

'Hate flier' investigation turns up embarrassment

By Kristin Casady

I am pleased to announce that a resolution has been reached in one of the more politically sensitive and publicly embarrassing cases in recent University history, otherwise known as the "hate crime" case involving the "Dream Date/Dream Girl" fliers. I speak as someone intimately involved — the accused.

Commentary

In this conundrum that has at intervals seemed to take on the appearance of a circus, a McCartheyque witchhunt, or a PC joke, it has been difficult to answer the question "What the hell is this all about?"

Some feminists think it's all about misogynistic hate fliers. The Office of Public Safety and Student Conduct Coordinator Elaine Green think it's about taking "corrective actions" against "hate fliers attacking feminists" (ODE, May 6). The lesbian community thinks it's about an investigation that made them feel unsafe. My mother thinks it's about lawyers who charge \$65 an hour. *The Commentator* (June 1991) sees it as an episode of the politically correct crucifying one of their own.

As part of that unique breed of lesbian-feminist-hate-crime-committing-integration, I wish to offer an interpretation. This case is about a financially strapped university that used over 200 paid hours to garner PR for appearing tough on hate crimes. It was an effort that resulted only in their public embarrassment.

I suggest, however, that this is far from the worst conclusion one might make. This investigation, launched to make a public example of me, may have done serious damage to the environment of free speech and political expression on campus.

Certainly Green, Myles Brand and OPS would come down in favor of political expression on campus, and would never intend to stifle activism — even the kind that refuses to operate under the auspices of an EMU Suite 1 group. So why were my fliers so zealously pursued, especially when any but the most cavalier analysis would show that these fliers were linking representations of militarism, misogyny and war profiteering?

They were honoring the complaints of the radical feminists who were upset about the fliers, as Green claimed in an April phone call. I find this difficult to believe, as no one has really listened to feminists before. But in this "sensitivity" trend sweeping the country, such an investigation is approved. It was a source of embarrassment for several sides — in this case when my gender became known, and the Women's Center changed its view of the fliers from a "hate crime" to "pretty stupid political satire," according to coordinator Hasani Kudura, coordinator (*Register-Guard*, May 7). Maybe this means some of these feminists feel pretty stupid; in Women's Studies parlance, women cannot be sexist.

If these feminists had taken a

moment to consider why I used a negative depiction of women on the fliers — to expose the misogyny in war language and visual representations of war — then maybe they would not have complained.

A thorough documentation of every ploy in this investigation requires more space than I have here. But I wish to provide you with a sense of the heavy-handed nature of the way the case was pursued.

An acquaintance of mine, Alexandra Foote, offered an alternate explanation for my fliers in her Women's Self Defense course back in February when they came under attack as being hateful to women. A concerned feminist took it upon herself to give Foote's name to OPS, where they had an officer assigned full time to the "hate-flier" case. Foote was, over a matter of many weeks, initially gently encouraged and later insistently harassed to reveal my identity.

At first, OPS claimed they just wanted to talk with me about it, then "who did it and why." They promised, notably, that I wouldn't be punished. I continually refused, not out of cowardice but on principle. I was offended by this farcical investigation, angered by sloppy interpretations of my flier, for example (ODE, Feb. 19), and busy with school.

Unwavering in their investigation fervor, OPS continued their search. They committed a grave dishonor by distributing the Unwanted Sexual Attention forms in Foote's class and using them for handwriting analysis. This ought to fly in the face of OPS's claims of being tough on sexual assault and creating a safe environment for women on campus. Thanks to this handwriting analysis, a woman was called in, read her miranda rights and interrogated for hours.

Despite OPS's inconclusive

evidence, she was detained, questioned at length and threatened with prosecution. They had conjectural evidence that the "hate-flier" artist's name was some derivative of Christine and that the perpetrator was a lesbian. These notions led to two lesbian women being unnecessarily frightened and wrongfully charged. The case took on such histrionic proportions that one of these women's employer was contacted and questioned.

I was livid at the turn of events and despite my earlier decision to wash my hands of the situation, I wrote an anonymous letter of explanation for my fliers and my refusal to come forward. That this was inadequate to end the investigation (for this letter was written in early March) shows the dishonesty of the prosecution. After all, OPS had assured Foote in her interrogation that they merely wished to ensure that I wasn't being hateful. I made this exceedingly clear in the letter and proving that my set of fliers had no connection with the racist and malevolent set that appeared in January was blatantly obvious due to their dissimilarity of both style and message.

But Green, Carey Drayton and the rest of the prosecution team apparently felt they could ride a wave of politically correct support into fame. They would have done well to examine the state of similar "sensitive speech" cases occurring on campuses throughout the United States. Higher courts tended to find against this wave of PC thought police. Rather, Green and Drayton wrote a commentary for the *Emerald* under the headline "Strong actions taken after hate fliers posted" (ODE, May 6), which was a shot at self-aggrandizement that backfired.

Public support leaned in my direction, and it would seem

that vocal protest on the part of students, faculty and administrative members changed the balance of power a bit in this case. One undergraduate's opinion that her civil rights were violated amounts to little, but mass concern about the state of free speech on campus counts for a lot. I am also thankful for the unflagging support of the Office of Student Advocacy.

A settlement has been negotiated, the terms of which the defendants largely stipulated — "All charges dropped, an apology to the lesbian community, an acknowledgement that this case raised speech issues, and no agreement on the part of the accused to release the University of liability."

I worry now about what cannot be undone with apologies. Has political expression been damaged irreparably? I know that after the tremendous stress of the case and the needless harassment of myself and others over the past four months, I would have thought twice early in February. That is a sad conclusion to come to, for I still stand wholeheartedly behind their anti-war and feminist message.

Incredibly, I still find myself fielding criticism that these fli-

ers were offensive and depicted women in poor taste. Of course they did. I was trying to visually represent a form of misogyny that is only on the surface cloistered and crowded out in our glorified sporting event that was created of the Persian Gulf War. It is all already there — I just wanted to co-opt all its ugliness and show it to you for what it is.

My advice is to reread the commentary by Drayton and Green published May 6 in the *Emerald* and think carefully about the commitments they articulated there. Know that such Orwellian words are coming from the mouths of representatives of the ultimate institutions of thought around the country — universities. What is really accomplished with attempts of institutions to implement an ideology that involves the regulation of thought and speech? What does it really mean to "[Be] aware early enough to the development of sensitive and controversial situations to take corrective actions"?

In its conclusion this article by Green and Drayton stated, "We've just begun." Let's hope not.

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