
Letters to the Editor

Gay Sex Abounds— Why Not Study It?

Never mind that Roger Kimball misquoted me; I suppose his point is that discussion of (gay) sex has no place in a university ("What Next, a Doctorate of Depravity?" editorial page, May 5). Sloppy reporting aside, we do have a real disagreement. From my vantage point in Canada, it seems that American culture is *all* about sex—from advertising to popular culture to politics. In studying contemporary society, isn't it therefore fitting that academics would both reflect and study this preoccupation?

Mr. Kimball frames the NYU queer studies conference as a carnival of depravity. He seems to prefer ridicule to thoughtful criticism. Why otherwise might he "forget" law professor Kendall Thomas's substantial consideration of sexual harassment laws, or Licia Fiol-Matta's close reading of the figure of the mestizo in the writing and political thinking of the influential Chilean writer Gabriela Mistral? Why would he quote Dana Takagi's title, "Queer Politics as Vocation: Sexuality and the 'package deal' of Multiculturalism," but neglect to inform the reader that Dr. Takagi drew on her experience as a race-relations expert in sociology to map tensions between personal commitment and academic scholarship, a long-standing dilemma especially for academics from minoritized communities? And why else would Mr. Kimball decontextualize Ruby Rich's observations on the changing responses of her students, citing only the words "extreme sadomasochism," but fail to indicate that the work in question is a widely-discussed American feature film—Sheila McLaughlin's "She Must Be Seeing Things" (1987).

As at any academic conference, some papers at "Queer Publics, Queer Privates" were more rigorous than others. Some were entertaining and engaging, others seemed stodgy or pretentious. Some ran on old steam, others opened intellectual doors. The value of such an event is that scholarship is put to the test of intellectual scrutiny. With his caricatured and selective reporting of this conference, Mr. Kimball clearly mistrusts this well-respected academic process.

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