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Register-Guard guilty of spreading rape myths

Two recent editorials have contained offensive attitudes that miss the meaning of consent

Do the editors of The Register-Guard have daughters? How about wives, mothers or sisters? Anyone who has read their recent editorials about the sexual misconduct case at the University wouldn't think so. The Guard's views propagate a dangerous rape myth — the notion that a woman who has had prior sexual relations with someone can no longer say "no" to future sexual relations. Autumn DePoe, communications director for the ASUO, called the first piece the Guard did on the subject "the worst editorial [she] had ever read."

Think we're exaggerating? Read this direct quote: "The acknowledged prior sexual intimacy and the voluntary nature of the overnight visits in both cases would destroy the credibility of any charge of sexual assault."

OPINION



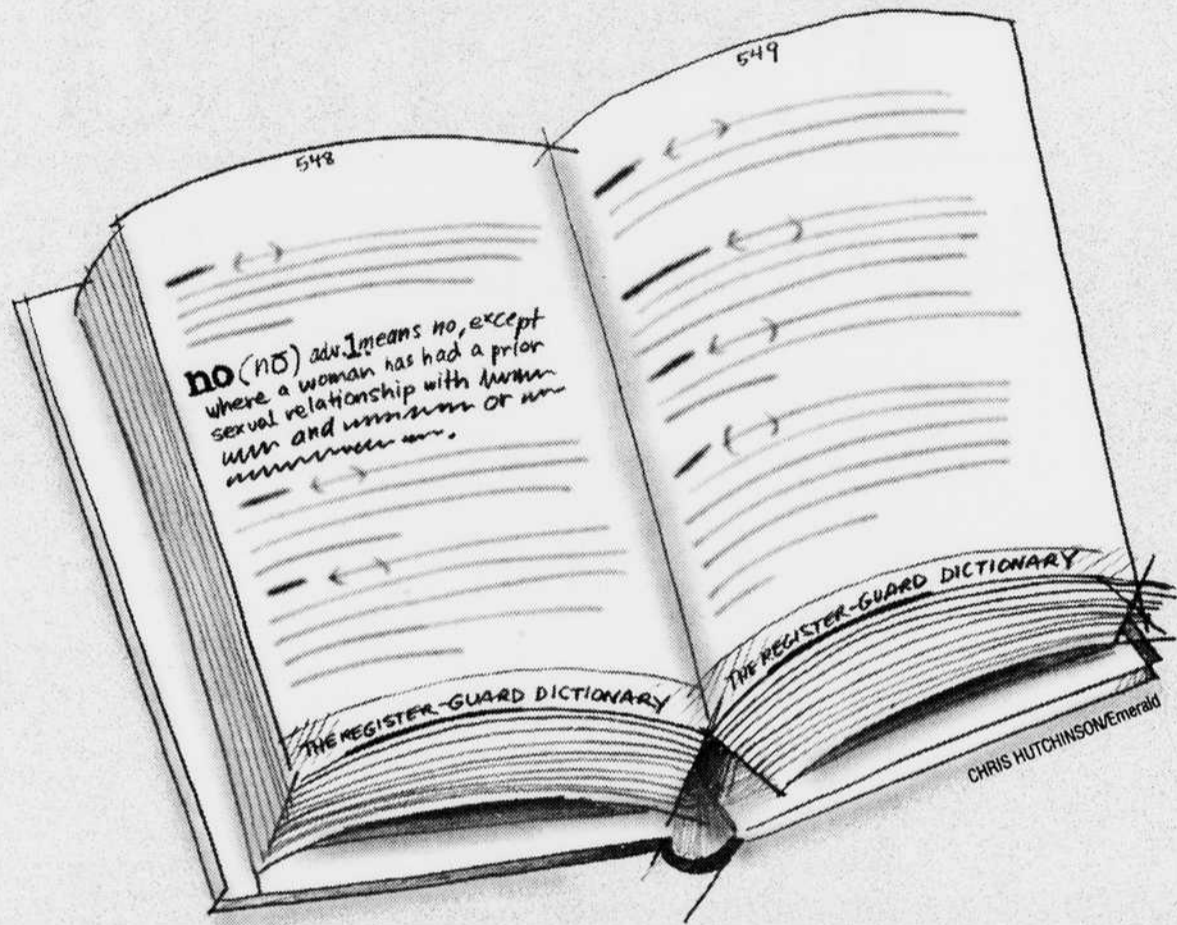
Jeff Shaw

There are two important parts of that sentence: what it tells you and what it doesn't. It does tell you that, by the Guard's standards, any woman who has had any sexual contact with a man has no right to say

"no" in the future. The problems this causes are obvious: what if someone changes their mind? And what about breakups? According to the Guard, any sexual contact with someone obligates you to accommodate their sexual desires — even if their desires exceed your stated limits.

And those limits are exactly what the Guard doesn't tell you about. In each case, the woman reports having explicitly said beforehand that she did *not* want to have sex. One woman says she explicitly told the man "no" during the act itself. This allegation is glossed over in the Guard's editorial. Why the selective emphasis of case details?

Most frightening about publishing this kind of stuff, though, is that it discourages reporting of a crime which already has a low rate of disclosure. "I could definitely see [the editorials] as discouraging reporting of sexual assault crimes," DePoe said.



"They not only said they didn't believe the women, but they actually wished [the accused man] good luck in his endeavors."

Apparently without any recognition of irony, the Guard admitted that the women didn't press criminal charges "because they didn't want the pain and embarrassment of a courtroom trial." Imagine that. It's a good thing they didn't know with what care and delicacy the Guard would treat their feelings. If I knew my reputation would be dragged through the mud in the local newspaper, I might think twice about reporting a crime too.

Remember, also, that the Guard published this opinion twice. As if the above quotation from their first editorial wasn't enough, they came back on Feb. 2 with this gem (one can imagine the incredulous tone in which they designed this sentence to be read): "Both women are accusing the defendant of having sexual intercourse with them without permis-

sion even though each acknowledges a prior sexual relationship with the man and having agreed to spend the night at his house."

Again, they don't tell you what the women claim, that the parties involved agreed not to have sex on the night in question. It's sad that we live in a world where people can be victimized by someone they trust. It's sadder still that newspapers publish opinions like these, designed to shame people who have done nothing wrong.

"I've read the Register-Guard ever since I was able to read," DePoe said. "Reading that editorial made me disappointed in a newspaper that I had read daily. I'd never want to give my money to a newspaper that encourages a rapist society and discourages women from reporting rapes." I've talked to a few people already who have canceled their subscriptions as a response to these opinions.

One can only hope more will follow suit. Victims of sexual miscon-

duct deserve understanding, compassion and support, not condemnation. And we all deserve a society in which you can agree not to have sex and have your wishes respected.

At the top of its masthead, our local daily claims that "a newspaper is a citizen of its community." Through its editorials, the Guard has been an irresponsible public citizen to this point. But if the editors are serious about upholding that creed, I have a simple proposal.

The Guard could help make up for its misinformation by reaffirming, in print, this simple truth: When a woman says "no" to any kind of sexual behavior and then someone goes forward with that behavior, it's rape.

That much is plain and simple. To everyone, anyway, except The Register-Guard.

Jeff Shaw is a columnist for the Emerald. His columns appear alternate Wednesdays. His views do not necessarily those of the newspaper.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Firm should get credit

The recent story focusing upon the role that students have played and are currently playing in the renovations of the EMU omitted several critical points of information. The most glaring omission from the article was any reference to the landscape architectural firm of Cameron/McCarthy/Gilbert, who are the designers of the outdoor space currently nearing completion. The article in Wednesday's Emerald (Feb. 4, ODE) completely ignored the fact that while student designs from two studios I taught were shown to the Design Advisory Group, and to CMG, they were used as idea generators, or as places to start, not as a singular driving force behind the project. While many good ideas came out of the studio work, including many of the ideas you see being incorporated into the new courtyard, the integration of those ideas into a buildable and beautiful design is fully the work of CMG, and credit should be given where it is due. Also left out of the article was any reference to the generosity of CMG in giving our students an opportunity to play a role in parts of the design and construction of the

new courtyard (planting design and installation, irrigation design and installation), and specifically Larry Gilbert's interaction with our students in leading weekly walking tours of the construction site that give our students an opportunity to see how a project like this comes to fruition. While the contributions of the students will in fact save money that can be spent in other areas of the project that were shortchanged or omitted due to an already limited budget, a point of equal or greater import is the educational role that these opportunities offer to our students. While this last point was made in the article, the role that CMG played in making it happen was left out.

Stan Jones
 Professor, landscape architecture

Looking for a lawsuit

If I were Donna Albro, Bill Miner, Ben Unger, Robert Wasson, a member of the ASUO Women's Center — or the ODE, for that matter — I would think twice (having obviously failed completely to think the first time) about using the label of "rapist" quite so

casually. As I understand it, "rapist" is a title that can be bestowed on a criminal at the conclusion of a criminal judicial proceeding followed by a conviction, all in a court of law. Prosecution under the Student Conduct Code evidently is not required to meet the standards that would be required by a court — although it certainly should be. But the use of such language following a SCC investigation and "conviction" in such a case does not exempt anyone from being sued for slander or libel. President Frohnmayer, in ordering a long-overdue review of this case, is obviously aware of this.

Dontá Graham-Preston may or may not be guilty; we'll never really know until there has been some sort of thorough and impartial — and legal — investigation. In the mean time, all the P.C. rhetoric about "rapists" and "survivors" won't alter the fact that this whole business looks a lot more like a Star chamber than a legitimate inquiry — or that it also looks like a humongous lawsuit just waiting to happen.

Michael E. Stamm
 Graduate secretary, English department

Thumbs



To Culinary Workers Union Local 226:

After being on strike since Sept. 21, 1991, The New York Times reports that the union finally won a contract from the Frontier hotel in Las Vegas. In the more than six years 550 workers were on strike, not one crossed the picket lines. Workers were protesting a variety of unfair labor practices, charges upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. The victory is part of a larger growth of labor in Vegas, which AFL-CIO President John Sweeney called "the hottest union city in America."



To the U.S. Marine Corps:

After an incident even the Marines admit displayed "recklessness" in which a low-flying jet severed the cable on a ski lift and killed 20 people in Italy, a steady series of damning revelations about the way the military treats the communities in which it has bases have emerged. Not only did the Marines admit their pilot was in error, but reports have also come out that such hazardous behavior was not uncommon in the region. Worse, in the days following the accident, the Marines and other officials have shown great disrespect for community members investigating the incident, going so far as to deny the plane had a flight recorder late last week, then delivering the recorder from the plane over the weekend after an engineer confirmed the military was dishonest about the presence of such a device on the plane.