

# Author speaks out about women's rights

INTERVIEW BY CHRIS BONING  
Staff Reporter

Last Thursday, author and entrepreneur Tolu Tolu came to speak at the University on the subject of women's issues and her self-published book, "Why and How Women are Exploited by Men Worldwide." The Index recently had a chance to talk to Ms. Tolu about her book, its controversial title and whether or not she considers herself a feminist.

**Chris Boning:** Where are you from?

**Tolu Tolu:** I'm a native Washingtonian. I was born and raised in D.C. I still live there. ... Everybody loves it — once they come there, like if they come there to go to school or something, they never leave.

**CB:** What's your background?

**TT:** I went to Howard University. ... Business was my primary major, and I did have another major in radiation technology therapy, but I have always been self-employed ... even when I was in high school I had a store, so I've always worked for myself. Before I started speaking, I had a real estate company and [did] financial planning and taxes.

**CB:** So you have this background in business and financial planning. How do you go from that to speaking about women's issues?

**TT:** What happened was that when I was born ... everything was totally different. And I could never figure out from the very beginning whether I was being held back and pigeonholed — at first, I thought it was because of my color, and that was an issue, but what I found out [was that] being a female was an even bigger issue. ... When I was growing up ... even the [women] that went to college ... went to college to find a husband, and after they got a husband they wanted to talk about the kids. ... I wanted to talk about the other things and many women used to separate because, whatever the function was, the women ultimately went in the dining room and the kitchen and the men went somewhere else, and I wasn't interested in any of that stuff. When I would try to go in where the guys were, the women would always tell me, 'You don't know your place. The women are over here.' So that's how things got started.

**CB:** Did that affect [you] when you were a business owner? Did you run into a lot of obstacles because you were self-employed?

**TT:** Absolutely. The whole time — all the time right to this day — even as we speak, people talk about the glass ceiling — it's been removed, but the whole idea of male and female is institutionalized. Rape and sexism is institutionalized, like racism, and it's woven into the fabric of cultures, and depending where you are ... there's just some places that this is the norm and there's this big of a gap, so, yeah, it's ongoing. I would run into it then, just as I do now.

**CB:** Does it surprise you that you get that kind of treatment even now?

**TT:** It's disappointing and aggravating, more so than it is surprising. ... Most often I find that a lot of women ... [have] just kind of accepted it, and said, 'Well, I've got a pretty good job making \$30,000 a year ... so I don't know what you're talking about.'

I've often run in to that in particular with professional women. The more advanced — if for example, they're an attorney, I've been on jury duty with an attorney once, and she was saying that never in her life had she been impacted by being a female. I'm like, 'Okay, all right.' You can't argue with a person [or] with their perception [and] what they say. ... [But] I'm thinking to myself, first of all there are more males in law school than females, so you're not going to tell [me] there wasn't a difference.

**CB:** How do you combat that sort of apathetic attitude from women?

**TT:** When I got out of Howard, I applied for a job — it was listed in the newspaper as a management position — well, as it turned out it was selling insurance, and I went there and I ended up taking the job. The manager was a person who said, 'Listen, if you are a good insurance salesperson your job is to convince someone who [does] not want insurance,

who has sworn they will never buy life insurance ... your job is to convince them to buy insurance. And I did that for a while, and what I realized was that he was wrong. ... What I should have been doing, and what I do now, is I look for and interact with someone who is at least open — there's a little crack. If you've got granite up, I'm not going to go up there — that's not how I want to spend my time and energy trying to convince you. We're just too far apart. I want to work smart — I don't want to work hard anymore.

**CB:** You wrote this book about how men exploit women. What's the first thing you think of when you [think of this topic]?

**TT:** A lot of times people think when they pick up this book and hear the title, they think I'm going to be talking about [how] John was supposed to meet me for pizza at 2 [o'clock] and he didn't come until

3 [o'clock] or he was over there with Jane. That's not what this book is about. This book is [what] my thought is and was. ... I wrote this book for girls as young as nine years old and [as] old as a 109 as a tool, like a dictionary, like any other piece of information of just simply having an idea of how things work. Men and women are different. ... They really are different. And if you don't think they are different, try getting a guy to do two ... things at a time. It won't happen ... that doesn't make him bad or the female better [than him] ... it's just knowing the differences or some concept of them because a lot of times we end up disappointed and frustrated because, like I was saying, I'm not going up against a granite wall. If I know this — who you are and how you are — then I can either say [I'll] work around it or I [won't] deal with it or I'm going to deal with it to a certain point. It puts me in a better position of power because I understand [how things are].

**CB:** When you're out speaking, have you noticed a difference be-

"The most important issue that affects women is the same that affects everybody — money and health and happiness."

**Tolu Tolu**  
Author and Entrepreneur



Mayank Dhungana/Index

**Tolu Tolu speaks about her book, "Why and How Women are Exploited by Men Worldwide," in Baldwin Little Theater Thursday.**

tween college audiences and other audiences elsewhere?

**TT:** That's the whole thing with being a college student — you're young, you're vibrant, you're open ... you're pleasant — everything about it is positive. I can't think of anything down where college students are concerned — they're the future of the world.

**CB:** [When] you speak out about the issues that affect women most ... what exactly is that to you?

**TT:** The most important issue that affects women is the same issue that affects everybody — money and health and happiness. So I talk about money because it's really important to understand that you're going to need to provide for yourself. Nobody owes you anything, and you're not going to be cute for five minutes. The cuteness and the youth and the nice shape ... are going to last for all of five minutes, so you have to ... make sure you have prepared yourself to be independent, and independence and having money determines your health and it [is] a big contributor toward your happiness. It's important to have resources. It's also important to take care of yourself first and foremost. Sometimes when I say that, people say, 'You

mean before my mother, before my husband, before my child?' Yeah, I mean before them. ... You must realize without you none of those other things [or] people will be important if you're not in a position to do the things that they need you to do or the things you would like to do for them.

**CB:** Because you speak on women's issues, do you consider yourself a feminist?

**TT:** One of the [Washington,] D.C. Congresswomen, Eleanor [Holmes Norton] — I saw her one day when my book first came out and I went to say, 'Hi' and show her my book. As soon as she looked at it, she said, 'This looks like quite a feminist book to me!' And I said, 'This is not a feminist book,' and I thought about it, and I remember hearing different music artists saying I'm rhythm and blues, I'm pop, I'm this and getting offended and getting into a big battle about it. I don't know ... if you see it as a feminist book, then it's a feminist book. If you see it as a child's book, then it's a child's book. I don't have a title or a thought in my mind or a category that I put it into. I just espouse what I have said in those 20 chapters.

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