

Oh, the humanities

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By National Post October 16, 2007

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First, the opaque nature of SSHRC grant proposals is necessary. In the context of scientific research, the ownership of ideas requires confidentiality while the ideas are in development. The same applies to research in the social sciences and humanities. In 2006 I worked as a research assistant on a SSHRC-funded project at the University of Calgary, and I quite rightly am unable to expand, until the project's publication, upon its content.

Second, Mr. Fulford's pot-shot at queer theory is derisive and disrespectful, clearly reaching for the sympathies of a conservative readership. His only explanation of queer theory states that it "prides itself on finding gay subtexts in apparently heterosexual stories," and he also calls the field "irrelevant."

Ultimately, queer theory offers strategies of deconstruction to challenge the way dominant discourses stratify society, to identify and break down the binary oppositions implicit in dominant modes of thought, which have implications for challenging the inner workings of a heterosexist, sexist social system.

The critical voices emerging from studies in the humanities are most concerned with relevance: relevance to humanity and to society; to promote self-criticism and self-reflection; to question, to challenge, to imagine. At the crux of any project in the humanities is the question of the relationship between knowledge and power. Mr. Fulford's column is an example of attempted censorship of an entire discipline; questions arise as to who owns knowledge and who should decide which knowledge is important.

Perhaps not everyone in the humanities grasps their importance to the understanding and critique of society. But "the current level of research" suggests to me, a master's student in the humanities, that this ultimate relevance is coming strong, and, thanks to the support of SSHRC, it can continue to be pursued.

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