



Notes from Dr. Robert Minor's Recent visit to Parker

On October 22, Gender Matters sponsored an exciting and thought-provoking visit to Parker by Dr. Robert Minor, professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas. Dr. Minor is a nationally acclaimed lecturer, writer and workshop leader on issues of gender, sexual orientation and active change and author of *Scared Straight: Why It's So Hard to Accept Gay People and Why It's So Hard to Be Human*.

Dr. Minor spoke to 7th - 12th graders at Morning Ex, met with faculty and students during the school day and shared his thoughts about gender role conditioning with parents and outside community in the evening.

His Morning Ex talk offered students a chance to examine and question the conditioning of gender roles and societal expectations that might prohibit a person from expressing their full human potential.

He began with the comment that, 100 years ago, pink was a "manly" color; now, it doesn't "feel" manly to wear pink. This is an example of gender conditioning, which is learning how to "act" from the system.

Dr. Minor pointed out that adults don't even know how to relate to a newly born baby if they don't know whether the baby is a boy or a girl. "What is the first question a new parent will be asked?" he said. "Is it a boy or a girl?"

He stated that the message of our culture is that "boys are better." Girls learn that it's worse to be a girl, yet a girl must be truly a girl. Tomboys are tolerated while they are young but each is pressed to be more of a "girl" as she grows older. Girls are encouraged to diminish themselves and be demure, to literally take up less space when they sit. They usually cross their legs and pull in their arms. Boys, on the other hand, are "allowed" to take up space. Notice how boys and men sit. They learn the oppressor role, and a boy will be put down if he doesn't take on that role.

Gender conditioning in our society also manifests itself in the way men are not supposed to hold hands walking down the street. Men learn not to pay attention to their bodies. They are not supposed to feel when they are hurt. "Act like a man!" starts in pre-school.

Dr. Minor said that studies show the worst thing school kids, even as young as pre-school, can say to each other is to call someone "stupid," "gay," "queer" or a "fag," even if the kids have no idea what the words mean. They just know it's bad to call someone those things.

At puberty, a girl's main concern turns to how her body looks. The focus is on bodies and body parts. Dr. Minor noted that girls are conditioned to "get a man" who will love and protect them-as if they can't be loveable without a man (and what do they need protection from?).

All this conditioning, Dr. Minor said, is to make boys grow into warriors and to keep women in their "place" of getting a man and standing by him. Our individual uniqueness becomes more and more repressed. Furthermore, the materialism of our culture offers us products to fulfill our human needs, to make us more loveable or more appealing. Dr. Minor remarked that the advertising industry needs to learn to sell things in a different way.

Dr. Minor's evening talk to parents covered much of these same issues. He also stressed that our society is built on a "war model." We must create warriors, and the language of war is the language we use in this country. Homophobia, which Dr. Minor defines as "fear of getting close to your own sex," serves the societal drive to create warriors, for, as Dr. Minor says, you can't kill someone you feel close to.

At both the morning and evening talks, Dr. Minor was quite open to opposing opinions. But whether the audiences agreed or disagreed with his statements, there was plenty of opportunity for all who attended to examine the many ways we each learn how to express who we are. The invitation to express our individuality fully lies at the heart of Dr. Minor's work.

Anyone interested in learning more about Dr. Minor, or purchasing his books or his new pamphlet (*Help I'm a Parent! Fully Human Parents Raising Fully Human Children*), can view his Web site at www.fairnessproject.org.