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Principles of PR

MWF 12:00 Sipes

Case Analysis

**Case Summary**

A Mount Union Area High School teacher has been accused of having sex with a student. The student, at the time the sexual relationship began, was a minor. Thomas Huff, of Mount Union, PA, has been charged with corruption of a minor and the endangerment of welfare of a child. Police began investigating the case and removed him from Mount Union Area High School to be questioned on Wednesday, March 23. March 23 was also the date that the charges were filed against Huff at Magistrate District Judge Michael Colyer's office, located in Mount Union.

There has already been plenty of controversy over this case involving Huff. The controversy begins with the details that were expressed to the public. While the student involved is unnamed, there are many other facts that have been in newspapers, on news broadcasts and on other websites. The girl that Huff had consensual sex with was, at the time their relationship began, a minor (although above the age of consent) and his student. The two involved would send messages to each other via Facebook, texts and also speak on the telephone. The girl claims that they would participate in oral and vaginal sex in his classroom at the high school during school hours and also in his home that he shares with his wife and children. She said that she would skip classes to go to his classroom during his planning period. The girl also stated that she and Huff ended their relationship in November 2010.

There have been rumors before about Tom Huff having sexual relationships with students, but no one has come forward to authorities until now. Tom Huff is 37 years old. He is a married man with two kids. He attended Mount Union Area High School and then attended Lock Haven University. After college, he was employed with the Mount Union Area School District as a history teacher, later becoming the head of the history department. The victim is 22-years-old now with one child and one on the way. She attended Mount Union Area High School. The affair began two weeks before her 17th birthday.

The residents of Mount Union have been speaking out from both sides of the case. Parents have expressed concern about the safety of their children while they are attending school. Students have made t-shirts and Facebook groups saying, “Free Huff.” Many people are speculating that the unborn baby will have Huff DNA. The biggest question that the public seems to want to know is why is this person just now coming forward to authorities about this?

So far, there have not been many results in the case. Charges have been filed against Huff. He has been charged with corruption of a minor and the endangerment of welfare of a child, both misdemeanors. Huff has been released on $20,000 bail. He is still employed, although he is suspended with pay. A preliminary hearing date has not yet been set.

<http://www.altoonamirror.com/page/content.detail/id/548689/Teacher-relieved-of-duties.html?nav=742>

<http://wearecentralpa.com/wtaj-news-fulltext?nxd_id=261406>

<http://www.altoonamirror.com/page/content.detail/id/548689/Teacher-relieved-of-duties.html?nav=742>

**Analysis**

There are a few key players in this case, Tom Huff and the unnamed female, most obviously, and then the faculty and staff at the high school. Each individual and group brings new problems to the case. Both Huff and the girl had an active role in the participation of the sexual acts. Huff brings about the most problems. He was in a position of authority over the girl, who was his student. In addition to the girl being his student, she was also a minor, even though she was over the age of consent. He used his classroom to have sex and was just very unprofessional. He is a married man so he cheated on his wife in his home where his wife and kids also live. The girl knew that Huff was her teacher and a married man. She also knew she was too young to have a relationship with him. The faculty and staff at the high school are key players because as all this was going on, nothing was done to stop it. Coworkers and those in higher positions could have known about the relationship and chose to do nothing about it. In addition, rumors spread quickly. As the rumors of Huff having relationships with students got around, someone should have looked into the situation more carefully, especially those in higher positions. Each key player has played an important role in this case and has had some part in the development of it.

**PR Principles Illustrated**

*Crisis Management*

The Mount Union Area School District has had to use forms of crisis management after word got out to the public about the case. The district promptly declared that when Huff was taken out of school, there would be no comments to the press made by anyone except the superintendent. They suspended him, with pay, until they further examine the situation. Once the situation has been further investigated, Superintendent Brett Gilliland stated that a decision about Huff’s job will be made. It is important to the district to uphold its name and cooperate with the police. This situation can be considered a crisis because it is something that is not a usual occurrence and because it could have a potentially negative outcome on the Mount Union Area School District.

*Image Restoration*

Image restoration is considered in this case in three ways. First, Huff will need to restore his image to many people, including his wife, children, family, friends, coworkers, students and the general public. He will have to do many things to make up for his behavior and to regain any type of respect. Next, the girl that was involved should apologize to Huff’s wife for the mortification she is enduring. Lastly, the Mount Union Area School District should do everything possible to show that this was a mistake and that nothing like this will happen again. It needs to prove to the public that it is still reputable and is still an educational institution.

*Invasion of Privacy*

Invasion of privacy can be considered in this case because of all of the media attention. Many reporters have been outside of the Mount Union Area High School. This could cause problems because some parents might not want their children affiliated with the situation and it could be possible that they might become upset or angry if their child/children is/are on television. The people working for the different types of media constantly come up to people of Mount Union asking their thoughts and opinions on what is going on with the Huff scandal. The media do not seem to know when enough is enough and just seem to keep pushing to get whatever information possible, no matter what the circumstances are.

*The Flow of Opinion*

The flow of opinion seems to be one of the most obvious principles used in this case. As the textbook states, “Public opinion is really formed by the views of people who have taken the time to sift information, evaluate it and form an opinion that is expressed to others.” In a small town, most opinions are very similar, if not all the same. It is as though there are two different opinions of the case in Mount Union. It kind of seems that the more mature age group is more upset or angry about the case because they more fully understand what is wrong with what Huff did. The younger and less mature age group just wants to “Free Huff.” It is as though it is just more of a joke to them, which is why it seems as though the only ones who participate in the “Free Huff” things are of a younger age group. People of an older and more mature age group are upset about what happened and seem to be even more upset because no one did anything to stop it or check in on the rumors that had been going around. Lots of questions have been called in to the high school, with some parents going directly to the district office to get answers. The opinion of the public has caused Huff to not be seen in public, with the exception of traveling to his arraignment, since he was taken out of school in March. There is a possibility that he is ashamed or embarrassed of his actions, and he realized that the public has their own thoughts about it. The majority of the public has expressed that they do not think that Huff should ever be able to have his job at MUAHS back and they have the right to that opinion. In addition, lots of people have expressed their opinion of the girl, mostly negative. The people of the public will always have their own opinions and with a case like this, it will be very hard for anyone to sway the opinions that have already been made.

**Evaluation**

In this case, there are ethical issues that are easily identified. The first ethical issue is that Huff was in a position of authority over the girl, who was his student. It was completely unethical and unprofessional for him to be having sex with a student, let alone in his classroom at the school. Also, being a married man, it was unethical of him to cheat on his wife and the mother of his children. It was unethical of the girl to have sex with her teacher, especially knowing that he was a married man. All of the ethical issues basically tie together because the whole situation is just completely unethical and just wrong.

In addition to the ethical issues of this case, there are also legal issues that have been brought about. Thomas Huff has been charged with corruption of a minor and the endangerment of welfare of a child. While both of these are misdemeanors, it is very likely that he will lose his job at the Mount Union Area High School because of the unethical decisions that he made. Other legal issues are pending the paternity of the unborn child belonging to the girl involved.

The problem has been rectified by someone going to the police to report the incident that began five years ago and ended in November 2010. The person who went to the police about the matter has not been identified. Police then took Huff into custody to be questioned. After the questioning, a warrant was put out for his arrest. Once in police custody again, Huff was released on secured bail and is now awaiting trial.

In my opinion, I think that if it was such a big deal to whoever went to the police, it should have been done a long time ago. I am questioning the motive behind the person who went to the police about the situation. Aside from that, I think that the situation is being handled in the best way that it can be legally handled. The only thing that I really do not agree with is the fact that Huff has only been suspended from teaching with pay. I think he should have been directly fired once he was actually arrested. I also think a more thorough investigation should have been done, or be done, because of all the rumors that have been going around about Huff for many years.

If I was the PR practitioner in this case, I would have done more things for the Mount Union Area High School than I would have done for Thomas Huff. I think that the reputation of the school is very much at stake because of the severity of this case. I would focus on restoring the image of the high school because many people’s opinions of the school have become negative due to this incident. I would explain to the press that although many people will hold the people in higher positions at the school responsible, the only people to blame for the unjust actions are Huff and the girl. Huff was in a position of authority and his colleagues trusted that he would uphold his authority. A situation like this is not something that is usually planned on happening. In addition, I would make sure there was some form of an apology from the superintendent, apologizing for the behavior of Huff and reassuring parents that the people working at the school plan to do everything in their power to make sure that something like this case never happens again. Lastly, I would just try to make sure that the media stayed away from the students and faculty during school hours. I would try to do everything I could to make sure that the situation did not have an effect on the education that is to be given and received at the Mount Union Area High School because that is probably what is most important.

***Discussion questions***

Who all could be effected by this case and why?

Do you think Huff owes anyone an apology? Why or why not?

Who all is to blame in this case and for what reasons?

Should the public have any say in what happens to Huff, job-wise? Why or why not?

After reading the case, how do you personally feel about the situation?

What should the school district do about the situation?

Are there any reasons that Huff should be acquitted of his charges?

Should there be more or other charges filed against Huff?

Was the person who went to the police doing the right thing? Even though the person went to the police five years later?

Do you think Huff will have his job back? What do you think will happen to him?