

Including Sex in Sexuality

Sofia Voloch, Out On Campus Collective member

After a week of fun events, great conversations, and copious amounts of free food, I was surprised and disappointed by Adam Cristobal's column on Queer Awareness Week, in which he criticized Out On Campus for perpetuating negative stereotypes of LGBT people, especially considering he admitted to not having attended any of the events in question. Having attended all of the Queer Awareness Week events myself, and been a panelist on the "Guess the Straight Person" panel, I would have to strongly disagree with his thesis; last week's events were an opportunity to bust many stereotypes, and to forge connections among students of all genders and orientations.

Cristobal discussed the two events held on Thursday—the sex toy workshop and the "Guess the Straight Person" panel. As quoted in his article, the sex toy workshop focussed on a number of topics, including "the art of sexual negotiations, obtaining consent, practicing safer sex, [and] toy selection and gender/orientation sensitivity." As such, this workshop was relevant on multiple levels—including the fact that it is, as Cristobal rightly points out, a topic of interest beyond the queer community, and thus served as a fun way to attract a broad range of students to the Out On Campus space (which is open to students of all genders and sexual orientations, including straight and/or cisgender). However, its usefulness in providing LGBT-specific information should *not* have been dismissed; as a lesbian, I often find information relevant to me is excluded even from so-called "comprehensive" sex-ed—even when advice for gay men is included. (The phallogentricity of most mainstream discussions of sex is a topic I could rant about for pages, if given the opportunity.) Even the varied services of SFU Health and Counseling does not always meet the needs of the LGBT community.

In that light, the importance of including an event like this becomes clear—a lack of openness and education about sex in LGBT contexts, as in straight contexts, can lead to risky behavior and the spread of infection (yes, even among lesbians). And until our community is fully served by more "mainstream" sex-ed initiatives, it seems appropriate for us to attempt to educate ourselves. Cristobal also raises the point that this can seem to perpetuate the stereotype of queers as "sex-crazed", which may be true. I would argue, though, that this may not actually be inaccurate...although we're really no more "sex-crazed" than our straight peers. One has to wonder if the appropriate response to people dismissing us using this stereotype is really to distance ourselves from the sexual aspects of our sexualities—why not ask: "on what grounds is my having an interest in sex a reason to dismiss me as not a serious person?" Challenging the assumption that an interest in sex is somehow shameful or silly can only benefit those members of our community who *are* interested in sex (a larger proportion that Cristobal seems ready to admit), as well as the straight community.

I was also startled by Cristobal's seeming to completely miss the point of the "Guess the Straight Person" panel, the other event held Thursday. He accused it of "serv[ing] as fodder for the myth of the gaydar", when in fact it was an engaging way to test this supposed intuition—and, by testing it, demonstrate that it doesn't exist. The six other panelists and I were posed questions ranging from "What's your favorite movie?" to "How do you feel about monogamy?", and the interesting mix of answers highlighted the incredible diversity of thought within our community. In the end, it was difficult for much of the audience to guess the panelists' orientations (given the choices of gay, lesbian, bi, queer, questioning, or straight ally). It is demonstrations like this, in which the audience realizes that they can't rely on the two-dimensional versions of people supposedly like us offered by TV shows attempting to be edgy, that can work to bust stereotypes for good. I wish that Cristobal had come and listened to some of the discussion it provoked.

Last week's events were incredibly successful in bringing together gay, straight, lesbian, bi, trans, queer, questioning and many other students to drink coffee, talk, and learn to see LGBTetc. people and issues differently. If the events were silly, that's simply a reflection of Out On Campus volunteers' own sense of fun, and interest in appealing to our peers who do not normally access its resources. Outside of the classroom, campus events need to be appealing to attract attendees, but with a bit of humor and what we could call a "gay" heart, it is possible to make discussions of sexual orientation entertaining without making the queer community the target of homophobic entertainment. I, for one, am looking forward to next year's Queer Awareness Week, and hope these events (which have become traditional) keep their Pride of place.