



XX FACTOR
by Eleanor Beaton

Dalhousie gets an education

The tawdry details are by now widely reported. A group of fourth-year male Dalhousie dentistry students created a Facebook group, the DDS Gentlemen’s Club. They then posted a series of crude, violent and misogynistic entries concerning (among other topics) using chloroform and nitrous oxide to sexually subdue unsuspecting women, as well as which of their female classmates they’d most like to “hate-f__”.

Initially, it was widely suggested that the students involved would be expelled. After all, how could we possibly allow people who demonstrated such violent and misogynistic attitudes – and passed them off as funny – to be, well, *dentists*? Dentists who would be instructing patients (many of them

young women) to lie back, relax, suck back the gas and open wide. The idea was abhorrent.

And then, in mid-December, some time after the allegations came to light, Dalhousie University president Dr. Richard Florizone announced that the university would be launching a “restorative justice” approach to the debacle. Under this “enlightened” process, the female dentistry students who launched the complaints would sit down next to the men who wanted to “hate-f__” them and sort out a healing solution for everyone.

That’s when the mess hit the fan. Facebook and Twitter promptly lit up with a storm of feminine rage. Restorative justice? For these sinister jokers? Seriously?

The entire story smacked of leniency in the face of privilege. Some pundits mused, quite rightly, that had the Facebook posts been created by, say, the Dalhousie Janitor’s Club, the entire matter would have been dealt with swiftly, and I would not need to be writing this column.

At the time of writing, the complete extent of the punishment is still up in the air. After the Christmas break, Dalhousie announced that all 13 of the male Dalhousie Dentistry students have been suspended from clinical practice and will have to attend separate classes. We are told that some sort of disciplinary “process” (in addition to the restorative justice approach) is underway.

The argument for dragging out the fate of the “Dal Dentistry 13” seems to be that because these “gentlemen” have invested so much time and money in their dentistry education, and are a few credits shy of graduating, society must grant them a do-over – a courtesy that is never offered to the victims of sexual harassment or sexual violence.

In fact, when it comes to dealing with sexual violence, our society has a troubling habit of taking its sweet time – if it responds at all. In dragging things out, Dalhousie is (disappointingly) following the well-worn path of supporting the guys until they become a total liability.

Another underlying assumption is that expelling the men from school will almost certainly mean the end of their “lives”.

Getting expelled from a professional program does not mean your life is over. For people who think chloroforming unsuspecting women (and encouraging others to do the same) is funny, getting expelled is precisely the life-saving medicine required. Because if someone really thinks inciting sexual violence is OK, I can tell you this: you may well graduate in five months and become a dentist, but your “success” will be a brittle shell and you will be unhappy, unfulfilled and forever searching because you have no spine, no integrity and no moral code... unless we – your community who is outraged, but still loves you even when you do stupid things (because, alas, we all do stupid things) – hold you accountable so that you wake up and learn from your mistakes.

Taking the restorative justice approach in this instance isn’t enlightened and “women-friendly”, it’s pure cowardice. Using social media to incite sexual violence against the women who sit across the aisle from you in class? In a province that has just housed the tragedy of Rehteah Parsons? In a country whose major broadcaster just fired Jian Gomeishi? What have we learned, people. What have we learned?

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FEEDBACK

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