

Revisiting the Noise at Northwestern

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Quick background: late last month – February 21st – at Northwestern University, a tenured professor with over 20 years of teaching experience allowed about 100 students in his Human Sexuality class to witness a woman strip naked, be penetrated with a sex-toy, and brought to orgasm. What is more astonishing than that is that neither the professor nor the students who were present believe anything was wrong with such a show. Even the university initially defended the act as a matter of academic freedom. ([See the full story here.](#))

Although the sex show itself was an example of something that could only come out of a leftist world-view, I am less interested in the sex act itself and far more interested in focusing my attention on the reactions of the professor following the well-deserved firestorm of criticism that has come his way since the spectacle became public. What follows are a series of defenses by Professor John Michael Bailey and my very brief reactions to his statements.

Professor Bailey initially defended his actions by stating that he believes such demonstrations are valuable because they “help us understand sexual diversity.”

What, exactly, was the new understanding that the 100 or so students took away as they watched Faith Kroll, a non-student, be penetrated to the point of orgasm by a sex toy used by her boyfriend, Jim Marcus? Faith Kroll, a 25-year old who openly admits to having the weird fetish of wanting to have sex in public with as many eyes on her as possible, has said she would do it again, publicly, if given the chance. So the demo certainly fulfilled one of Ms. Kroll’s fantasy’s. And it is a virtual certainty that many of the hundred or so young, curious students present were titillated as well. But apart from seeing how to hold the sex toy, or where its on-off switch is, I am at a loss at how this helped students understand – *deeply understand* – human

sexuality. Yes, they saw something. But do they now possess some deep, meaningful understanding based on what they saw. Judging from their comments, I would have to say they do not.

Bailey concluded that day's lecture with this bit of folk-wisdom: "Sticks and stones may break your bones, but watching naked people on stage doing pleasurable things will never hurt you."

The students may not have been physically hurt, as with sticks and stones. But certainly, whether they realize it or not, they were morally hurt. It is astonishing the professor remains oblivious to this. Watching two people have sex in public did not enhance the intellectual acuity of any of those students. It may have whipped some of them up into a silent frenzy, but little else.

Bailey wrote in an email defending his actions that he includes a variety of guest speakers for the optional, after-class seminars, that include gay men, transsexuals, convicted sex offenders, swingers (i.e., married couples that openly swap partners with other married couples), and people who are into what he terms "kinky" sex. ([See the Professor's email wherein he explains his side of the story.](#))

I wonder what it is about the bizarre, the aberrant, the weird, the strange, and the sick that commands such attention for Professor Bailey. I am curious as to what it is about normal male-female sexual experience that he finds so uninteresting. It seems to me that Professor Bailey has an agenda – to expose his students to as much strangeness and perversity as possible, while shielding his students from what is normative.

Bailey claims he allowed the couple to perform the live sex act when he, in the one or two seconds he gave thought to the matter, was at a loss as to why such a demonstration would be a bad idea. Personally, when I am faced with big decisions, I often require more than one or two seconds to collect my thoughts, weigh and consider options, conduct analysis, etc. A person of experience should know this.

And the fact that Bailey initially hesitated at all speaks volumes. There was evidently something deep in his soul that suggested caution, but since he could not academically formulate a coherent set of arguments

to support that visceral reaction, he ignored it. In other words, if the act of performing live sex in public at a University is totally normal and acceptable conduct, why the hesitation at all? If it was normal and natural, there would be no hesitation. Professor Bailey should have listened to his initial instincts.

The news reports indicate that about 20 or so students walked out of the seminar when they were told how explicit the demonstration was going to be. About 100 stayed. Let's compare and contrast the two groups – the 20 and the 100. Are the 20 on to something? Were they wise to have left while the 100 who stayed were either foolish or slow to consider the ramifications? Or, was it the 20 who were cowardly, prudish, and weak while the 100 were strong, adventurous, and courageous? Or, is this a situation of relativism – different strokes for different folks? I am clearly on the side of the first option for reasons that will become clear momentarily.

The professor makes it clear that he does not believe in boundaries:

. . . earlier that day in my lecture I had talked about the attempts to silence sex research, and how this largely reflected sex negativity. I have had previous experiences with these silencing attempts myself. I did not wish, and I do not wish, to surrender to sex negativity and fear.

OK, this is becoming clear. Since he does not want to be subject to one extreme – silence and censorship – he is quite comfortable with the other extreme – anything goes. There seems to be no middle ground for this professor. Also, the professor seems to believe that if you have boundaries, and if you consider what is proper and what is dignified, that means you are fostering negativity and fear about sex. Therefore, he believes, one must remove all boundaries in the name of removing all negative stigmas about sex.

Really? One wonders if the professor would not allow a demonstration of forcible rape on one of his female students were it not clearly illegal.

Finally, it is worth reviewing how Professor Bailey views his students in the aftermath of the controversy: "I certainly have no regrets concerning Northwestern students, who have demonstrated that they

are open-minded grown ups rather than fragile children.” Here the professor truly demonstrates his inability to process the significance of what he has done. He has made those students worse, not better, and it makes no difference whether the students understand the damage he has done to them or not. This really all comes down to how one views the act of sex itself.

If the act of sex is no more significant than, say, the act of sneezing, or scratching an itch, or hiccapping, then the professor is correct: the students witnessed a biological process that is no more significant than any other biological process.

But if, as I maintain, the act of sex is the single most intimate event in two people’s lives, one that has the power to not only engender new human life (through conception and birth) but also emotionally bond two adults who are in love and in a committed relationship (traditionally and ideally, this has been marriage) then the professor has demonstrated a lapse in judgment of incalculable proportions. He has taken something that many would consider a very private act – even a sacred act – and has prostituted it and caused it to lose much of its mystery, its specialness, and its aura. He has cheapened that which is singular. He has made common that which should be protected and guarded.

Certainly the scientific study of sex education has a place in our universities, but Professor Bailey has overstepped the bounds of propriety and has done something he had no business doing: allowed the perverse fetishes of the smut from the Chicago subculture, along with his own perverse conceptions of what constitutes academic freedom, to contaminate the moral center of over one hundred students, who to this day do not comprehend the significance of what happened to them on February 21st.