

Staff Editorial

'We are editors, not censors'

Nearly 12 years ago, The Davidsonian deceptively published a satire column by a fictional author on the subject of pornography. As to be expected, the newspaper received a barrage of criticism.

To quote a staff editorial entitled "P.C. (Preventing Censorship)" (April 11, 1994) from that controversy, "What most outraged Davidsonians said was this: 'I can't believe you printed that sexist article.'"

Sound familiar?

Recent subject matter in The Yowl satire section has become a lightning rod for the same sort of criticism, as the content of these pages will attest.

The criticism, like that of 1994, misses its mark.

The editorial continued:

Now wait a minute. These critics are walking on dangerous ground, even if unintentionally ...

To limit any kind of speech, no matter how extreme the view and no matter how noble the cause, would be to insult everything a college stands for. The way to make progress is to change what people think, not what they say... Repression only causes resentment and brings no solutions.

On the other hand, getting a point of view into the open will spark debate and fertilize the ground where people can grow and change. We are editors, not censors. We edit trite vulgarities as a simple matter of course, but we have no qualms about printing bizarre points of view. Once, people thought the idea of women voting was pretty bizarre, too.

College is not about being proper. It's about learning. We should thank our administrators and faculty that Davidson has not fallen into the verbal police state that has infected many colleges and universities.

What are the lessons here?

First, satire can offend, and one can make the case that it should. The Yowl addresses real stereotypes and serious issues on this campus. Without identifying problems, there is no way to solve them. The Yowl has served to jump start much-needed conversations on gender issues.

Second, suppressing satire of misogynistic attitudes on campus amounts to censorship. There is a fine distinction between outrage at the message and at the messenger, and we hope that the college will avoid falling into a "verbal police state."

No member of our staff discredits the notion of equality. So let's not frame this debate around definitions of feminism. The Yowl, The Davidsonian and its readers have injected this problem into the college consciousness. We should all seize this rare opportunity to work towards a solution.

The Davidsonian

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The Davidsonian is published Wednesdays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 7182, Davidson, NC 28035-7182. Phone (704) 894-2148. E-mail Davidsonian@davidson.edu. Our offices are located in Room 411 of the Alvarez College Union. Opinions expressed in letters to the editors or commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board of The Davidsonian. Subscriptions cost \$50.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DWC doesn't get it

The Davidson Women's Committee's response to the now infamous Yowl articles stated, "a clever satirist knows that well-written satire may antagonize or tease its subject, however these articles were simply harmful." The Davidson Women's Committee, however, gravely misinterpreted the object of the articles' satire.

It is not women who are being satirized, but rather the two clearly outrageous and pathetic male narrators. The opinions of "Sketchy Steve" and wrestling frat-boy "Harry Greene" regarding women are clearly carried beyond the brink of reasonableness and into the realm of absurdity.

"Sketchy Steve," as his name implies (the term "sketchy" is the new adjective for "dirt bag"), hardly functions to serve as role model "to encourage men to act in an inappropriate manner towards women." In fact his "fly boy" arrogance, along with "Harry Greene's" meat-headed outlook, is clearly criticized by the articles' implied authors. The Yowl articles hardly "perpetuate stereotypes." Instead, they cleverly condemn their narrators' behaviors as absurd and their misogynistic attitudes as grossly inappropriate.

The Davidson Women's Committee's poor interpretation of the articles stems from an overly-eager feminist tendency to apply a narrow and potentially irresponsible world view to many of life's situations. It's time to for the members of this ill-premised crusade to take a pill and recognize the true intentions of these effective works of satire.

Jack Hubbard '06

Yowl satire off-base

In the face of recent misogynist satire in The Yowl, I'd like to write to affirm my commitment to feminism at Davidson. Feminism teaches me to celebrate individual voices and differences—of women and men. Feminism teaches me that equality for all citizens will only be possible if we radically and creatively reimagine society. This means likewise exposing and dismantling existing power structures of all kinds which accord rights and privileges to the few based on gender, race, class, physical ability, sexuality, age, and creed.

In the spirit of feminism, I hope The Yowl writers will return to satire that causes productive discomfort to those who assume privilege is justifiable, entitlement is natural, and passivity equals good manners.

Ann M. Fox

Associate Professor of English
Gender Studies Coordinator

Men and misogyny

Concerning drivel in the Yowl, offensive frat party flyers, letters of righteous indignation on the part of faculty (which I do agree with and have signed, but feel are generally not so useful pedagogically), I wonder this: where are the cries of protest from the men on this campus? Are they cowards?

Misogyny is everybody's problem.

As a father of daughters, brother of a sister, son of a mother, husband of a wife,

Scott Denham

Professor of German

Director, Center for

Interdisciplinary Studies

SISTAHS speak out

The members of the SISTAHS of Essence of Davidson campus, an organization that seeks to provide a support system for women, were very upset by the recent satires in The Yowl section of The Davidsonian.

As a support system for women, we found these satires offensive and inappropriate. We hope that the views represented in The Yowl are not representative of the overall view of women on campus. Further, we find that messages like these, although for comic relief, are actually degrading to the integrity of Davidson College as a whole. These messages are derogatory and we do not believe they should have been allowed to be printed in The Davidsonian. Just as blatantly racist or violent articles would be censored, we would hope that same discretion would be used in the future before printing sexist material.

While we understand that The Yowl is not supposed to be taken very seriously, that does not excuse its editors from responsibility for what they print and the ideas their satirical pieces may perpetuate on campus. Our organization was completely disappointed and discouraged by these sexist additions to The Davidsonian.

Jacquie Milhouse '08

Secretary of SISTAHS

The Davidsonian welcomes letters to the editor. Please e-mail submissions of no more than 250 words to davidsonian@davidson.edu by 6 p.m. on Sunday. We reserve the right to edit for content, brevity and grammar.

Faculty members speak out as feminists

As faculty who are troubled by a range of recent events – from ostensibly satirical features in The Davidsonian, to themes of parties on the Court, to more general practices across campus that denigrate women – we are compelled to speak out:

... because we believe in the liberating power of education;

... because we believe that a keystone of a liberal arts education is working to understand and value other's perspectives;

... because we believe that to be fully human and humane, we should cherish both our similarities and our differences;

... because we believe that when our unconsidered actions hurt others we need to understand why and try to understand their perspectives;

... because we believe that laughter is an essential part of the human condition, and good humor should not cause undue pain for others;

... because we believe that we should speak out, and help others—especially students—to find their voices;

... because we believe that maturity means anticipating and accepting the consequences of our actions;

... because we believe in the need for political, economic, and social equality, regardless of sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, disability, or creed.

For these reasons, we embrace the word "feminism." We are feminists who seek to establish a welcoming environment for those, male and female, who find these instances disturbing. We encourage them to speak with us and with others about their perceptions in an effort to bring about constructive change.

Signed:

Daniel W. Aldridge, III; Chris Alexander; Dennis Appleyard; Ruth Ault; Pat Baker; Tim Beach-Verhey; Ruth Beeston; Jonathan Berkey; Karen Bernd; Shireen Campbell; Verma Case; Kelly Chaston; Keyne Cheshire; Helen Cho; Suzanne Churchill; Ann Marie Costa; Jacquelyn Culpepper; Scott Denham; Vivien Dietz; Megan Drinkwater; Amanda Ewington; McArthur Freeman, II; Joe Gardner; Gail Gibson; Sharon Green; Karen Hales; Cindy Hauser; Alberto Hernandez-Chioldes; Laurie Heyer; Carol Higham; Pam Hay; Annie Ingram; Herb Jackson; Pearl James; Gayle Kaufman; Kyra Kietrys; Martha Koljonen; Carole Kruger; William Lawing; Neil Lerner; Ralph Levering; Cynthia Lewis; Larry Ligo; Barbara Lom; Fuji Lozada; Scott MacKenzie; William Mahony; Magdalena Maiz-Peña; Jane Mangan; Gerardo Marti; Maggie McCarthy; Kathleen McElhane; Sean Mckeever; Sally McMillen; Linda C. McNally; Elizabeth Mills; Kristi Multhaup; Greta Munger; Jeanne Neumann; Lou Ortmyer; Ed Palmer; Pat Peroni; Karl A. Plank; Lynn Poland; Shelley Rigger; Scott Ripley; Carlos Manuel Rivera; Susan Roberts; Leon Sachs; Samuel Sanchez y Sanchez; Lola Santamaria; Cort Savage; Nina Serebrennikov; Vivian Shen; Fred Smith; Ray Sprague; Jennifer Stasack; Mary Thornberry; Patricia Tilburg; Kathie Turner; Mary Vásquez; Onita Vaz-Hooper; Angela Willis; Anne Blue Willis

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