

December 2002

500 Words or Bust

Bethany Kohoutek
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos>

Recommended Citation

Kohoutek, Bethany (2002) "500 Words or Bust," *Ethos*: Vol. 2003 , Article 15.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2003/iss2/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

500 Words or Bust

HATE CRIMES AT IOWA STATE? BELIEVE IT.

column by | BETHANY KOHOUTEK

One night after a long weekend away with his friends, Joel Taylor returned to his fraternity room to find posters stripped from his walls, a box of cookies emptied into his aquarium and his belongings rifled through. Upon closer inspection, he also noticed that the rainbow flag, which had been sewn tightly onto his backpack, had been ripped off, and the pink triangle “Safe Zone” sticker had been removed from his wall.

Joel was targeted not because of anything he did or said. He was targeted because he is gay. And he says cases like his are far more common than many of us realize. He has spoken with students who have had gay-related materials torn from their doors or spit on, received written threats on their dry erase boards, and verbally abused.

And what could be more obvious than the words *Die Fag* scrawled on Durham Hall a couple of weeks ago?

Yet if you look at DPS’s safety report, you’ll see big fat zeroes in the hate crime columns. Not one hate crime on record at ISU in the past four years.

Originally, after discovering how alarmingly often this happens, I wanted to devote a full-length story in **ethos** to sexual-identity-related harassment and hate crimes at ISU. But this was more difficult than I had imagined. Incidents are sorely underreported (as proven by DPS’s lacking statistics), and victims of hate crimes are often reluctant to tell their stories, partly because of the possible repercussions.

“There’s a stigma attached to other people knowing who you are, especially in Iowa,” Joel says.

Ron Jackson, staff psychologist and diversity coordinator at Student Counseling Services, says that while he

has never dealt with victims of actual hate crimes, he knows plenty of students who are afraid to even come out.

“They don’t want to feel that social isolation and marginalization from coming out,” he says. “Some of the grad students are afraid of what could happen to them with their major professor... It’s a risk to come out here. It’s always a risk to be different here.”

Unfortunately, these incidents can be much more severe. Just this semester, two students in separate incidents were violently and randomly attacked outside their apartments — one incident ending in a trip to the emergency room. Why? Because they’re gay. Yet these cases will never be chalked up as hate crimes. One was reported to the police as a simple assault, and the other wasn’t reported at all.

Victims, like these two students, are faced with a frustrating catch-22: report it and face social consequences, or forget about it and allow the public to continue to believe that this ugliness never happens in Ames.

One way to solve this is for victims to file an anonymous Bias Incident Report, which lets the university, the police and the Ames City Council’s Human Rights Committee know that a hate-related incident has occurred.

But the real goal is to prevent anyone from ever having to fill out a report in the first place. Stop hate crimes before they start. If you see your frat brother, dorm buddy or some drunk idiot in Campustown trying to prove his manhood by targeting someone else, refuse to participate. Go a step further and report it. This isn’t just a problem for the gay community; as long as ignorant messages are being graffitied on campus buildings, and our classmates are assaulted for being who they are, it’s a problem for everyone. **e**

