

Give hookahs a chance

With \$200 000 down the drain, the SU can't afford not to try something new



ADAM GAUMONT

My first reaction when I heard that Vice-President (Operations and Finance) Chris Cunningham bought four hookahs for the SU was, "What was he smoking?" After all, the last thing the SU needs is another frivolous expenditure, and the \$400 purchase was a big surprise to the other members of the Executive, who thought Cunningham's suggestion was nothing more than a far-fetched idea.

But after coming down from my original indignation, it occurred to me that a hookah bar might be just the thing the Powerplant needs to pull it out of the dredges of object poverty and into the mires of regular poverty.

Unfortunately, the rest of the Execs didn't share Cunningham's visions, and the hookah plan will now die a short, painless death before it ever got a chance to flail around a bit. But with the Powerplant slated to lose over \$200 000 this year, I don't see why the

Execs aren't willing to give it a shot.

Just picture it: you walk in from the cold to what was once an innocuous coffee shop known as Dewey's, through the velvet curtains into the main parlour. The host greets you with a knowing grin and leads you up the grand staircase, where rows of bubbling hookahs and low-lying furniture await. The scent wafts throughout the oversized warehouse, permeating the air and covering up whatever post-buffet stench remains.

While such a high-minded scheme may not replace hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost beer- and hamburger revenue, it's at least something that would pique students' interest. Hauling out another "hip redesign" or other costly renovation will only be met with snide indifference from most of this campus' constituents, while what amounts to a hallucinogen-free opium den would at least draw people in out of sheer curiosity.

What the various proponents of Powerplant revitalization fail to see is that there's actually nothing wrong with the building itself—it's all about its reputation. Just eight years ago, the 'Plant made \$131 616, and it was in the black as recently as 2001.

Since then, however, profits have slid steadily downwards. But buffet

tables aside, nothing about it has really changed—that is, except students' perception of it.

You can chalk up the relatively minor \$20 000–40 000 losses of years past to whatever you like: bad food, bad service, high rent, lame bands. But the massive six-digit downfalls mean that people just aren't going there anymore. It's a downward spiral: the 'Plant does shitty, less people go; less people go, the 'Plant gets shitter; eventually, people who used to dine there religiously haven't been in months, while first years who've never set foot in there assume it's some sort of haunted house full of sticky floors and broken VPOF dreams.

Sure, some of those people may flock to the lifeless conference room at the top of SUB instead, but the stigma surrounding that scary-looking brick building behind Dent-Pharm remains almost impossible to overcome. In order to get people to brave the long, lonely walk back through Quad, the SU needs to do something drastic—something that gets people talking again, even if only in an incredulous manner. That something might have been found last month in the form of big-ass herbal bongos, but thanks to the lack of vision by the rest of the SU's honchos, we may never know.

Vagina dialogue still needed



MARIA KOTOVYCH

Last week, three girls from John Jay Public High School in Cross River, a suburb of New York City, were suspended for saying the word vagina during a reading of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. The school principal had made the girls promise not to use the word vagina during the performance because there might be children in the audience, as he didn't feel that this term was appropriate for their tender ears.

While it's unclear whether the girls had actually promised not to say the word "vagina," this prohibition was absolutely ridiculous in the first place—the girls shouldn't have been put in a position where they were required to make such a promise at all. The word vagina isn't dirty. It isn't a swear. It's an anatomic reference to a body part—you can't get much less offensive than that. But by telling the girls that they can't use an anatomically correct term for a part their body, the school turned "vagina" and its referent into something dirty and taboo, thus completely negating the empowering message of Ensler's play.

This past Thursday was International Women's Day. Some people might wonder why, in North America, we still need a special day for women. The incident in New York tells us exactly why: if the word vagina is seen as something that can't be uttered in public, then it shows that female sexuality is still something that society sees as dirty and taboo.

A stigma still exists around female sexuality that just isn't there for males.

A woman who has many partners or who enjoys sex is called a "slut"; no equivalent exists for a man of similar description. Then we have "cougar" to refer to older women who seek out younger men. To be fair, an older man who goes after younger women will still earn himself the title of "dirty old man"; however, the implication of predatory behaviour isn't inherent in this title the way it is in its female counterpart.

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And let's not forget all of the lovely ways in which a woman can be insulted: "whore," "ho," and my personal favorite, "cunt." All of these terms are sexually based attacks at women, and the term "cunt" is a double-whammy: first, it slings an insult at her genitals, suggesting they're dirty or disgusting. Then it insults the woman by using that term to refer to her.

Girls start to see society's ignorant attitudes towards women's sexuality when they're quite young. My junior high school's sex ed program was a joke. In Grade Nine, for example, my teacher's idea of sex ed was telling us that "tampons can be used for birth control, as long as you have enough of them up there." Later, in high school, we studied the reproductive system in biology class—and you'd think that the book would take a scientific approach to teaching anatomy. Yet I don't remember any discussions about the clitoris when we studied the female reproductive system. It

certainly wasn't brought up during classroom lectures.

Women's sexuality is still seen through male-centric assumptions; nowhere is this more apparent than in pharmaceutical companies' feeble attempts in treating female "sexual disorders." Testosterone patches. Female Viagra.

Some groups are fighting to have female sexual dysfunction redefined and treated from a feminist perspective. These groups acknowledge that while there may be a physical cause for sexual dysfunction in some women, this purely physiological approach doesn't take into account many other issues that could prevent women from fully enjoying their sexual experiences. Relationship problems; fatigue from having a career and doing the majority of the housework; insecurity over body image; or having a partner who is sexually selfish or controlling—these are just some factors that might cause a woman not to enjoy sex. These are problems that can't be fixed with a simple testosterone patch.

Other women might have anxiety, depression or a history of sexual abuse that prevents her from fully expressing her sexuality. Finally, a woman raised among cultural/social/religious attitudes that teach what she's doing is "wrong" might also not be able to enjoy her sexual experiences. The current definitions of, and treatments for, female sexual orders puts too much emphasis on what is "wrong" with the woman and her genitals, while ignoring social and relationship factors (or her partner's sensitivity or competence as a lover) that could affect her ability to enjoy sex.

Women's concerns still have not achieved equality, at least not where sexuality is involved. So, as a starting point, I encourage everyone to open wide and say "vagina." There—didn't that feel good?





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