

Sexual Orientation and Academia

JETHILO E. CABILETE

THE BRUNSWICKAN

This is an interview with a professor on the perceptions of sexual orientation within the academic field. One of the main concerns that has been posited is the "naturalization" of heterosexuality as the only acceptable, "normal" form of sexuality that society perceives. It is frustrating for several reasons. One, it limits the types of research being performed under the classifications of sexuality to the accepted heterosexual norms. Two, any non-medical research material is dated and new material is difficult to obtain. Finally, one must occasionally come up against discriminatory stances taken within academia that may hinder research. Similarly, there are some differences among the various countries of the world in terms of their respective attitudes, beliefs, political stances and the contrasting attitudes between politicians and the population.

Brunswickan: Are there differences in how different countries deal with homosexuality and bisexuality in terms of literature, education?

Professor: It is a very complicated topic to talk about because there are great differences. If we're talking about sexuality in education, for example, this is something that is extremely conservative. While there might be sexual education, we're talking about a very, very bourgeois, clean-cut, physical sexual education of how things work. And even here, we're talking about [predominantly] straight, heterosexuality.

I don't think that young people, or young adults are relearning in the schools about oral sex, anal sex practices; whether they are heterosexual, homosexual or whatever. I think kids are very streamlined according to specific bourgeois guidelines when it comes to talking about sexuality.

As to the research issues of sexuality in literature have become quite a hot item in North America, but it's very hard to find texts. Now that work has been done in the last twenty to fifty years, it assumes that when one does research to find things on sexuality, it can quickly become nightmarish. For example if you are looking for a novel, you can try to trace lesbian literature or history and you will quickly recognize that there are, in fact, an incredible amount of publications, but to actually find, locate them and order them through inter library loan is difficult.

Brunswickan: Is this what you have found in your own research?

Professor: That's what I have found in my own research, yes and it is something that is an ongoing problem. There are so many obstacles when one does research dealing with sexuality that is not streamlined, that is not within the heterosexual "norm." One is that it is extremely hard to locate. I mean it's not recent publications that are difficult, but it's things like lesbian novels that were published in 1932 in Europe even if they have been translated. You would think that it would be relatively easy to obtain a copy of it, but that is not the case. It can take two years to actually locate one and to find an archive on the

copy. When you do find a copy you'll find it is out; someone else has them and you can't find out who has them. These are obstacles that you would never think of and you wonder then if it has something to do with the topic itself.

Brunswickan: So it is not necessarily the data itself [that is problematic], but how people perceive the data, the research material?

Professor: Of course you cannot prove that this is in fact the case because you never find out. Nobody would tell you, "Well we don't really put this in the stacks because we don't want you to see it." But when you add up all of the obstacles and stones that are thrown into your way, you wonder if that is not really the case.

Brunswickan: What about UNBF? I've seen some of the material on homosexuality and bisexuality at the Harriet Irving Library and there are not many. The few that exist are dated information.

Professor: Yes, a lot of it is dated and I would say there is an endemic lack of publications that deal with sexuality and I'm not talking about medical books. I'm talking about sexuality in various fields and how sexuality and the discussion of sexuality has influenced the various fields; such as philosophy, literature, sociology, practically every field in the Arts. For example, there is a lack of theoretical works. That is especially hard because there have been so many new publications, especially in the last ten years that we do not have [at UNBF]. Interlibrary loans are limited in obtaining recent and archival

publications. Most libraries don't lend anything recent; sometimes even two years after publication. So it is very difficult to keep up to date. Which simply means that you do not have access and other people don't have access.

Brunswickan: From a research point of view, how does one's own sexuality and professionalism in academia go hand in hand? Does it hinder what one does in research?

Professor: No not really. It's rather the opposite. I think it makes it easier and more frank, especially if you're out and people are aware of differences in sexual orientation.

Brunswickan: How do students deal with a professor who does not necessarily fit their idea of a professor in terms of sexuality?

Professor: I have not had any negative reactions from the students, which surprises me in a way that this is not what you expect from students in a smaller university, or students in a university in a smaller city. It is actually pretty good that students in general have been positive; I mean don't forget that even gay professors who are out don't enter the classroom with a sign on their foreheads. Yet they may not hide their sexuality if someone asks them. I don't know, maybe there are many students who do not pick up that you're gay. I have been lucky maybe that I've had no difficulties whatsoever. My experience has been very positive and because I don't make my sexuality an issue, it's not an issue.

WARDROBES OF THE SEXES

JENN BROWN

THE BRUNSWICKAN

As long as people have existed there have been certain gender expectations. What is considered masculine or feminine has changed through time, but the fact remains that there are still certain traits or actions that are 'supposed to be' male or female.

In exploring the idea of gender expectations one must first look at gender and what it is. There is a distinct difference between gender and sex. A person's sex is what they are born with. Gender is not quite as specific. A person's gender is what they are socialized to be. Boys are taught how to be men and girls are taught how to be women and with each gender there is a certain expected "norm" of actions and mannerisms.

With the progress of the women's movement we have seen a gradual change in the expected roles of the genders. Women are now accepted in jobs that have traditionally been held by men, such as mechanics and engineers and men are more easily accepted into traditionally female positions, like nurses and secretaries. At one time, we would not have expected to see a female president of a company with a male secretary now, however, it is entirely possible.

There has been a change in the expectations of physical appearance for the genders as well. At one time the distinction between what men and women wore was

very clear. Now, however, the line between the wardrobes of the sexes is not as clear. Women are now wearing clothing that at one time was considered acceptable only for men. Strangely enough it is still not considered "socially acceptable" for men to wear women's clothing. Women regularly wear jeans and business suits, even men's underwear without a reaction from society. However, if a man wears a skirt or blouse he is labelled a "cross-dresser" and is, in many cases, shunned by society.

The current fashion trends of androgyny and grunge are, for a large part, responsible for the blending of gender. Designers like Calvin Klein are combining the two genders. A popular Calvin Klein ad shows men and women of similar physical appearances dressed in jeans and white tank tops. The idea is to show for the purpose of advertising the gender neutral CK One cologne, the lack of differences between the sexes. Plaid, flannel shirts and well worn jeans are the uniform for our generation and they are completely gender neutral. Girls with short or no hair and boys with long hair is another indication of the joining of the genders.

Despite the fact that current fashion trends and the feminist movement have made the gap between the genders smaller there is still a gap. Changes have been happening and continue to happen but at least for now there is both a feminine and a masculine ideal. If this will always be the case is something that only time will tell.



DREW GILBERT PHOTO