE NETWORK



This film, directed by Rozenn Potin, was presented during the Network meeting.

What is the status of feminism nowadays? Is it outmoded, or is it still needed? "Feminism isn't dead; long live feminism!" the participants in this story will tell you.

This film breathes fresh air into the feminist movement. In this documentary, we can see young people who have a feminist vision and who are working to achieve it, each in her own way. "Feminism means asking yourself questions and looking at things differently." This definition may seem simplistic to you, but it is meaningful. In fact, questioning things and putting them in perspective is what moves us forward. Before seeing this film, I wondered how a man could be a feminist. In fact, it all depends on how they act with women, treat them as equals, reject sexist jokes, get involved equally in the family, etc.

The notion of queer is also discussed in the film. For those who ask what this is, it is a person who does not define herself or himself as a woman or a man and who rejects the imposed stereotypes of gender and social construction. It can be said that people defined as queers are inherently feminists, because they reject the typical image of women and remain themselves, without allowing social pressures to overcome them.

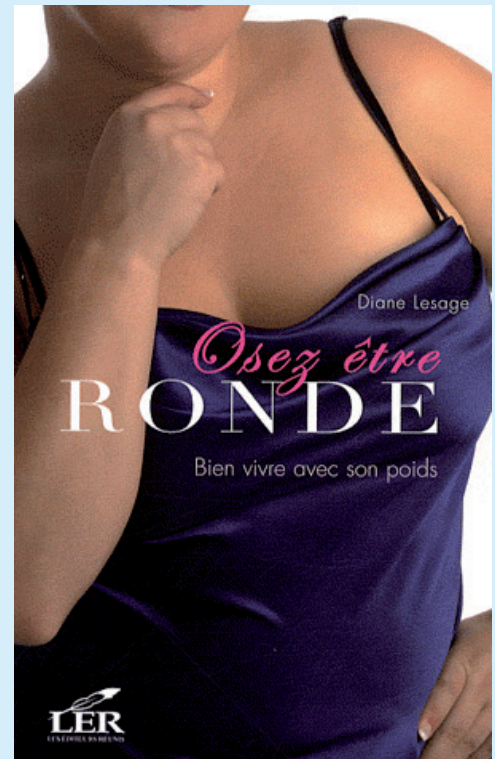
This film shows us that the feminist movement is making progress, that feminism is not dead, that it is still relevant, but that there are more battles to be fought. Whether you are a committed feminist or whether you aren't sure what you are, this is the film to see!

Patricia Lajoie, member of the Status of Women Committee ■

"Osez être ronde" – what heresy! Is this a science fiction movie? What else could it be in an era when beauty standards are constantly swelling the coffers of all the maters of this industry? How could you dare to be round and thus defy this industry, which has turned beauty into an object of worship and which rakes in between 40 and 50 billion dollars a year in the United States?

But seriously, I invite you to discover this author's thought process. Diane Lesage has lived with the complications of excess weight in a world where "be thin" is the first commandment of beauty for women. On the strength of ten years of activism and social action with the *Coalition Corps-Accord*, she sensitizes us to the importance of respecting our differences, like any living being on this planet, and leads us to ask ourselves the non-fatal question – quite the contrary: Why do we really want to lose weight, and for whom?

Despite the attempt to make us believe the contrary, thinness is not synonymous with health and youth, no more than it equals charm and success. Wanting to lose weight for good reasons is inherently praiseworthy, but



this must be done without endangering our own health! This is a book that makes you think and should be shared, in my humble opinion. You be the judge!

Rita Lamothe, member of the Status of Women Committee ■



she was known as a poet under the names Colombine and Musette. Her involvement in the definitive debates of her time inspired her reflection and writing.

In most of her columns published in the radical press over the years, Éva Circé-Côté, quite often using male pseudonyms, defended ideas that clashed with conventional wisdom: the right of women to work, regulation of prostitution, compulsory and secular education, freedom of thought, etc. Her struggle against ignorance and intolerance lead her to found a secular high school for girls, and she contributed to the creation of the Montreal Municipal Library.

Reading this book taught me a lot about this little-known woman, who nonetheless played a major role in the cause of women. I strongly recommend this book!

Annie Pinard, member of the Status of Women Committee ■

This book tells us about the life of Éva Circé, a modern and involved woman for her time. An essayist, musician, journalist, playwright and librarian,