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The Daily Tar Heel

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DUELING EDITORIALS

Changing Mr(s). Tingle

The editorial board locks horns over whether a California teacher should have been fired after deciding to have a sex-change operation.

SOPHIE MILAM
EDITORIAL WRITER

Dana Rivers used to teach high school journalism. But Rivers is no longer allowed to teach on account of being a woman — that is, since he became a woman.

Earlier this year, Rivers — formerly David Warfield — began hormone treatment in preparation for an upcoming sex-change operation that will complete his transformation into a woman.

Last weekend, high school administrators informed Rivers he would be fired due to his "evident unfitness for service" as a teacher.

Despite the glaring injustice in firing a person based on irrelevant factors like the nature of sexual organs, Rivers' dismissal is not the most hideous grievance committed here.

Psychologists have long considered isolation to be the most debilitating form of torture. Those alienated from society are driven mad, much like our young schoolyard-killers. Often ignored, frequently ridiculed, these students have been rejected by their peers and eventually lose control.

Unfortunately, these days losing control means mowing down classmates with a semiautomatic weapon.

Parents and administrators could help prevent such atrocities by teaching students to accept those unlike themselves and encouraging students to reach out to forsaken classmates.

Instead, adults choose to discharge a teacher simply because his uniqueness might distract some students from learning, thereby setting the example that individuality should not be tolerated.

These adult role models are teaching kids to ostracize a person, strip him of his dignity, take away his job and tarnish his name simply because his differences make them uncomfortable.

Doesn't anyone remember the ugly duckling? As children we learned not to disregard someone simply because he was different on the outside — he might grow into a swan one day.

We spent the last century rebelling against the notion that a person is less intelligent, less worthy or less human because of surface qualities like race or gender. Didn't we learn anything?

Rivers' former students are being taught to discriminate. They're being taught to hate, to exclude and to ridicule. But worst of all, they are being taught that it's not OK to be unique — that they will be shunned for being different.

Is this really the message we want to send to our children?

If parents and administrators are so concerned about a student's ability to learn, maybe they ought to be a little more selective about what it is their students are learning.

JOE MONACO
EDITORIAL WRITER

Students do not have the right to be disruptive in school. Fittingly, teachers shouldn't either.

David Warfield served in the Navy, worked as a political consultant and was a rafting instructor before becoming a high school journalism teacher in Antelope, Calif.

However, through it all, Warfield felt he was really a woman trapped in a man's body.

In April, shortly after beginning hormone therapy, Warfield — who has since changed his name to Dana Lee Rivers — announced to the school's principal that by September, he would be returning to school as a woman. Rivers claims it was this announcement that led the district to fire him last weekend.

If River's assertion that the dismissal was the result of his hormone therapy and planned sex-change operation, then he might have a legitimate complaint. It would seem that such a firing has the potential to get the ol' "First Amendment Violation" sticker smacked on its forehead.

However, I think we need to give the administrators the benefit of the doubt and realize that Rivers' dismissal was based not on the sex change itself but on the potentially disruptive effects his presence could have on the school's learning environment.

The administrators are responsible for creating an environment conducive to learning. If they honestly believe Rivers' presence would be an unnecessary disturbance or distraction for the students, then the decision to fire him is completely justifiable.

Consider the following scenario. A teenage girl walks into homeroom with a ridiculously revealing outfit. She's got the tight, transparent shirt and the miniskirt that's way too mini. If her outfit causes a needless disturbance or distraction among the students and interferes with their ability to learn, school administrators have, in most cases, the right to send her home.

First Amendment violation? Of course not. In her school, she's guaranteed freedom of expression, so long as it doesn't hinder the ability of her classmates to perform.

Imagine if Rivers were to leave school one Friday afternoon with a goatee and emerge from the faculty lounge Monday morning with bigger breasts than the Homecoming queen. Surely, this would cause an unnecessary distraction for the students.

Would her students adjust over time? Admittedly, they probably would.

However, they shouldn't have to. These are high school kids. They are young. School is tough enough without wondering what's the deal with the teacher.

The administration made the right choice. Rivers might be a fine educator. However, by opting to become a woman, his presence in the classroom places a needless and entirely avoidable burden on the students.



Don't Believe it — And Don't Buy it

With the new millennium less than 15 months away, it is high time for the doomsday prophets to come out of the woodwork and mesmerize us with wild visions of the end of life as we know it.

Whether you subscribe to notions of a coming apocalypse isn't really important. Everyone can enjoy and benefit from crackpots, not only every thousand years, but every day.

You can make up your own prophecies, if you want to. For example: At their present rate of growth, stores owned and operated by The Gap, Inc. will cover every square inch of earth by the year 2000.

Once that happens, there will be nowhere to go but up. As the overpriced, conformist clothes reach skyward, they will eventually block out the sun and humankind will perish.

But oh, what a stylish death it will be.

If, for some reason, that doesn't happen, don't worry. Humans won't last far beyond the turn of the century; they're just too stupid.

That fact should be obvious from the frenzy in this country over new technology. Such a fervor isn't surprising, since we are a consumer culture in which possessions translate directly into status, but as the gadgets and gizmos increase in number, the line between what we want and what we need becomes nonexistent.

Two purchases, in particular, fly in the face of common sense. It is impossible to imagine anyone having a need for such things, and yet the public is groveling for them like a law student on a job interview.

One, home security systems, have been around for many years and have wormed their way into the hearts of most homes in America.

The other, digital TV, doesn't exist yet, but when it comes to production it will almost certainly spread like the plague, pushing humanity further down the road to imbecility.

First of all, nobody ever benefited from the purchase of a home security system except the



JOSH FENNEL
CAUSTIC CORNER

stockholders of ADT. Alarms, in and of themselves, don't protect your home. Despite what you see in commercials, nobody has ever been scared off by a "This Home Protected By..." sticker.

As a groundbreaking article in The Charlotte Observer pointed out, if someone wants to get into your home, they will. All that your alarm is going to do is get your family nice and panicky right before the intruder chops them up.

The alarm monitoring companies don't even want to protect you. When they get a signal, they call (of all people) your next-door neighbor.

In this day and age of alienation and 24-hour Internet porn, you would be lucky to have a neighbor who knows your name, much less one willing to go check out your house and get chopped up, too.

Don't bother calling the police, because they won't save you either. Unless you live next to the station house or a donut shop, response time is never less than five minutes.

Death and dismemberment (not to mention simple robbery) happen a little faster than that.

So, what can we do to protect our things, if alarm systems are so useless? Nothing. You can be killed at any time. Get over it.

And so we come to digital TV. The government likes it, cable companies like it, why shouldn't you? Because watching television is what morons do.

There is nothing good about buying a brand-new TV set just to get high quality pictures. It's television; nobody wants to see wrinkles in Dennis Franz's ass.

If you want realistic, go outside. Besides, what does quality have to do with TV? The programs are still shit, only with digital you can fill your head with shit that comes in crystal clear.

It isn't enough that the government and cable companies are stacked against you. They want you to want digital TV, too. Hence the Time-Warner ad campaign that presents digital technology as an increase in the quality of life.

The only increase is in the cable bill, which will go up to about \$300 a month, until "Digital II" technology comes around.

Oh, and your TV set will be obsolete.

Sorry. PBS, that bastion of independent thought, is even getting in on the act. They have a commercial all about how digital TV will benefit students. One major benefit, it seems, will be that classes can take "virtual field trips."

What is a "virtual" field trip? Apparently, it's "just as good" as actually going somewhere.

So, instead of paying workers at the end of the week, why not just show them a digital image of their paychecks? That's "just as good."

Actually, there would be a riot, because that's money.

Obviously, the question is no longer "What do we need?" but rather "How much do we need?"

The truth is, we don't need any of it. Garage-door openers are as useful as apple-coreers are as useful as cellular telephones.

A lie is a lie is a lie. You don't have to buy it and you don't have to believe it.

Josh Fennell is a junior biology major from Charlotte. Send hate mail to fennell@email.unc.edu.

BAROMETER

2 Out of 3 ...
Officials claim that two out of three UNC students come home sober on party nights. With assistant hoops coach Phil Ford's recent DWI arrest, one wonders what the odds are for the Department of Athletics.

Of Hank and Unity
Though civil-rights leaders decry the lack of minorities in TV shows, let's toast the one show loved by all races: ABC's Monday Night Football.

Résumé Welfare
Student Congress is considering the issue of stipends for student group leaders. If you've got the time to be involved, do it — but no one should expect to get paid for padding his résumé.

Deadline Set
Kudos to interim Chancellor Bill McCoy for finally setting a firm March 31, 2000 deadline for full disclosure of factory sites that make UNC apparel.

READERS' FORUM

DTH Should Treat People it Profiles With More Respect

TO THE EDITOR:
I used to frown upon my fellow UNC students for only picking up a copy of The Daily Tar Heel to do the crossword. But recent publications have swayed my opinion otherwise. Reading the issues of the past week, I have concluded that there is not a single competent writer on the DTH staff.

Who on this incompetent staff came up with the caption "We're in the Money!?" Did this person ever think that we should celebrate the man and not the money? That perhaps David Benjamin Clayton was more than a \$28.6 million donor?

Probably not, since David Clayton was profiled on the fourth page of the DTH, sandwiched in between a variety of advertisements. This apparently seemed dignified enough for the editors.

Hey, here's an idea! Let's have Clayton's picture and profile on the front page so students and faculty would be able to put a face with a price tag. Oh wait, then you wouldn't

have had enough room for the giant "Big Bucks" graphic.

So how about a little more respect and attention to the people that the DTH attempts to profile? ... I will spare the editors from my outrage of (another) caption because plenty of my fellow students have already expressed their disgust.

So keep those crosswords coming! That's about the only thing in the paper I can bear to read.

Oh, and Dilbert's pretty good too.

Sabrina Torres
Senior
Music

Tournament Noise Makes Naps, Studying Torture for Residents

TO THE EDITOR:

Where do our rights begin as students and residents of UNC? I recall last year when residents complained about the Bell Tower being too loud when it chimed and thinking, "That's ridiculous! They have no right to complain about something that is a huge part of the UNC tradition."

Now I find myself on the other

end of the stick living in Teague Residence Hall.

A recent weekend was absolutely torture when I either tried to study in my room or watch TV or when my roommate tried to take a midday nap as most of us do on our weekends.

We, as well as other residents, found the soccer tournament going on this weekend a nuisance, with the speakers for announcing and the band facing none other than our residence halls along Stadium Drive.

My question is why doesn't the University take into account students' living situations before erecting a new clubhouse full with announcer's desk and speakers, facing the residence halls? Some might say, "Well, they did it so you can see the game from your walkways or from your rooms."

If that was the case, and I really wanted to see a game, I'd go to the stadium and watch the game like everyone else. After all, this is an institution of education first where we have there right to live and study, and then an institution of sports and entertainment, not the other way around.

Christopher Nagy
Junior
Biology

TAR HEEL QUOTABLES

"The book has increased my awareness and made me re-evaluate my community service and interactions."

FRESHMAN GENEVIEVE YANCEY
Finally, it's on the record — at least one freshman read her required summer reading, Alex Kotlowitz's "There Are No Children Here."

"Alumni came back and said that things had changed."

TOWN COUNCIL MEMBER FLICKA BATEMAN
On the town of Chapel Hill's year-old anti-panhandling ordinance. As if you needed yet more proof that it's really the alumni who run this town.

"If we have to close down it creates a greater sense of panic in students."

WRITING CENTER INTERIM CO-DIRECTOR KRISTIN RINGELBERG
Who would have known the Writing Center was that important to UNC students. One would have thought it would be Kenan Stadium or the Smith Center.

"You score 28 points in the first quarter, and that's pretty much the ball game."

FLORIDA STATE FOOTBALL COACH BOBBY BOWDEN
On the Seminoles' 42-10 drubbing of the Tar Heels last weekend. That's what the fans who left early thought, too.



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 400 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail forum to: dth@unc.edu.