

THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST

Public Meeting Sunday March 20, 2016 Nancy Bradshaw-Hertz

Nancy Bradshaw-Hertz is our featured speaker this month. She will speak on domestic abuse and how it relates to religion. Nancy has worked with victims of domestic abuse for over 15 years. In that time she has seen how religion can make it more difficult for women to get out of abusive relationships and how religion can be a concern for mental health in general.

Nancy's talk will briefly touch on the following areas:

- What is domestic abuse,
- Gender roles set by the faith communities,
- How forgiveness, within the religious communities, can interfere with women wishing to leave an abusive relationship,
- How religions work to keep marriages together despite abuse,
- How religions keep the abuse hidden within the community,
- How the concept of an afterlife can affect a woman's decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship,
- How the concept of suffering plays a role in a woman's view of the abuse.

We will also take a look at how the secular community's belief systems compare to religious communities, and what secular communities can do to help victims of domestic abuse.

Nancy is a life member of Minnesota Atheists and an event organizer. We look forward to hearing her insights on domestic abuse and religion. We hope you are able to join us!

Sunday March 20, 2016
Rondo Public Library, 461 N Dale St,
St Paul

1:30pm – Doors Open
2:00pm – Featured Speaker
4:00pm – Dinner at Mai Village, 394
University Ave W, St Paul

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Religion can make it more difficult for women to get out of abusive relationships.



President's Column

By Alyssa Ehni



Hello. I'm Alyssa, your new president for Minnesota Atheists.

I have been involved with Minnesota Atheists for a few years and served on the board of directors for the last two, as a director-at-large and associate president. I believe it is important to demonstrate positive atheism in action. My desire to be involved with my local community is directly informed by my atheism.

A few years ago, I started looking for community. I attended a couple of meet-ups, joined our Toastmasters group, and started volunteering at The Family Place. Through the events I attended, I met many interesting people with different stories, so I kept coming back.

My favorite meet-up was (and still is) volunteering at The Family Place, a daytime homeless shelter in St. Paul. At these meet-ups, the volunteers bring the ingredients needed for the menu of the day, which is posted in advance on Meetup.com. We then prepare a meal, large enough for 50 people, and serve it to the families that are staying at the shelter. The volunteers partake in the meal, dining with the families, and then clean up. After all of the dishes are washed and the food put away, the volunteers typically head out to a local establishment to socialize.

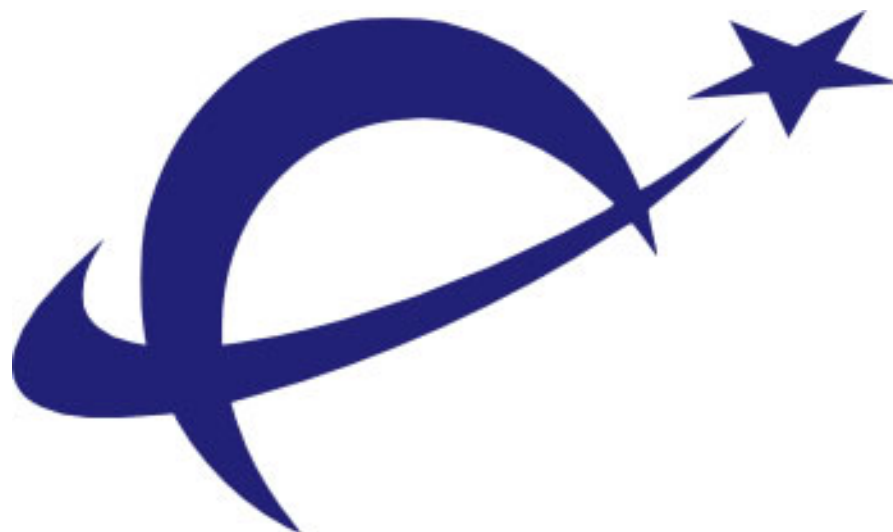
I found community within Minnesota Atheists, through

volunteering at The Family Place, attending Godless Gamers, and many other events. It's a wonderful group full of people with whom I have a lot in common, besides atheism. I met my partner while we were both volunteering and have made several lasting friendships with people I've met at various events. I look forward to continuing to expand our membership and build our local freethought community.

In this upcoming year, I am partnering with our chair, Heather Hegi, to bring a fresh and youthful perspective to the leadership of Minnesota Atheists. We are bringing back Newbie Night, an event for people who are new to Minnesota Atheists to learn about our organization, and meet other people who are new to the group. This was one of my first events and I'm not sure if I would have gone to any other meet-ups if I hadn't first attended Newbie Night. (I was concerned that I wouldn't find any other women or others around my age. Thankfully, my concern was unfounded.) The goal is to have a Newbie Night once a quarter and have at least two hosts. If you are interested in co-hosting a Newbie Night, please e-mail me at pres@mnatheists.org.

Another item of interest is our online presence and the content that we produce. How can we gain more visibility in spaces where currently we are not known? What can we do to maximize the social media presence we already have? Is there a way to produce more and better original content that can be distributed more effectively? These are a few of the questions that I (and others) will be thinking about in this upcoming year.

Feedback from you is appreciated. If you have any thoughts or suggestions, please feel free to send me an email or talk with me at one of our many events.



News and Notes

By George Francis Kane

This month I present, for your amusement, a quiz. I will provide a quote concerning religion, atheism or separation of church and state; try to name the presidential candidate who said it. Good luck!

1. Two Corinthians, 3:17, that's the whole ballgame. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
2. I would have problems with somebody who embraced all the doctrines associated with Islam. If they are not willing to reject Shariah and all the portions of it that are talked about in the Quran — if they are not willing to reject that, and subject that to American values and the Constitution, then of course, I would.
3. Any president who doesn't begin every day on his knees isn't fit to be commander-in-chief of this nation.
4. Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.
5. The job of a military chaplain is to be insensitive to atheists.
6. In the end, my goal is not simply to live on this Earth for 80 years but to live an eternity with my creator.
7. I loved the absolute nature of the Catholic Church. It resonated with me.
8. You know, everybody practices religion in a different way. To me, I would not be here tonight, I would not be running for president of the United States if I did not have very strong religious and spiritual feelings.
9. If you do not understand that our Judeo-Christian values are one of the reasons why America is such a special country, you don't understand our history.
10. The First Amendment says keep government out of religion. It doesn't say keep religion out of government. So, you do have a role and a place here.
11. Everyone should have the right to pursue their religious beliefs, or lack thereof, as aggressively as they want to. But to me religious freedom doesn't mean we have to put up with intolerance from others onto us, and it doesn't mean we have to put up with someone telling you what you believe is invalid.
12. I'm a Christian first, American second, conservative third and Republican fourth.
13. I know the role that I have to play on earth — to lift people, to realize that all those who are made of the image of the Lord need to be upheld.... I have a mission, and I have a role on this earth, but I'm trying to prepare myself for the world that's yet to come.
14. This is the battle that we must have — to restore people's understanding of what conservatism truly means and how important faith really is in this nation
15. [Some of my opponents] do not want to change the Constitution, but I believe it's a lot easier to change the constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that's what we need to do is to amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards.

(continued on page 4)

Cryptogram By George Francis Kane

Udbimq vi qmr mqd rmmk mp rcmjcr bemqj ebqx, vr vi red dqrvud rmmkwma. Rm bstmhbrd
 rebr udbimq wd svihbusds vq imed hvuhleirbqhdi vi rm bstmhbrd rebr revqzvqj wd svihbusds -
 fcvhc kdbtdi mqd vq red omivrvmq mp brrdeorvqj rm sm b nmw bprdu rcumfvqj bfbx red
 udylvuds vqiruledqr.

Jdmujd Ievrc, *Brcdvie: Rcd Hbid Bjbvqir Jms*

2016 Minnesota Atheists Board

The 2016 Board was elected at the February Monthly Meeting and took affect on March 1st.



August Berkshire, Georgia Hancock Tsoi, Alyssa Ehni, Art Kallenbach, Hertzey Hertz, and Heather Hegi.
Not Pictured: Chris Matthews, Tim Berry, and Eric Jayne

News & Notes (continued from page 3)

Answers

1. Donald Trump, speaking at Liberty University.
2. Ben Carson, to CNN in September 2015
3. Ted Cruz
4. Hillary Clinton at a New Hampshire Town Hall, citing a quote from John Wesley as her personal motto.
5. Again, Ted Cruz
6. Marco Rubio
7. Jeb Bush, speaking of his 1995 conversion.
8. Bernie Sanders at a New Hampshire town hall.
9. Mark Rubio again, at a rally in Council Bluffs, Iowa.
10. Rand Paul at a private prayer breakfast in March, 2015.
11. Governor Chris Christie campaigning in Iowa.
12. Again, Ted Cruz.
13. John Kasich, to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 2015.
14. Carly Fiorina, at the Faith & Freedom Coalition Conference.
15. Mike Huckabee, calling for a right-to-life amendment to the United States constitution.

Cable Report

By Steve Petersen and James Zimmerman



David Pacheco, President of the Minnesota chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, discussed upcoming legislative proposals in several states. Pacheco specifically mentioned how Religious Freedom Restoration Acts are now being used to deny equal rights to same-sex couples and reproductive rights to women. He also discussed First Amendment Defense Acts, which are bills designed to allow businesses and government employees to discriminate against same-sex marriages and unwed couples, among others. The conversation then turned to student groups at publically-funded colleges that wish to adopt discriminatory membership requirements; and the policies that several state legislatures are proposing to legalize the discrimination. Pacheco noted that interested persons should visit his chapter's website at mnau.org to learn more and to get involved. James Zimmerman hosted the episode.

We are actively looking for people to host and produce each show. If you have ideas on programming or interest in hosting please get involved. Contact Steve Petersen at address@mnatheists.org.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Les Stordalen, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson.

Podcasts: Programs are available on the MinnesotaAtheists.org website. Access via iTunes and YouTube has been made possible by Grant Hermanson. To date, our

channel has had over 200,000 downloads.

Cable Schedule

Bloomington: Ch. 16. Sunday 11:00 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

Minneapolis: Ch. 75. Monday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Northwest Community Television (NWCT): Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, Maple Grove, New Hope, Osseo, Plymouth and Robbinsdale, Ch. 20 check web page for date and times: <http://nwct.org/programming.aspx>
Sponsor: Grant Hermanson

Rochester: Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview/New Brighton: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

St. Cloud: Ch. 12 Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor: Tom Stavros.

St. Paul: Ch. 15 Wednesdays 5:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Wright.

Stillwater: Ch., 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Ch. 15. Saturday 8:00 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

Have a program idea? Would like to be an interviewer or interviewee? Would like to get some experience of being on the crew behind the scenes? We have opportunities for you! Also, if you would like to see *Atheists Talk* on your local station, we can work to make that happen. Please contact Steve Petersen at address@mnatheists.org.

Secretary's Report - February

By Heather Hegi

- A motion was made and approved to accept Revision H of Minnesota Atheists Public Policies as proposed by the Public Policy Committee.
- The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) has come on as a full co-sponsor covering half the costs of the 2016 sponsored St Paul Saints game where we rename the team to the Mr. Paul Aints for the evening.
- A motion was made and approved to adopt a corporate resolution authorizing Chris Matthews, Heather Hegi, and Eric Jayne as signers on our Ameriprise account.
- A motion was made and approved that we spend \$125 to register for the May Day Parade (free speech section) and for an information table at the May Day Festival.

Complete meeting minutes are available to dues paying members by contacting Heather at chair@mnatheists.org

Quarterly Business Meeting

By Heather Hegi

The Minnesota Atheists Quarterly Business Meeting for the First Quarter will be held on Monday, March 28th, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Green Mill Restaurant & Bar, 57 Hamline Ave S, St Paul. Last year we initiated this format to allow our membership meeting to be more in-depth and of more value to our members. We want to hear from you, so if you have any agenda items you would like to be discussed, please submit them to me, Heather Hegi, at chair@mnatheists.org

Currently on the agenda is to review and discuss any committee reports provided, to discuss getting more of our original articles and content onto our website and distributed through social media outlets, and to discuss efforts to get more volunteers involved.

There is no cost to attend, but having some food or ordering a drink helps in saying thanks to the Green Mill for letting us use their party room. The Green Mill does have a parking lot on the north side of Grand Ave next to the Sinclair gas station and street parking is also available in the neighborhood.

If you have any questions or comments about this evening, again, please email me, Heather Hegi, at chair@mnatheists.org. Hope to see you there!

Cryptogram Answer

Reason is not one tool of thought among many, it is the entire toolbox. To advocate that reason be discarded in some circumstances is to advocate that thinking be discarded - which leaves one in the position of attempting to do a job after throwing away the required instrument.

-George Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God*

January Treasury Report

By Chris Matthews

Radio Fund

Mark Nelson	\$200
George Kane	\$100
Mike Haubrich	\$70
Nancy Ruhland	\$50
James Barri	\$25
Francis Leckie	\$25
Herbert Davis	\$20
Mark Paquette	\$15
August Berkshire	\$10
Rachel Wilson	\$10
Cash, 5th Sunday Fundraiser	\$133

Total Radio Fund \$658

General/Visibility Fund

Michelle Tjernagel	\$70
Leland Salisbury	\$50
Angela Stehr and Mark Friedl	\$30
Justine Hartz	\$27
Ted Haland	\$25
Robert Schmitz	\$25
Daniel Harrison	\$15

Total General/Visibility Fund \$242

Total Income: \$900

Current Building Fund Total \$135,021

Top Expenses

Radio Show	\$1,025
Newsletter Printing	\$440

The Psychological Damage of Christianity

By August Berkshire

1. We are not born as neutral or good people but as sinners.
2. We cannot take credit for the good things we do because, of ourselves, we can do nothing. We are the instruments of an invisible god. Everything we do glorifies that god, not ourselves. (It's not a big leap from "pride is a sin" to "healthy self-esteem is a sin".)
3. Everything bad is our fault, even if we had nothing to do with it. Not only the bad things we actually do, but also anything bad in nature, because Adam and Eve (and, by extension, we) disobeyed a god and somehow brought evil into the world.
4. An invisible being is spying on us 24/7, which can create paranoia.
5. We are made to feel guilty because someone supposedly died for us, when that death was completely unnecessary.
6. We may be tortured forever after we die.

Call for April Articles

We welcome contributions from all readers of The Minnesota Atheist. While we cannot guarantee that your submission will be accepted for publication, we will carefully consider anything that is related to atheism. We would especially like to receive contributions which provide profiles of individual atheists and which report atheist-related events in the wider community.

Because we are a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, we cannot print articles that support or oppose a specific candidate, but we can print articles that support or oppose specific causes. Article length should ideally be 500-1000 words and no more than 2000 words.

Please send submissions to the editor, Jenny Nolan at editor@mnatheists.org by 11:59pm on March 22. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. Without readers like you The Minnesota Atheist would be needlessly constrained in its breadth and depth.



Featured Blogpost

by Jason Thibeault, reprinted with permission from

<http://freethoughtblogs.com/lousycanuck/2015/11/18/on-the-pr-disaster-at-skepticon-and-the-lack-of-concernedstudent1950-representation/>

Given how the late-addition “Q&A” session at Skepticon came into being, how it was sold to the convention, how it was advertised, and how it was “envisioned” by Danielle Muscato and Mark Schierbecker, it is no surprise the entire thing went off disastrously. Let us itemize the ways this all went wrong.

To catch you up, first.

Jonathan Butler went on hunger strike on November 2nd at University of Missouri (aka Mizzou), to protest systematic racism, the destruction of planned parenthood services and health insurance, the pepper-spraying of peaceful protestors, and edgelord bullshit such as nooses and feces swastikas on campus, along with Chan-culture making death threats via YikYak. After press of the less-than-sympathetic sort (e.g. Breitbart and Fox News) kept wheedling their way into the protest and into protesters’ faces, students created a press-free cordon around Butler and his closest protest supporters, many of whom are black students who have felt unsafe on campus thanks to the overt racism and ratcheting back of necessary services that they experienced.

A student boycott ensued, along with support from the football team and faculty members, including a Mass Media prof named Melissa Click. Mark Schierbecker — a “citizen journalist” non-journalist student of Mizzou — entered the area to take videos of people reacting to the news of the President and Chancellor both resigning. Click demanded he leave several times, and at one point put her hand on the camera he was using to film. Police are presently considering criminal assault charges for this.

Shortly thereafter, Click apologized thusly:
Yesterday was an historic day at MU — full of emotion and confusion. I have reviewed and reflected upon the video of me that is circulating, and have written this statement to offer both apology and context for my actions. I have reached out to the journalists involved to offer my sincere apologies and to express regret over my actions. I regret the language and strategies I used, and sincerely apologize to the MU campus community, and journalists at large, for my behavior, and also for the way my actions have shifted attention away from the students’ campaign for justice. My actions were shaped by exasperation with a few spirited reporters. From this experience I have learned about humanity and humility. When I apologized to Tim Tai in a phone call this afternoon, he accepted my apology. I believe he is doing a difficult job, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak with him. His dignity also speaks well to the Journalism program at MU. Again, I wish to express my sincere apology for my actions on Carnahan Quad yesterday.

Note, Tim Tai is another reporter, who was crowded out of the press-free zone by the students and who had his arms pulled down when he tried to take a jumping photo of the inside of the cordon.

Schierbecker characterized this apology as “insincere” and “curt”, and to this day believes Click should step down. In fact, during the Skepticon event, he stated that he won’t rest until she does step down, even knowing that putting the focus on his pain and his belief that his “first amendment rights” were violated by not being allowed to access people who wished for privacy distracts from the issues of racism on campus.

The video by Mark Schierbecker went viral. The short version of the video is being used to make arguments against black folks generally by overtly racist orgs like Stormfront, and also by those attempting to damn the Black Lives Matter and ConcernedStudent1950 movements like Breitbart and Fox News. The video as edited in the “short version” shows Click demanding Schierbecker leave the area, touching the camera, and ends with Click calling for “muscle”. The fuller version shows more attempts to get Schierbecker to leave before Click becomes frustrated, and has two students serving as “muscle” approaching Schierbecker and repeating the requests to have him leave the area, and effectively physically blocking Schierbecker from persisting in attempting to film the students against their wishes. The “muscle” did not actually strongarm or physically contact Schierbecker in any way, but served to assert the requests for privacy of the people Schierbecker was attempting to gain access to.

Now, for the specific event and everything that went wrong, in no particular order.

This programming addition to Skepticon was advertised online shortly before the official opening of the con, so it was not printed in the schedules. It was only available on the online schedule, and it was announced in a blog post dated Friday, November 13th, the first day of the con programming.

On the schedule, the lunch break between speakers was registered for between 12pm and 2pm. The speakers were also expected to gather for a Speakers Photo from 12 to 12:30, however this process easily dragged on til at least 12:45. It seems while I was running to the bathroom and to get some coffee, the talk started, and I missed the opening timeline.

There were only a small handful of people in attendance — no more than 25 or 30. Peak attendance within the main hall was probably 400-ish, which is good considering there were always contemporaneous events in other rooms and attendance (though lower than last year) is likely around 600 (remind me to ask for actual registration numbers!), and there was at least 200 in the room at the 11-12pm talk for Fallon Fox.

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Featured Blogpost (continued from page 8)

The low attendance is undeniably because it was both late within the schedule, held during the lunch break, and poorly advertised — nobody knew there was a reason to stick around through lunch, as nobody even mentioned it (by my recollection) after Fallon Fox's talk when lunch break was announced.

The talk was evidently sold to Skepticon as a "Question and Answer", though Danielle Muscato and Mark Schierbecker did not envision it as such. The questions for the probably-scripted event all came from Danielle Muscato, who, during the course of the event, disclosed that she was acting as *pro bono* Public Relations for Schierbecker, whom she considers a friend. Only because a number of black activists effectively started shouting out questions when Muscato declared the interview to be over did the event actually become a Q&A.

Evidently, Muscato was using this event to essentially coach Schierbecker on how to repair the image damage he'd done himself by putting the focus on his "first amendment rights" issues over the racism and death threats happening on campus. That Skepticon doesn't appear to have been aware of this relationship, and that the "press release" in the blog post appears to omit this fact, indicates to me that Skepticon, knowing Danielle Muscato from previous events, trusted her to use the forum judiciously. This use was, as I posted on Twitter shortly thereafter, a gross abuse of the venue. There is nothing "skeptical" about posting the views of the person with all the power who was aggrieved on a small scale with having their camera touched, while omitting the views of those aggrieved in the grander scheme, in a public-relations spin job fashion, when the person in question is already being published in major (right-leaning) news organizations uncritically.

Repeatedly, both Muscato and Schierbecker conflated right to access to people with freedom of speech. You have every right to say what you want, but you have no right to demand access to others. And indeed, being a student on campus and having access to the football field generally would not grant you access to the field in the middle of a game if you're not a player — you'd get tackled, even though you have the same level of "right" to be there that Schierbecker had to the area where students requested privacy from press. No amendment grants you as a fundamental right the freedom to harangue people who've asked you to back off, given that you can be charged with criminal harassment even if you are on public property, nor does it grant you a right to an audience, specific or general. It's this sort of conflation of free speech with entitlement to other unrelated aspects of communication that progressives like us call "Freeze Peach".

From my tiny contingent, when Muscato declared she was Schierbecker's PR, Niki Massey (whose notes on Skepticon you really should read) left the room saying to us, "I can't do this.". Shortly thereafter, Stephanie Zvan left to make sure Niki was all right (EDIT: she left to get migraine meds and food, and supporting Niki was a side-effect). Me, Greta Christina and her partner Ingrid stayed, out of an inclination to witness this event. Between us, we each kept remarking to each other that this was unbelievable and surreal, that we didn't understand what

was actually happening, but that it was certainly not a Q&A as advertised, and we speculated that Skepticon didn't know what exactly was unfolding.

When the black students from Mizzou started asking questions about why the narrative was focused on Schierbecker and why there were no representatives from ConcernedStudents1950, the cameraman, Rob Lehr of Hambone Productions, was absolutely guerrilla in his coverage of this.

He turned the camera toward the protesters and brought a boom mic to get their questions, and encouraged Muscato to keep going because he would keep filming. I think without his quick thinking and his self-sacrificing (this was his lunch hour too, after all!), we would not have had as much actual Q&A for the event.

When during the audience questions portion Schierbecker suggested that he would only stop distracting from the important fight against racism on campus when Click stepped down, when his own injustice was redressed to his satisfaction, I finally broke and yelled something like "You get justice before anyone else!?" This was, for the record, the only time anyone from my contingent said anything. A few seconds after that, Greta, Ingrid and I left. This was probably for the best because I was angry enough to heckle, and that doesn't really happen with me.

A very important point to note is that Skepticon, and especially Lauren Lane, Skepticon's lead organizer and *primo* boss lady, do not appear to have had prior knowledge that Danielle Muscato was acting as Mark Schierbecker's Public Relations. I have yet to confirm this single fact directly with anyone on staff, but staff seemed genuinely distressed by the events. When we were leaving the room, I saw Lauren Lane entering with a power-walk stride, looking to my eye pretty horrified by the events unfolding, so clearly someone had informed her what was going on and she was returning from her lunch with a mission. That said, things kept happening for a few minutes more thereafter.

I think someone — possibly Lauren, but I didn't see, as we were just exiting the huge room at that point — asked about a question from the audience more than once, and it might have been directed at Greta who was leaving the room with me. Greta had, after all, had her hand up for many minutes without being called on before the three of us walked. I'm completely unsure as to who asked whom about questions, and the video doesn't help fix things in my mind.

Muscato posted on Facebook that she'd severed her relationship with Schierbecker as PR manager for "multiple indefensibly racist comments". I did not sense there were actual directly racist comments in what Schierbecker said — only that his (and now, unfortunately, my) efforts continue to center attention on him and his "freedom" to access people to catch a story, rather than the black folks being made to feel unsafe by threats and overt racism.

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Featured Blogpost (continued from page 9)

While he did say “everyone’s a little bit racist”, and repeatedly said “fuck racists” and “I have white privilege”, he also asserted that privilege to demand that justice for transgressions against him should take priority.

And the fallout after the fact is ridiculous in the hamfisted attempts at reshaping the narrative being made by trolls and racists and reactionary right-wingers and Chan culture who want to tear down progressives in general, and Skepticon in particular — Schierbecker put out a video (titled “Journalists’ Lives Matter”, subtitled “Fuck Skepticon”) shortly after Muscato threw him under the bus.

(ETA, this may have been edited later to “Journalists’ Livelihoods Matter” given the current title and the number of people who remember it as “lives”, which while it’s good that Schierbecker realized there are some lines you probably shouldn’t cross, is actually pretty damning that people being killed is somehow comparable to journalists having the right to play paparazzi.)

During the video he admitted to being on the autism spectrum, and was clearly shaken by the whole experience of being called to account for his prioritizing himself. Trolls have seized upon this, pretending like they can now catch progressives out on what they perceive to be our attempt to play “identity politics” by claiming that Skepticon and progressives criticizing Schierbecker are actually attacking him for being autistic. (This from people who regularly use “retard” as a slur, so take it for what it’s worth — which is to say nothing, because I know plenty of people on the spectrum, none of whom are assholes or racists.)

The trolls also repeatedly demand that Skepticon apologize for calling Schierbecker racist, though clearly the only person who’d done so was Danielle Muscato, the person serving as his PR agent. Granted, Muscato was given a great deal of autonomy in putting together the event, so one might conceivably make an argument that Skepticon is on the hook for Muscato being an agent for the con. But the distress among Skepticon staff was visible to me, placed as I am such that I can actually see the feet paddling below the surface in most cons that I attend, and despite that distress, none of the agents actually called Schierbecker racist.

Shortly after the talk, I said on Twitter:

The conflation of first amendment rights with access to people who’ve asked you to back off is galling. 1st & fetishization. #skepticon

If the goal is to stop the racism at Mizzou, and you can’t get representation of the protestors, don’t hold the event. #skepticon

Among the people who favorited that was Danielle Muscato. Some time after she favorited that tweet, she posted this on Facebook with some clarifications, including agreement that the event should not have gone on without representation from ConcernedStudent1950, while reiterating that she’d attempted to get them to show up.

I fully understand why they didn’t, knowing now what Schierbecker’s and Muscato’s goal was for the event. I stand by my assertion that it was an abuse of the venue. A number of Skepticon’s organizers seem to feel the same, and this statement by Lauren Lane seems to agree, even if it takes more responsibility for “failure” than I think the con deserves — if it failed, it was only in trusting Muscato would not use the con improperly. I have a great distaste for everything that has happened, and I’m more than upset with Muscato, and am suspicious of her intentions and her apparent cavalier use of the venue. She redoubled the damage to the narrative that has happened with the event in trying to do damage control, when she declared that Schierbecker made “indisputably racist statements”, because that overstatement doesn’t bear out. Now trolls can say “he didn’t say anything wrong and Muscato says so herself”, when a) she was doing damage control; b) she overstated the case after she felt she had to retract her support; c) the case is actually still about the covert racism of white privilege rather than hoods and pitchforks.

And now, Muscato has posted again, appropriately walking it back, retracting the “indefensibly racist” part, hoping to still be friends with Schierbecker. But the damage’s already done.

Much like how Dan Rather took damage from an overstatement of the case against George W Bush’s missing military service records despite the fact that there’s still a gap that’s unaccounted for, this particular story’s sails were sabotaged by the overstatement. I fear the damage is done now and the story will forevermore be about how wronged Schierbecker was in having his camera touched and in being denied access to people who asked that he step the hell off, rather than the story being about the black folks who are effectively under emotional and potentially physical siege by the systemic racism they’re facing at University of Missouri.

Once again, a white person’s metaphorically stubbing their toe takes precedence over a black person being assaulted.

And once again, a white person is swinging into action to defend and fix the PR problem that first white person caused. Then, that same white person is screwing things up by overstating the case, then walking it back.

And once again a white ally — because we’re, basically, the only people the white folks squabbling over what’s racist and what isn’t will ever listen to — has to lay everything out for easy consumption by white eyes.

I am so, so sorry that all of this is happening. I honestly feel every bit as betrayed by the parties involved in putting together this sham of an event as the folks at Skepticon, and the black folks who expected an actual Q&A from this session without having to take it by force.

I really need to put together a post about all the good that came out of Skepticon, and all the huge wins. I think Stephanie is putting something together now, but I have my own high points, so maybe I’ll make mine more personal and less event-specific.

Upcoming Events

Susan Jacoby in Minneapolis Tuesday, March 29 at 7:00 p.m., Uptown Church, 1219 W 31st St S, Minneapolis. Magers & Quinn Booksellers present Susan Jacoby, author of *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*.

Atheist Night with the Mr. Paul Aints Saturday, July 16 at 7:00 p.m., CHS Field, 310 5th St E, St. Paul. Atheist sponsored St. Paul Saints minor league baseball game. Purchase tickets at SaintsGroups.com, password: 2016atheists

Atheists Talk Community Brunch 1st Sunday of every month at 10:30 a.m., Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Ave S, Edina

Godless Gamers Every Sunday at 2:00 p.m. and Thursday at 6:00 p.m., Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Rd B2, Roseville

Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous Every Sunday from 6:00-7:00 p.m. and Wednesday from 7:00-8:00 p.m., Health Recovery Center building, lower floor, 3249 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis. Based on A.A, minus beliefs in any form of a God.

Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30-8:00 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W., St. Paul. freethought.toastmastersclubs.org

Freethought Dinner Social 2nd and 4th Monday of every month from 5:00-7:00 p.m., Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave S, Bloomington

Freethinking Females 2nd Wednesday of every month at 7:00 p.m., Claddagh Irish Pub, 7890 Main St. N, Maple Grove, and 4th Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m., Sweeney's Saloon, 96 North Dale Street, St. Paul (Note, two different locations). Shattering the myth that Atheist groups are male dominated with a female's only event.

Volunteer Food Packing 2nd Thursday of every month at 1:00 p.m., The Food Group, 8501 54th Ave N, New Hope

Blasphemer's Brunch 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St., Richfield

Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting 3rd Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m., Amherst H Wilder Foundation, 451 Lexington Pkwy N, St Paul. All Minnesota Atheists members are welcome.

Bowling for Deities Last Saturday of every month at Noon, Memory Lanes, 2520 26th Ave South, Minneapolis

For more events, visit www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists



Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

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Minnesota Atheists

Positive Atheism in action since 1991

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

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Minnesota Atheists Goals
Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educated the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.

Minnesota Atheists Affiliations

Minnesota Atheists is affiliated with the Atheist Alliance of America, Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, The American Humanist Association, the Council for Secular Humanism, The International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the Secular Coalition for America.

Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 206
Life members: 42
Meetup members: 2017

Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

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