

Bikini Coffee Shop Story

My theory of being an elected official is pretty simple. Tell people what you really think as truthfully as you understand it. Some people will agree with you. Some will disagree. But, overall, people will respect that you actually say what you think and don't try to "politic" your answers. I frankly don't even know if this whole "just be honest" thing works in politics. The evidence is probably to the contrary, but life is too short to pretend you are someone else all the time.

But I digress, to the point.... So, a few days ago I made what I thought was a pretty uncontroversial post on my facebook page. I post to my facebook page all the time, just like most people do. I post about a comedy show I went to, about the new Star Wars coming out, about my love of trail running, or about my dislike of mayonnaise. I also post about my job like most people. In this case, one of my jobs is Tempe City Council member.

The post on a bikini coffee shop took all of about 30 seconds to write and was one of a dozen things I'd posted that week. In it, I basically said, "I respect the right of the owner of this bikini coffee place to open, but I hope they go out of business for lack of business. I HATE this!" It was longer than that, but that was the crux of it. The initial feedback was generally positive. Then the company saw the post, re-posted it on their page to their fans, and my facebook page blew up with hate comments from people all over Arizona and America. My post wasn't news. The flaming on my wall made it news.

I did a bunch of TV, radio, and print interviews that went something like, *"You hate this business, the women that work there, and the owner, right?"* And me responding. "No, it's a free market, and the girls that work there are making a rational economic choice, but this isn't the 1960's and the 'women as object' model I thought, was on its way out. Mostly, I'm just disappointed that this business model may still be viable." That kind of response doesn't make for very interesting "the fundamentalists are trying to take away your freedom!" news, so sometimes my comments would get edited into short clips with voiceovers to give it more of an "us vs. them/epic battle/SUNDAY SUNDAY SUNDAY!" angle.

My hope was that after the news cycle passed the whole thing would die down and life would go back to normal. Well, the article was picked up and run on national news and the owner of the coffee shop has re-posted my original comment, presumably, to continue to fan the flames of his base and draw more media attention for free PR. Fair enough, controversy is a good business model.

Given that this story continues to have legs, and more people are asking me for interviews, I'm going to invoke one of the few rules I've learned about politics from watching movies; answer the question as completely as possible once, then if you are asked again, simply say, "I've already answered that question." So, in an effort to end this whole thing, here is the "answer it fully and once" answer.

So what do I think of the bikini coffee shop that it opening in Tempe? When I initially read the article about it, it made me mad. At a gut level that I can't explain. I'm a teacher and a Jr. High Cross Country coach. It's really important to me that the girls I coach know they can be angry, be fierce, sweat, and compete like the boys. It's important to me that the girls I teach know they can be anything they want to be. To read an article about a coffee shop like this caused an immediate gut reaction in me of, "Seriously, this is the exact opposite of what I'm trying to teach!" So, I made a post in anger. Probably not a great life choice.

My initial reaction has worn off, but the basic idea remains. That being, at a fundamental level, I do not agree with the objectification of women. The city isn't going to burn down if we do it. We already do it at restaurants, bars, clubs, in magazines, and at a host of other places. But I thought the trend of humanity was heading *away* from the objectification of women. That the way women are treated on Mad Men is seen as a failed idea of times past. That it's no longer appropriate to say, "I know you're smart, but your body is more valuable to society than you as an actual thinking person." Maybe we aren't past this idea yet. Maybe I've watched too much Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

I'm not trying to limit your freedom as a consumer. I just don't agree with the way you are using your freedom. That said, it's yours to do with as you wish. Some people use their freedom to collect stamps. I don't get it, but they are welcome to do it. I'm a fan of the female body. I'm just not a fan of telling women that's their most useful trait to society.

I don't fault the women that work there. It's really none of my business how a woman chooses to sell her labor in the marketplace. If liberation means anything, it means the liberty to sell your labor in whatever way you want. My frustration is that we as a society spend our money such that we tell women this is the best way to sell their labor. What we are saying is "if you have a PhD in math, but you're hot, you are better off as a cocktail waitress in Vegas." I think these kind of priorities for valuing people are beneath us.

I don't want to personally shut the place down, even if I could. Government shouldn't pick winners and losers. However, I do want them to shut down for lack of business. Make your own choice, based on your own values. But don't be surprised when your daughter spends more time trying to marry a doctor, instead of trying to become a doctor. Your buying patterns make it so.

While the equal treatment of people based on race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation is important to me, this one particular coffee shop is not that important to me in the overall scheme of things. I'm disappointed that saying "I think we should be moving away from the objectification of women" is something newsworthy....like it's still a radical idea. This statement shouldn't be news! I wouldn't have guessed it when I made the post.

I'm proud of the things I've done in four years on Tempe Council related to park improvements, bike and road improvements, code enforcement, safety, jobs, LGBTQ equality, renewable energy, and water conservation. If you want to see a list of the interviews I've done about city issues, you can read them [here](#). If you want to see the list of the great things the council has done while I've been on council you can read it [here](#).

I can't imagine that this is really going to end the posts by people who want to talk about how it's their God-given right as an American to see women in bathing suits. That's fine, but at least now if you want to hate me, you'll hate me for what I actually am, instead of what you think I am. A person who thinks our society should be trending away from "women as objects" as a business model.

~Kolby Granville, Tempe City Council

PS, Some links that are worth following.

- [Crash Course: Women in the 19th Century](#)
- [Iron Jawed Angels](#)
- [Katherine Switzer](#)
- [Mad Men Clip](#)
- [Gender Pay Gap Data](#)