

Globe article just plain Wong



MATT
FREHNER

"I like to think of Edward and I as sharing a special editors-in-chief bond; as such, I can appreciate that some things will slip through the cracks. But surely an article that links Québécois to a term like "racial purity"—along with all the Third Reich connotations that it entails—should have raised an eyebrow or two."

As the tune from Broadway's Avenue Q goes, "Everyone's a little bit racist." We all notice colour and ethnicity to a certain extent—part of being a civilized human is keeping your random offensive thoughts to yourself. *Globe and Mail* columnist Jan Wong and I are a part of this civil society; the only difference is that one of us knows that a nationally distributed newspaper isn't the best place to let loose the ethnic stereotypes. Doubly so when claiming, mere days after the shootings at Dawson College, that francophone culture is to blame for the murder of Anastasia De Sousa; in other words, that Kimveer Gill's pent-up rage was fuelled substantively by being an English speaker in French-speaking Montréal.

Lest it be perceived that I'm misinterpreting Wong's remarks, or taking her out of context, here are a few of the tastiest, most provocative speculations that were sprinkled amongst an account that reads almost like a work of short fiction rather than a news article: "What many [outside of Montréal] don't realize is how alienating the decades-long linguistic struggle has been in the once-cosmopolitan city."

"All three [of the Montréal shootings

at postsecondary institutions] were carried out by mentally disturbed individuals. But what is also true is that in all three cases, the perpetrator was not *pure laine*, the argot for a 'pure' francophone. Elsewhere, to talk of racial 'purity' is repugnant. Not in Québec."

And finally, "To be sure, Mr Lepine [who murdered 14 at Ecolé Polytechnique] hated women, Mr Fabrikant [who shot four people at Concordia University in '92] hated his engineering colleagues and Mr Gill hated everyone. But all of them had been marginalized, in a society that valued *pure laine*."

In other words, never mind the fact that Dawson College is an English-speaking CEGEP (*Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel*), or that Gill had a clear infatuation with violence and death; the real issue is that French Québécois are racist and exclusivist to such an extent that it leads some to murder. The absurdity of such an argument barely has a parallel in the annals of Canada's two solitudes.

These poorly backed comments aren't simply awful journalism. They're sensationalist, incendiary and hugely damaging. *Globe and Mail* Editor-in-Chief Edward Greenspon effectively

admitted as much, when he wrote, "We regret that we allowed these words to get into a reported article ... In hindsight, the paragraphs were clearly opinion and not reporting, and should have been removed from the story."

I like to think of Edward and I as sharing a special editors-in-chief bond; as such, I can appreciate that some things will slip through the cracks. But surely an article that links Québécois to a term like "racial purity"—along with all the Third Reich connotations that it entails—should have raised an eyebrow or two, especially when the subject matter is so recent, frightening and inexplicable.

The printed word carries authority. A publication such as the *Globe and Mail* has the ability to shift our nation's view on a subject, and must, in turn, weigh carefully the potential ramifications of green-lighting such obvious trash.

Sometimes, Jan, the fact that an article sparks controversy isn't a good thing—sometimes it's just poor journalism. As one letter-writer commented, these are the kinds of articles that remind him of why he's a separatist. Unfortunately for him, Jan Wong lives in Montréal.

Stakes high for vampirefreaks.com

Online forum unjustly criticized for role its in Dawson College shootings



MICHAEL
SMITH

triple homicide in Medicine Hat by a 12-year-old girl and her 23-year-old boyfriend was linked to this site, as they were apparently registered users. More recently—and more damning—Dawson College shooter, Kimveer Gill, was revealed to have posted on the site, where he talked about shooting people at schools and called himself the "Angel of Death."

That said, just because I might say "I want to bomb the *Toronto Sun*" doesn't mean I'm going to do it.

Enter *Toronto Sun* columnist Michele Mandel. Now, I'm already used to enough moronic tirades by closed-minded journalists in our own *Sun*, but the opinion article that appeared in their 17 September edition really grinds my gears. It's a response to a plan by members of vampirefreaks.com to march in support of the local Children's Wish Foundation.

In the article, entitled "Stay Home, You Freaks!" Mandel writes that "It's a match made in hell. They are the members of the website that hosted the Montréal killer, the users who stood by and did nothing as Kimveer Gill boasted of his love of guns and murder. Now vampirefreaks.com wants to improve their blood-soaked image—by hooking up with sick children."

This shows a fundamental lack of understanding of these types of sites, and makes her article appear entirely

foolish. For her to ask the site's administrators to somehow police more than 600 000 users is a ridiculous proposition in itself, and then blaming the users for not warning anyone about Gill, though a little more reasonable, is stated in such a way that it destroys her credibility.

Like any such community, the number of stupid threads and flames going around vampirefreaks.com would make an outsider wonder. That said, just because I might say "I want to bomb the *Toronto Sun*" doesn't mean I'm going to do it.

This isn't to say that the site is filled with terrorists, but that in such a community, comments such as these aren't taken seriously. And although they might crack down now, sites like these thrive because administrators don't attempt to curtail free speech, and instead allow users to discuss what they like and form their own opinions. This peer-centric design makes it unlikely that any big changes to the site will come in light of the negative publicity surrounding the Dawson College shootings.

In any case, Mandel's argument is made moot by the way she pokes fun at the entire gothic subculture. She even wrote a follow-up for the 24 September issue wherein she claims that she wasn't trying to be insulting, all the while continuing her haughty and derogatory tone. She even congratulates the vampirefreaks community for raising money for the Montréal Children's Hospital a week after claiming that their help wasn't wanted for any such thing.

At least she hasn't failed convincing me her memory is as bad as her understanding of the Internet.

In the past few years an online trend has emerged as part of the burgeoning new "Web 2.0" movement epitomized by sites like MySpace and the more local Nexopia. The basis behind these communities has existed since Usenet newsgroups debuted in the early days of the 'Net, but the inclusion of forums, personal pages, private messaging and all sorts of other digital bells and whistles has led to their immense popularity at an unheard-of scale.

There's nothing inherently wrong with these sites, as they offer ways to meet, connect and stay in touch with people across Canada and around the world. However, many people, especially those who don't understand them, fear and criticize these communities. Accusations, for example, that they encourage pedophilia and that they promote violence have been levelled against them.

Take vampirefreaks.com, an online community composed of the North American goth subculture. The name aside, there's really nothing that sets this site apart from any of the other web communities targeted at specific subcultures. However, this site does have a couple of recent claims to fame in Canada that have led to certain members of the media and society to lash out at them.

Back in April of this year, a grisly

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