

NORTHWESTnews

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MIXED MEDIA

KGW gets an earful in the ol' Dr. Laura department; Willamette Week resorts to name calling by Inga Sorensen

About 500 protesters gathered March 21 outside Paramount Studios

KGW Channel 8 has been drenched in calls, e-mails and letters from people opposed to the Portland-based television station's intentions to air a weekday program built around Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a hot-button physiologist whose radio talk show, *The Dr. Laura Program*, attracts an elephantine audience of 20 million listeners.

Paramount Television plans to launch a syndicated television program hosted by Schlessinger in the fall.

In the Feb. 18 issue, *Just Out* broke the story that KGW is the local station picking up the show, which is slated to begin in September.

Schlessinger has publicly labeled gay men and lesbians as "deviants" and the products of "a biological error." She also touts so-called reparative therapy.

In February, Brenda Buratti, KGW's program director, told us her station began negotiating with Paramount last summer, and she said KGW management was not then aware of Schlessinger's views on homosexuality.

The pending program, Buratti said, "was pitched on [Schlessinger] solving relationship issues." She says only later did management learn of Schlessinger's anti-gay comments.

We asked Buratti if KGW has received much feedback from the public since word spread that her station is to air the show.

"Oh, yeah," she says. "We've gotten several e-mails and calls."

In fact, an estimated 30 letters and calls—or, as Buratti calls it, "a huge amount, considering the show is not even on the air yet."

It appears Schlessinger's professed views have unleashed a flood of disgust among concerned citizens.

According to Buratti, all those who contacted the station about the yet-to-be-seen television program tagged Schlessinger's anti-gay positions as the reason they opposed the program's airing.

"Nobody mentioned anything else but the anti-gay issue," she says.

Buratti has spoken with Paramount directly to stress KGW's concerns.

"I told Paramount we don't want to see any group of people disparaged," she says, adding, "Paramount said, 'We don't either.'"

On March 21, hundreds of demonstrators assembled at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, Calif., to demand that Paramount Television drop plans to produce the Schlessinger show.

"Paramount would never give a TV show to a host that called any other minority 'biological errors,'" blasted Robin Tyler, California organizer for StopDrLaura.com, one of the demonstration co-sponsors.

"It is outrageous that Paramount chooses to be in business with a woman who is literally dangerous to the gay community," chimed David Lee, co-creator and executive producer of the hit television series *Frasier*, which is also a Paramount production. "She may not have a club in her hand, but she encourages an atmosphere where those who do wield weapons feel free to use them."

A day earlier, the West Hollywood City Council adopted a resolution that reads: "Let it be resolved that the City of West Hollywood condemns Paramount Studios for its part in spreading Dr. Schlessinger's message of hate by giving her a wider forum from which she can shamelessly attack a minority community."

A few days later, the head of a national association of sexual minority physicians and medical students asked television stations planning to carry the show to reconsider, citing Schlessinger's "lack of clinical credentials and the prospect of harm to gay, lesbian and questioning youth."

Dr. Donald Abrams, president of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, wrote: "We are working very hard with experts in the field to reduce the number of suicides among gay, lesbian and questioning youth. Even if Laura Schlessinger stops using terms like 'biological errors' and 'deviants' to describe these young people, you are giving her a platform to espouse views that are not only destructive, but at odds with genuine medical findings."

He added: "None of us would want to deny her right to free speech or your right to air what you choose. However, you do make choices...."

We hope you will take the high road and not participate in the dissemination of this kind of hate speech that causes so much harm to an already vulnerable group of people."

Earlier in the month, Schlessinger issued a statement that said, in part: "Regrettably, some of the words I've used have hurt some people, and I am sorry for that. Words that I have used in a clinical context have been perceived as judgment. They were not meant to characterize homosexual individuals or encourage others to disparage homosexuals."

Some gay and lesbian activists perceived the remark to be an apology and became further outraged when, a few days later in a *Boston Herald* column, Schlessinger said her statement was a "clarification," not an "apology."

Buratti, meanwhile, says she doesn't believe Paramount will pull the program prior to its airing. She urges viewers to take a wait-and-see approach.

"Given all the controversy, I have a feeling [the show] won't even touch this issue," Buratti says, referring to gay-related matters.

In related news, organizers of Portland's pride celebration dismissed any notion of approaching KGW as a possible sponsor of the June event.

During a March 23 meeting, Pride Northwest Inc. board members said it would be inappropriate for the station that is promoting Schlessinger's show to be officially associated with queer pride.

Schlessinger's television program is scheduled to air Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to noon on KGW beginning in early September.

SURE, WE'RE QUEER, BUT FREAKS TOO?

There was something a smidgen nettling, albeit halfway funny, about a snippet found in the March 22 issue of *Willamette Week*.

In a piece titled "Freaks and Geeks," a bolded, subheadish bleep read: "On an otherwise dull March weekend, an underground group of Oregonians metaphorically came out of the closet. No, we're not talking about homosexuals. We're talking about something freakier—though we doubt Dr. Laura would approve of this, either."

Freakier than homosexuals? What has society come to?

NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

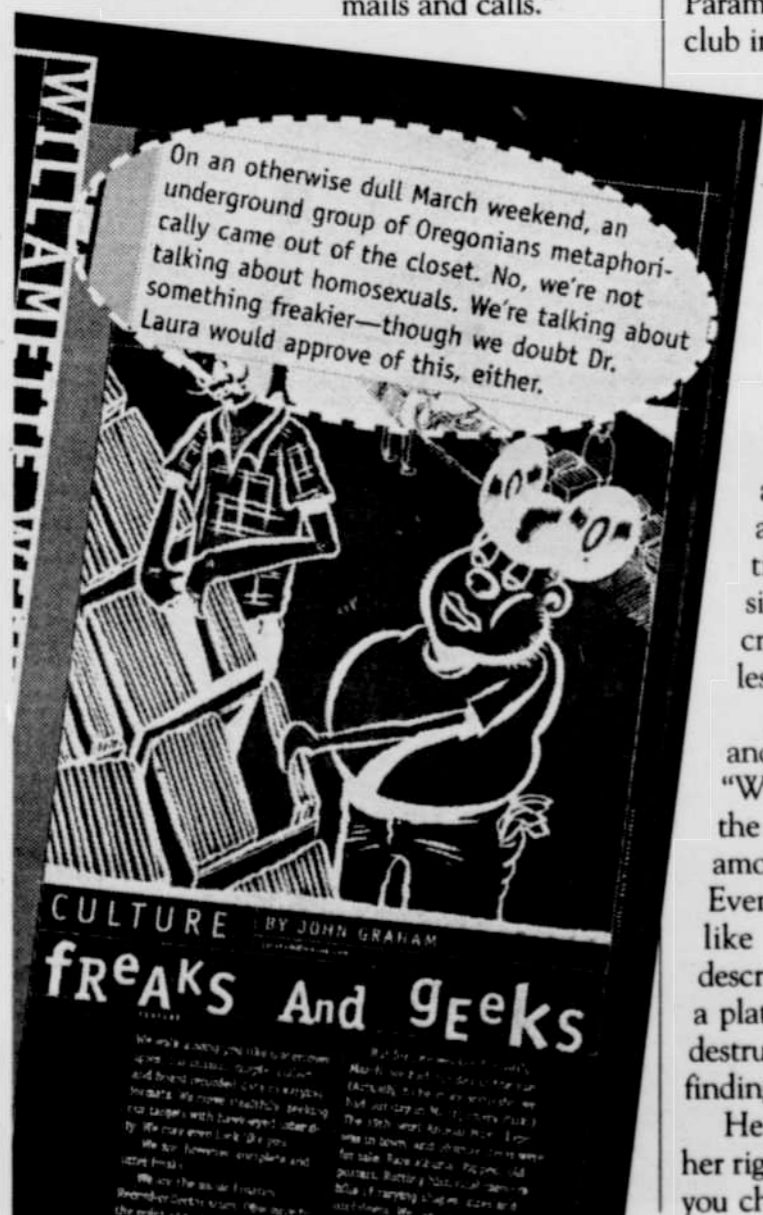
OK, so maybe you were thinking that *Out* had become an irrelevant national mag with its incessant heroin-chic fashion spreads.

Take a peek at the March issue, however, and you'll snag a swath of history and a little local flavor via a photo essay called "Big Night," about the international court system.

The text and accompanying pictures highlight the Oct. 23, 1999, convergence upon Portland by court enthusiasts from Oregon and beyond who attended the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court's investiture of new emperor and empress at the Melody Ballroom.

The piece also notes that the Rose City's court system is the second oldest in the land, after San Francisco's.

■ Got a news tip? Let us hear it! Contact News Editor INGA SORENSEN at (503) 236-1252, ext. 17, or inga@justout.com.



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