

The Body Politic

Sex and the single editor

Sex. Is not that one of the most succinctly enticing openings (albeit a sentence fragment) possible in the black-and-white, two-dimensional world of the print medium? Some readers may recoil in horror (or at the very least, profound distaste) at the mere mention of the word; others, upon seeing it, may scrutinize the page with far more interest (though perhaps looking about nervously first to make certain no one is scrutinizing them). Though a perfectly innocent three letters, sex has the effect of a four letter word: once uttered, whether for good or ill, people sit up and take notice. One wonders, then, exactly why this is so. Why, at the very mention of sex, do most people's ears perk up like a dog's at the sight of a jerkey treat? Whence comes this perpetual, inexplicable obsession with all things sexual, anyway?

These uncommon editorial musings were prompted by our pseudo-infamous sex supplement, printed in the last issue of the *X-Press* (jokingly referred to by some as the *Sexpress...snicker, snicker*). Actually, this editorial was inspired less by the supplement than it was by the reaction to it. Before exploring that, though, it would be helpful to make clear what typical public response to an issue of the *X-Press* is like. This publication concentrates on things of interest to the U.P.E.I. community, but also incorporates articles and features of interest to anyone and everyone, on a wide range of subject matter. Despite this broad spectrum of material, it is very seldom that we hit upon something that sends our readership into a stir. In fact, it is rare indeed for the paper to receive any response to its contents, apart from broad praise or criticism, both usually of the word-of-mouth variety. Usually, reader response is sadly lacking, even in the case of features that request reader participation. This is true to an extent no matter what the circumstances, perhaps because many students are (as many claim) either too busy or too apathetic to bother writing to us. We have written about life, death, and everything in between, and very seldom do our readers manifest vital signs, let alone concerns of any kind.

In view of this, the response given our sex supplement stands out in stark contrast. We received over a hundred responses to the "sex survey" we printed to gather data for the supplement, which is about a hundred more than we ever got for any other requests for reader input we've put forth in the last four years. Moreover, the sex supplement brought the *X-Press* an unexpected glut of media attention, sparked largely by a fearful article in the *Evening Patriot* (in response to the sex survey) wondering just what the heck these radical *X-Press* rascallions were trying to do by addressing such a subversive topic as sex in a P.E.I. publication. L.M. Montgomery

must be doing pirouettes in her oft-visited grave. The *Patriot* article was spotted by other local media, and before long the *X-Press* found itself being covered by CBC and ATV as well, though their attentions were, thankfully, devoid of the inflammatory and judgemental slant that characterized the initial article in the *Patriot*. Overnight, this particular issue of the *X-Press* had become a media event, in a rather warped display of a substance-starved media feeding on itself.

This was all rather weird, but unfortunately not unique. Many of the few other media blitzes related to the *X-Press* over the past few years have revolved around matters of a sexual nature. Several years ago, the paper came under intense media scrutiny when its staff debated whether or not to print a controversial article (on safe-but-erotic gay sex) that had been circulating among university newspapers (incidentally, the paper had decided to cut the article regardless). The following year, the paper was mired in seemingly endless controversy over the printing of the "Backlash", a "column for the politically incorrect" whose occasional criticism of feminism (among many other things) sparked a feminist reaction that led to the *X-Press* being viewed thereafter as the forum for some titanic battle of the sexes, with a plethora of posturing on both sides that is both too silly and too lengthy to go into here (almost to this day, other members of the Island media, when they have occasion to contact us for some reason, ask wistfully if the "Backlash" or some facsimile thereof will be gracing our pages in the future). It seems that one has but to mention the word "sex" to guarantee the undivided attention of many people.

The question remains, though: what is all the fuss about? On one level, sex is a simple biological act, and no more deserving of literary dissection than a trip to the washroom. On another level, most people see sex as a very special, very private intimacy reserved for those who share a special bond of love with one another, and still others, such as this writer, see it as that and as an expression of a spiritual communion reserved for the commitment of marriage- in either of these cases, sex is then a very private thing, and no more deserving of media attention than any other personal or spiritual matter. Sex is seen by some as a social issue, by others as a health issue, but in either case it again frequently receives more media attention than other issues of these types. Perhaps this is because the very existence of sex was, for so long, regarded as taboo under any circumstances, let alone in the sphere of public discussion.

Since Adam and Eve's sinful snack, it's been true that any "forbidden" knowledge is to most people extremely tempting, or at least intriguing, and it seems that sex will always, to some extent, be a shadowy subject layered with myth and mystery, so that people will always be dying to know about it (perhaps literally, in light of the spread of AIDS). Sex and its ramifications are undeniably relevant to virtually any reader, and none can deny that it is, like most issues, deserving of some attention. One hopes, though, that our society will eventually be mature enough to shed this sophomoric preoccupation with such a basic facet of human existence. Perhaps then the media will be less likely to devote as much time as it often does to courting a public that it assumes is composed of adolescent voyeurs.

Sean McQuaid,
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**Probing the
minds of the
sex-obsessed
media and its
public in the
wake of the
X-Press Sex
Supplement**