

Harvesting public opinion

A couple of Sundays ago, I was surprised by a phone call from the pollsters at Angus Reid. Bored with television, I happily agreed to answer some questions — I was promised they would not take more than 20 minutes.

There were several components to the poll — some asking me to choose answers off the top of my head and others asking me to choose between two or more options.

This particular poll was sponsored by the *Globe and Mail* and focussed primarily on where Canadians think the new government surplus should be spent.

The woman on the other end of the phone faithfully punched my answers into a computer program. The only problem was that often she couldn't find a button to click which corresponded with my answer.

For example, I was questioned about the worst environmental problems facing my community or province:

"Well...Halifax dumps all of its raw sewage straight into the harbour. That's pretty bad," I said.

"Poor sewage treatment?" she asked, scrolling in search of the appropriate icon.

"No. No sewage treatment," I said. "Well we don't have that on the screen, so I'll just type in too much sewage."

Too much sewage? What is too much sewage? I don't think Haligonians spend a disproportionate

amount of time on the can, the problem is that we use our harbour as a giant outhouse. But as much as I was enjoying participating in the poll, I wasn't eager to spend ages debating semantics with someone who didn't care.

"Is there anything else?" she asked.

"Well I hear the Sydney tar ponds are quite serious," I said.

Editorial

"What are they?" she asked (obviously from a telephone in Ontario).

"Just put it under toxic waste," I instructed.

"Halifax has toxic waste?" she asked.

"No. Sydney does...tar ponds...the Sydney tar ponds."

Another part of the poll — the part I found most tedious — focussed on Mutual Funds (must be a *Globe and Mail* poll) and asked me specific questions about a company whose name I have purposely forgotten. At the conclusion of a list of attributes for this obviously well-endowed company, the woman asked me if I would, given the attributes, invest in such a company.

"Well I'm a student so I don't really think I could invest in anything right now," I said.

"No, not *can* you invest, but *would* you invest," she said (arguing

semantics).

"Well...okay, sure," I said, feeling a bit bullied.

"Yeah, It sounded good to me too," she agreed enthusiastically. "So, how much *would* you invest?"

"I'm supposed to make some kind of fantasy investment?" I asked.

"Just say how much you would like to invest in such a fund," she said sharply.

"About a million dollars would be fine," I said, immediately regretting that I didn't ask for a couple houses on Boardwalk.

Near the end of the poll, I was given pairs of options (for example the national debt vs. healthcare) and asked to choose which one most deserved surplus money. Throughout, I faithfully picked social issues over fiscal issues because I imagined I was in some way pissing-off the stuffy white collars at the *Globe and Mail*.

When *The Globe* printed the results of 'my' poll in last week's *Saturday Edition*, they showed that when people were asked open-ended questions about where the surplus money should go, reducing the national debt featured quite prominently, but when asked to choose between specific options, the social issues were favoured.

The Globe took this anomaly in stride, claiming the results showed that "Canadians are compassionate conservatives". I read that sentence twice. And I thought, just for a moment, that they were trying say, "Canadians are Progressive Conservatives" (sly bastards).

Regardless, the experience has left me with very little faith in public opinion polls. As I sat in my living room that Sunday afternoon, wearing just my boxers, scratching, smoking, hungover and answering questions on the phone, I couldn't help but think of the other people participating in the poll (1,509, to be exact) and whether our views could really represent the diversity of 30 million Canadians.

Even the *Globe and Mail* admits a "margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20", whatever that means.

ANDREW SIMPSON

Letters

Women's sports need more coverage

To the editors,

I would like to comment on your paper which I personally feel is the best university paper in the Metro area. The Gazette incorporates a good balance of campus and community news relevant to the Dalhousie student.

But there is one area that is lacking — the sports venue. You would think by reading the sports section of the Gazette that there are only three teams, namely hockey, men's volleyball and men's basketball. I have yet to read anything substantial on any other teams, club sports or intramurals.

I would like to point out that there is a disparity in the way men's and women's teams are presented in the Gazette. For example, in last week's issue, men's volleyball and men's basketball had half a page

each, both accompanied by a photo and interviews.

Men's basketball also had an additional story on another page. The women's equivalent of these two teams had four lines each, with no photo or by-line, and was stuck in the back pages. Ironically the women's teams are doing better than their counterparts.

There are many examples of this irregularity in the Gazette's sports section. How can you explain why certain teams have top billing regardless of their results (can we say hockey) while other teams are not even reported? Why do the women's teams at Dalhousie get shafted every week?

Let's start by celebrating the achievements of all teams whether they are marquee teams or not. To overlook this fact does not do any justice to the sports program here at Dalhousie.

DANIELLE POST

AHM calendar

February 12th - February 18th, 1998

A selected calendar of events for the coming week of African Heritage Month. Check each week in the Gazette for the following week's activities.

Thursday, February 12

9:00 am-12:00 pm

"Good Food" Cooking Class
@North End Community Health Centre

Space is limited. Phone 420-0303 to reserve space

1:30 pm

Black Firsts
@Woodlawn Public Library

7:00 pm

Vibe Night: A Celebration of Local Talent, poetry, songs, and storytelling
@Halifax North Memorial Library

Friday, February 13

1:30 pm

Black Youth and Racism
@Dartmouth North Public Library

2:00 pm-4:00 pm

Official Inaugural Ceremony and Reception for the Council on African Canadian Education
@Cornwallis St. United Baptist Church

7:00 pm

"Rhythm of Our Roots": Youth On Stage
@Neptune Studio Theatre

Saturday, February 14

3:00 pm-5:00 pm

African Dance Workshop with Kwasi Dunyo
Grafton St. Studio, 1531 Grafton St., 3rd floor
Admission: \$20.00 per session; \$50.00 for 3 sessions

7:30 pm

W.P. Oliver Night of Honour
@Black Cultural Centre

9:00 pm-2:00 am

Valentine's Dance
@TBA
Admission: \$5.00

Sunday, February 15

2:00 pm

African Drum and Dance Concert featuring Kwasi Dunyo with the Halifax Honour Choir, Ross Road

African Percussion Ensemble and the Agudze Drum and Dance Ensemble
@Queen Elizabeth High School Auditorium
Admission: \$5.00 per person

4:00 pm -6:00 pm

Second Annual George Elliot Clark Literary Competition Awards Limited Awards Ceremony.
@CBC Halifax
Admission: Phone (902)420-5595 for invitations

9:00 pm

Round Midnight Black Cabaret
@DuMaurier Studio; Neptune Theatre -Admission:\$7.00

Monday, February 16

7:00 pm

Official Launch: "In this Place...": An exhibition of Black Art in Nova Scotia with performances by Voice Black Theatre Ensemble.
@Anna Leonowens Gallery, 1891 Granville St

Tuesday, February 17

10:00 am

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters Puppet Show
@Spring Garden Public Library

11:00 am -5:00 pm

"In this Place...": An exhibition of Black Art in Nova Scotia with performances by Voice Black Theatre Ensemble.
@Anna Leonowens Gallery, 1891 Granville St

2:00 pm

Black Youth and Racism
@Halifax North Memorial Public Library

7:00 pm

The Evolution of Our Consciousness: A discussion for People of African/Black Ancestry.
@Halifax North Memorial Public Library

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THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE

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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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