

# A Matter of Conscience

## *part 2: sexual orientation*

by Craig Douglas

Two weeks ago I wrote an article in the X-Press pertaining to the issue of tolerance in society. I have decided to continue this section on a weekly, if not bi-weekly, basis. I believe that such an issue can not be dealt with in one week and on one page. Each week I will attempt to deal with various issues which seem to predominate in our lives whether it be at home, school, the workplace or at other social locations. I want to say I am not an expert in these areas of analysis and I am only a concerned student who feels that such issues must be forced out into the open so at least we have the opportunity to approach these issues. It is because of this I would be more than happy to invite you to comment on these articles. I hope that these articles may incite comment, whether it be agreement or disapproval. The list of articles that might be dealt with will be determined by how many issues of the X-Press will be printed til the end of the Winter semester. The first of these articles will deal with sexual orientation; whether it be heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality. I believe this issue is one of great importance due to the many factors which this issue affects: our development with each other in society, expression of feelings for each other; emotional or sexual, and our basic individual moral character. These factors seem important to each of us in our daily activity and interaction with ours. There are many studies out there that give varying statistics on the percentages of homosexuals, heterosexuals and bisexuals that exist in society today. Of course these statistics are developed by asking individual people for their responses on the question of sexual orientation and by no means is it a perfect science. But a general answer to this question of percentage of basic sexual orientational groups that exist in society is the following: (taken from the Kinsey Institutes' study on human sexuality, 1990) The percentage of the population which practices heterosexuality is approx. 75-90%, those that practice homosexuality at approx. 10-25%. The orientation of bisexuality is much harder to acquire numbers on due to the shortage of data on the subject. Some studies done by the Kinsey Institute estimate the Bi-sexual population at between 10-25% of the population, but this is clearly inconclusive. Again, to emphasize,

these numbers are based on the responses of the individuals approached, whether they were being honest or not. We will have to assume the individuals were honest.

In reference to an article that appeared in the X-Press a few weeks ago dealing with the question on the numbers of the student population that are believed to be homosexual these percentages would have us believe that there exists a large population of homosexuals and bisexuals. The approximate size of the student population being 2,800 fulltime students and many more parttime students would have us assume that there may be as many as 700 homosexuals on campus or as little as 300. The amount of bisexuals is harder to conclude. These numbers are based on the one study done by the Kinsey Institute. There are many other studies which approximate the percentages of sexual orientational groups at other varying amounts but Kinsey's study will be the one used in this article. If these numbers were assumed to be true to reality, it would seem that a large percentage of these homosexuals or bisexuals remain closeted. This closeting of their individuality may be having a pernicious affect on their ability to develop relationships with others; whether it be the harbouring of resentment against those who oppose such sexual orientation or themselves, either of which would have a great affect on the University community itself. It is because of these circumstances that we as individuals must develop an awareness of each other whatever our orientation may be and respect our own individuality. Is the individual copping out of their obligation to fairness and tolerance of other groups in the university by maintaining that there is only one "true" orientation (heterosexuality)? Those who believe that there are no homosexuals they associate with or that exist at this university will have to come to terms with reality. The reality is that there are many groups which make up the diverse university community, each of which should have the same rights and privileges that other groups have claimed. They may not be vocal or outspoken of their individuality but they do exist no matter how much we try to avoid facing or ignoring them.

The tolerance that I spoke about in my last article must be circulated throughout our community. In the book *Human Sexuality: 4*

The Campus Environment for Gay and Lesbian Life, John D'Emilio explains that policies of equal treatment should be placed in such institutions [universities] on the side of equal treatment. Gay faculty, administrators, staff, and students need to know that their school is committed to fairness, to treating us on the basis of our abilities.

The university's responsibility towards its gay members goes well beyond these elementary procedures of fairness, however. Administrators will need to take an activist stance to counteract the misinformation about gays and lesbians that many members of the university community have, the cultural prejudices that are still endemic in Canada, and the growing problem of hate-motivated incidents. The following areas need attention.

1. One of the prime locations where harassment occurs is in the residence halls. Dormitory directors and their assistants need to be sensitized about gay issues and trained in how to respond quickly and firmly to instances of oppressive behavior and harassment. In an age when heterosexual undergraduates routinely hold hands, walk arm-in-arm, and engage in other simple displays of affection, lesbian and gay students need to know that they will not have their rooms ransacked, or their physical safety endangered, for doing the same. They also need reassurance that campus activism on gay issues will not come back to haunt them when they return to their dorms each night.

2. Student affairs programming is an important tool in fostering toleration, understanding, and enthusiasm for differences in culture and identity. Resources should be made available to sponsor special gay awareness week events, as well as to integrate gay films, public lectures, and other events and activities into the regular programming.

3. Late adolescence is an especially stressful time for gay men and lesbians. These may be the years when they become sexually active, form their first relationships, and grapple with issues of identity. School counselling services need personnel who are sensitive to these issues and who can foster self-acceptance and self-esteem rather than reinforce self-hatred.

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