

Do I make you angry, baby?

Lawsuit over Austin Powers doll illustrates dangers of frivolous, irresponsible litigation



BEVERLY MIRELES

The line between obscenity and humor is blurred every day, regardless of good taste, and often at the expense of decency. Almost anyone who watches movies on television would agree. What is not easily agreed on is whether the law has a say in editing what is acceptable or not, and if it does, how much?

The judicial system is obviously an important tool in the massive task of balancing rights against regulations. However, when the system attempts to make regulations in order to save us from ourselves, the system stops being a tool and begins to become a public nuisance.

Case in point — legal action concerning the Austin Powers doll. In Georgia, Tamatha Brannon filed an obscenity complaint against the Toys-R-Us chain after her 11-year-old son picked up the doll that asked, "Do I make you horny, baby, do I?"

When her son asked what horny meant, Brannon became so offended that she bought both the dolls remaining on the shelf and turned one over to the local police. Her actions seem somewhat excessive, considering the circum-

stances. The complaint against Toys-R-Us is completely frivolous. The store was supplying the doll to satiate a demand, just like it stocks toy guns, Barbie dolls and video games.

That said, it is true that the doll is ugly, strikingly ape-like and mildly vulgar. But that does not make the entire Toys-R-Us chain guilty of endangering a child. No matter what the masses may expect from chain stores, Toy-R-Us has little responsibility to the public. If they did, perhaps its shelves would not be filled with toy weapons of war, sexist figurines and violent games, all of which are bought by both parents and children every day.

Brannon's actions were completely above and beyond the call of duty, as far as regulating so-called obscenities go. It would have been perfectly acceptable for her to picket the store, organize a boycott or simply complain to the manager.

When Brannon involved the police, she illustrated how individuals would rather ban the choice than let others with the implications of maturely deciding what is acceptable on their own terms.

Brannon is not the only person guilty of such reckless use of the legal system. Frivolous cases go before judges every day, wasting taxpayers' money and trial times. These trivial cases have had such a negative impact on the judicial sys-

tem that there are even laws regulating these types of cases.

Unfortunately, these cases continue to fill court dockets. Complaints like Brannon's only serve to add to the judicial system's burdens. Regulation over reason is one of the least sensible trends occurring in society today.

The Austin Powers doll situation only concerns a toy, but the trend goes much further than toy stores. In many cases, citizens would rather blame major institutions or corporations than deal with the consequences of choice themselves. One only has to look to Littleton, Colo., to see how people were quick to use Hollywood as a scapegoat instead of dealing with the real issues at hand.

Tamatha Brannon may not have been ready to explain what horny meant to her son (who is notably nearing puberty), but this hardly means she was correct in filing a complaint against the toy store supplying the doll.

Certainly she had the right to file the complaint. The beauty of the judicial system is that individuals can change policies.

Nevertheless, with rights come responsibilities. Brannon obviously felt the responsibility to file a complaint, but she failed to take the responsibility to parent her son without the help of the legal system.

Beverly Mireles is a junior microbiology major.



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

Angst over annexation can be avoided



MARC GRETHER

whether or not to be co-opted into the city. Each landowner should have the choice to determine what to do with his or her land.

Rather than just complaining, Hall did take steps to rectify the problem. Her groups circulated a petition to call for a vote to amend the charter. The city secretary said 1,475 qualified voters in Bryan signed the petition.

Unfortunately, Hall's good intentions resulted in a vaguely worded document which will likely be voided in court. Her petition called for the charter to be changed, but did not specify in what way.

Further, the petition incorrectly stated the change would be an ordinance, not an amendment.

While this seems like petty nitpicking, the law requires strict wording. But the City Council's response was to sue the petitioner. Rather than complying with the petition and holding an election, the city filed suit in district court.

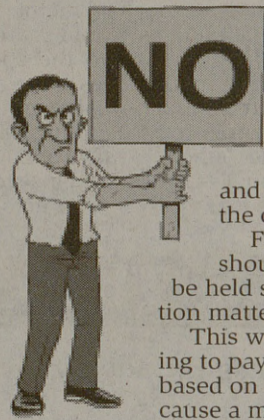
It contends it would be impossible to fulfill its duty because the petition does not specify the wording for the proposed amendment. Further, the city would save \$30,000 by not having an election. This amendment would not affect the current annexation proposal because the vote on the petition would occur after the annexation vote.

Each of the city's arguments is valid. However, it is not taking the best approach. This suit has been extremely unpopular because it does not address the petitioners' concerns. In fact, it has made them angrier and caused many

people to feel further alienated from the council.

The council should propose an amendment themselves that would satisfy Hall and her groups. Bryan Mayor Lonnie Stabler is right in pointing out that an amendment could be seen as an attempt to control the situation, but so is suing the petitioners.

By proposing an amendment itself, the Council would be making a good-faith effort to follow the will of the people.



The council's amendment should include the provision that all annexations must be initiated by landowners and then be voted on by Bryan's citizens. Both parties are interested in these matters and should be allowed to vote on the outcome.

Further, the amendment should specify that votes will not be held strictly to decide on annexation matters.

This would keep the city from having to pay \$30,000 for an election solely based on annexation. This would not cause a meaningful delay in most cases because annexations typically take years to complete.

And after doing this, the council could continue following the will of its citizenry by practicing self-restraint and not voting to annex any land until the charter amendment situation is cleared up in the courts.

By taking steps like these and listening its citizenry, Bryan will be on its way to truly becoming an All-America City.

Marc Grether is a graduate student in mathematics.

Cabarets good for community

In response to Caleb McDaniel's July 7 column.

I like sex. Just this sentence has probably offended half of this conservative little town already.

I am glad people have different opinions, they just need to realize where those opinions are coming from before they spew rhetoric, as in McDaniel's article about the new cabaret.

All of the cliched old points in his article are obviously due to his religious viewpoint.

Instead of complaining for half a page about true love, the degradation of women and morality, he needs to admit he has a problem with cabarets because his religion has a problem with sex.

Call it anything you will, sex sells. Even though our community is oh-so-pious, the adult video store on the corner of campus has failed to go out of business yet.

I will not be visiting the new cabaret because that form of entertainment just does not float my boat, but I applaud John Skruk for allowing people to attend something other than bars, tiny clubs or movies in the evening.

MAIL CALL

I only wish other entrepreneurs would follow suit and help bring this town up to date.

Adam Nordost
Class of '01

It seems McDaniel forgot one "truth" for his column: America is a capitalist society — not a capitalist (with respect for morality) society.

Hence, what a minority — or even a majority — finds "wrong," as McDaniel termed it, has no bearing on the establishment of a business.

Also, do Aggies a favor and do not waste more of our money on ink for such a weak argument. To promote or define universal truth, use the tools of fact, logic and reason. Save the morality for your personal truths, because they are not ours.

Brent Barkley
Class of '00

Grad speakers should be brief

In response to Caleb McDaniel's July 6 column.

While it is unquestionably discourteous to leave graduation early, it is equally discourteous to the graduates and faculty for com-

mencement exercises to last for hours and hours.

There are ways to make it easier to stay, including shortening speeches and having separate ceremonies for each college.

If the audience were considered by the speakers, they would see that less is more.

Succinctness is not stressed in our society. We love lots of words, especially if we can pepper them liberally with technical jargon. But ask, "What exactly is the point?" and often neither speaker nor audience knows.

Graduates want and need the pearls of wisdom passed on at graduation, but perhaps they do not want or need quite so many of them.

Ann Weaver Hart
Class of '00

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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More financial aid, cultural opportunities can make A&M diverse



JEFF BECKER

concerned about diversity. The answer lies in the statistical correlation between race and economic status.

Economic factors are the main reasons people do not attend college. The person who has the lights shut off every other month because his or her parents cannot afford to pay the bills is going to have a much tougher time finding the time to do homework assignments than someone who has everything provided. Many people are forced to find jobs when they reach employable age just to help their family pay the bills.

Economic status does affect academic performance.

Less affluent families are not able to afford to send their children off to school at a cost of thousands of dollars a year.

The problem is this: much of the minority population is poor, unfortunately. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of the population that is black in poverty areas is four times greater than the percentage in non-poverty areas.

The comparable percentage of His-

panics living in poverty areas is three times greater than in non-poverty areas.

The reason for the discrepancy can be attributed to many factors, including

"Economic status is a much fairer gauge by which to give admission and scholarships than race."

past injustices and high levels of immigration to certain areas.

In Texas and other states, the immigration rates have led to large numbers of first- and second-generation Americans who have been traditionally poor throughout the nation's history.

More opportunities for advancement must be given to people who are in their economic state because they had the misfortune of being born into it.

An education at A&M is one of the

best financial deals in the country, so there is little excuse for having such a small minority population compared to other schools. A&M needs more scholarships based on financial need in order to diversify its population. A&M should realize the adverse effect of economic background on academics and the ability to go to school when parents cannot afford to pay.

Economic status is a much fairer gauge by which to give admission and scholarships than race, which A&M has thankfully abandoned.

When scholarships are given on the basis of race, it is not fair because not all whites are rich and not all minority members are poor. For instance, more than half of the people living in poverty areas in the United States are white. Many people are not given the proper treatment because they fall in these categories which are ignored when scholarships are given based on race.

The policy of giving certain people preferential treatment on basis of race is discriminatory. However, by offering more financial need-based scholarships,

Texas A&M can fairly and efficiently create a more diverse environment by making it easier for people of all economic backgrounds to attend.

But diversity is also about the unity of people who have a myriad of cultural backgrounds and multi-faceted interests. A&M can help to create a more diverse group of students by bringing more culture to the university.

A&M should not be known for having one museum and two nuclear reactors. A&M must consider more options in improving the liberal arts program, such as more funding and better facilities. If A&M were to bring more cultural opportunities to campus, an even more diverse group would surely be drawn to A&M.

A&M has already taken many measures to attempt to diversify the school, but a more intense effort must be made to truly create a dynamic, competitive and fair learning environment and diverse student body.

Jeff Becker is a sophomore computer engineering major.