

This complaint is simple to resolve for three reasons. First, none of the conduct that Tisdale complains of is a violation of RWA's Code of Ethics. Second, Tisdale's complaint contains numerous assertions which are not supported by any evidence, refer to the speech of people other than myself, or are contradicted by her own screenshots. Finally, the primary conduct that Tisdale wants RWA to punish is that I, a half Chinese-American woman, spoke out against negative stereotypes of half Chinese-American women. Far from being dishonest or disingenuous, my expression here is that of deeply-held beliefs which I have discussed for years.

It is up to RWA and the Ethics Committee to decide if that speech is allowable, but I will not apologize, and am not sorry for, trying to make people recognize that negative racial stereotypes are harmful.

I. Factual background.

Tisdale's account of what happened requires substantial additional information to present a complete picture, and also breaks the linear flow of Twitter threads. I believe that the timing of events matters and so, with apologies to the Committee for duplication, will include Twitter threads in full where appropriate. Public attention first came to this matter on August 7, 2019, when Carolyn Jewel tweeted as follows.



Tisdale refers to a tweet Grimshaw liked from “two African American women who happen to be conservatives and supporters of President Trump” and a tweet from Trump about a visit to Ohio. This understates matters considerably. The first tweet Tisdale mentions links to an article which states that white supremacy is a “hoax.” (Exhibit A, Diamond and Silk article; available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibita>).



Members of the community captured screenshots of other tweets liked by Grimshaw, including tweets applauding the mass arrests of hundreds of Latinx workers in Mississippi.¹ Screenshots were taken of only a small number of Grimshaw's likes, but those who scrolled through those likes say they were racist in character. (Exhibit B, thread of Ella Drake containing screenshots; available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitb>; see also Jewel tweet above)². After the discussion became public, Grimshaw removed hundreds of likes from her history. (Exhibit C, screenshot of Grimshaw's current twitter.)³

Before August 16, 2019, the issue was discussed extensively by many members of the community. Marie Force's publishing imprint had recently announced that they had hired Grimshaw as an acquiring editor, and much of the pushback was on her and her publishing company. (Exhibit D, collection of discussions prior to August 16, 2019.) Laura Vivanco, an academic who has published books about romance, summarizes what happened here: <https://teachmetonight.blogspot.com/2019/08/racism-and-corporate-romance-buyer.html>

I mention the date August 16th above, and include snippets of the discussion in Exhibit D, because at the time when the news first started to circulate, I had numerous other personal issues on my plate. Tisdale implies that I was somehow responsible for the discussion. The reality is that I did not say anything until others in the romance community had already brought significant pressure to bear.

When I first addressed the issue, my comments were directed solely to the issue of Grimshaw. (Exhibit E, Courtney Milan initial thread on Grimshaw, available at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibite>). I did not know at that time when I posted the thread that Grimshaw was employed by Glenfinnan Publishing; on August 17th, Rhonda Merwarth informed me of this fact.



¹ The tweet Grimshaw liked refers to those arrested as "illegal aliens," but almost half of the workers who were taken up in the mass arrest were subsequently released. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49283157>.

² Displaying Twitter threads where screenshots are attached poses some difficulty, as saving to PDF truncates the screenshots. In this case, I have saved the exhibit as a PDF and then added to the PDF the full images from the original Twitter thread. Where appropriate, I also provide links to the original on Twitter for the Committee to examine.

³ Exhibit B demonstrates that Grimshaw had 3,582 likes as of August 8th; Exhibit C demonstrates that Grimshaw had 2,915 likes as of September 2nd. It appears that in order to avoid scrutiny, Grimshaw removed at least 667 of her likes.

Rhonda directly contacted Tisdale on Twitter and informed her of the issue with Grimshaw. At Tisdale's request, via direct message, Rhonda provided screenshots and links to some of the prior discussion (Exhibit F, Direct messages between Rhonda Merwarth and Tisdale; DMs provided with Rhonda's permission.) From what I am aware⁴, between August 17th and August 24th, only a small handful of people in addition to Rhonda also replied to Tisdale. Again, I was not one of those people.

Tisdale neglects to mention in her narrative that on August 24th, 2019 at 10:27 AM,⁵ she significantly fanned the flames of this controversy and brought attention on herself by filming a twelve minute long live video directed to the community at large. That video is archived at <https://www.pscp.tv/w/1yoKMzRLLjYGO> (accessible via <http://bit.ly/suzantisdalevideo>), and is transcribed in full in Laura Vivanco's account linked above.

In her video, Tisdale stated: "I know this is going to piss a lot of people off." (Tisdale Video at 1:27). Tisdale was not wrong. The response was explosive. (See Exhibit G, a partial selection of responses to Suzan's video that predate my own).

I do not follow Tisdale and was not aware of her video until later that evening, when I saw discussion of it on my timeline. I discussed the video without replying to Tisdale for the first time at 4:58 PM on August 24th, 2019. (Exhibit H, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitj>). I responded to Tisdale for the first time on August 24, 2019, at 5:45 PM (Exhibit I, available on line at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitg>). This was the first time that I directly interacted with Tisdale on this matter. Over the course of the evening, I retweeted comments from others and had two additional short threads on the importance of editors and the use of institutional power. (Exhibit J, Two Short Threads, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitj1> and <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitj2>).

Tisdale also does not mention that in response to the backlash about the video, she tweeted about her reasons for starting Glenfinnan Publishing. (Exhibit K, tweets of Tisdale). In that thread, she stated that there was a problem with "New York's traditional publishing houses and how they treat authors of color" and stated that her publishing company, Glenfinnan, had been started so that "great authors" could "get[] the attention they deserve."

I responded to those tweets by asking how many authors of color she had published. Her answer was "None. As far as I know none have submitted to us." I then explained why I thought that her answer indicated that her publishing house did not have the knowledge or expertise to market to people of color, and why her answer seemed to contradict things she had said before. (Exhibit L, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitl1> and <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitl2>).

Later that day, Lisa Lin, a Taiwanese-American member of RWA, tweeted about a book that upset her because of its representation of Asians. Lisa did not name the book in her tweet thread. I asked her to direct message me with more information. At the point when I asked for more information, I had no

⁴ Because I have fairly active mentions, I have turned on Twitter's quality filter, and several other filters based on whether the person replying has verified emails/phone numbers/some other metric Twitter has that is something of a mystery. Even actively searching for some discussions will not show me all the tweets on the subject. Due to Twitter filters which I do not completely control, providing a completely comprehensive overview is outside my capacity.

⁵ All times are giving in Mountain Time, which is the time that Twitter shows me when I login. If Committee Members view these tweets independently, Twitter will likely show them the time in their local time zones.

idea that the book was connected to Suzan Tisdale and Glenfinnan Publishing. (Exhibit M, tweets of Lisa Lin, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitm>). Via direct message, Lisa Lin informed me of the content of the book and the fact that the author was an editor at Glenfinnan. (Exhibit N, direct messages with Lisa Lin, included with Lisa's permission.)

Contrary to Tisdale's assertions, I did not visit Glenfinnan's website in order to pick a target. I visited Glenfinnan's website to check that Davis was an editor. I also downloaded a sample of the book from Amazon to verify Lisa's account. I discussed the book in question only after I had made an independent review of the facts Lisa asserted.

And yes, I did state the book was a racist mess. I provided extensive documentation of that claim at the time. (Exhibit O, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibito>).

II. Tisdale does not assert any conduct which is in violation of the Code of Ethics.

Tisdale highlights numerous sections of the Code of Ethics, but they are all clearly inapplicable on their face.

- A. Section 2 of the Code of Ethics forbids "engaging in...conduct that objectively threaten a member's career, reputation, safety or wellbeing. Specifically excluded from this section are exchanges of business information, true statements, personal disagreements, honest discussions of books, non-RWA operated social media posts, and marketing materials."

Tisdale states: "I realize that the code of ethics does not have a clear or well-defined rule on social media behavior." Tisdale is wrong. The Code of Ethics clearly states that discussions on non-RWA operated social media behavior are not covered by the Code of Ethics.

In addition to the social media exclusion, the conduct at issue is specifically excluded from this section in multiple other ways. The tweets she highlights are a discussion of business practices. Discussing the character and content of several editors who are selling services to authors as independent editors, and who are the editors of record for a publisher that publishes authors, is a business discussion. (See Exhibit J, establishing that I believe an editor's ability to acquire and edit diverse fiction is an important business matter for authors). Tisdale also references my commentary on a book, which is clearly an honest discussion of that book. I also believe that my statements are true, and that we have a personal disagreement on the meaning of the word "racism" which has led to this dispute.

- B. Section 3 of the Code of Ethics forbids "discriminatory or harassing behavior" by RWA Board members.

I am not a Board Member of RWA, and so this section does not apply to me.

- C. Section 4 of the Code of Ethics forbids "making a member's personal, private identifying information public with the intent of harming the other member's career, reputation, or wellbeing."

Tisdale does not allege that I have made any personal, private identifying information public. The only information about Tisdale or other editors of Glenfinnan that I mentioned are the fact that they are editors for her publishing company—a fact stated openly on her website—and screenshots from

a book written by one of her editors, which is publicly available for sale. None of this is personal, private identifying information, and Tisdale does not argue that it is.

- D. Section 1 of the Code of Conduct forbids “repeatedly or intentionally engaging in conduct injurious to RWA or its purposes.”

I have saved this for the last, even though it is mentioned first, because it requires further discussion.

The specific conduct mentioned in Tisdale’s complaint is:

(1) I asked her how many authors of color Tisdale had published, and was critical of her answer. This question is not injurious to RWA or its purposes; in fact, the question of how many authors of color a publishing house publishes is one of significant interest to both RWA and the romance community.

(2) I said one of her editors was “a fucking racist mess.” To clarify: the tweet in question states that the book is a racist mess. (See Exhibit O. There is a clear grammatical typo in the tweet, but I think typo notwithstanding, it is clear that the author’s name is mentioned to identify the book, and that the antecedent of “fucking racist mess” is the book, not the author.)

The character in question is, like me, half-Chinese. My explanation of why the book was harmful stems from my lived experience and is relevant and useful to authors who don’t want to harm others. Educating authors on how to strive for excellence in fiction is one of RWA’s purposes.

III. Tisdale’s statements lack evidence or are verifiably untrue.

Tisdale’s complaint is largely composed of assertions for which she provides no evidence. I cannot possibly go line-by-line and identify every statement that she makes without evidence, and must ask the committee to consider whether she has provided a basis for each assertion as a blanket matter.

I will only mention a few instructive examples. For instance, she claims that she believes that I acted as I did because she and her editors are white. She cites no evidence to support this claim except her personal belief.

Tisdale states that “Ms. Milan and her ilk” referred to her and her editors as “privileged white women.” I have actually never used that phrase on Twitter, and she attaches no screenshot in demonstration. I do sometimes talk about white privilege, but have said multiple times that I do not think it is an insult, and that as a half-white woman, I also sometimes benefit from white privilege. I am not sure who my “ilk” are, but the Code of Ethics does not make me responsible for the speech of others. She provides a screenshot of someone leaving her a one-star review on Goodreads claiming that she made a racist video, but that person is not me, and in fact responded to Tisdale on Twitter time-stamped before I had responded to Tisdale’s video, saying that they had left notes on Goodreads. (Exhibit G, page 6.)

Tisdale claims that I refuse to correct inaccuracies for my followers. In reality, she includes in her screenshots the only time where she identified a factual inaccuracy to me—and also includes the fact that I acknowledged that the single claim at issue was inaccurate. (Exhibit P, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitp>).

Tisdale manages to assert both that as far as she knows, no people have color have applied to Glenfinnan and also that she does not know the race of 99% of those who apply to Glenfinnan, two statements that are in significant tension with each other.

IV. My response to Davis's book was sincere

Tisdale claims: "It is my belief that Ms. Milan targeted Kathryn Lynn Davis simply because Ms. Davis is one of my acquisitions editors and Ms. Davis happens to be white. I can find no other reason for her to attack Ms. Davis in this manner; certainly nothing based on any factual evidence."

Tisdale has not tried to look for factual evidence. My objections to the book were laid out in full Exhibit O. While she refers to the thread as "false," she does not explain what is false about them, and indeed, the majority of the thread consists of direct screenshots from the book so those who follow along can make up their own mind. I continue to believe the book by Davis was a racist mess. The book in question includes the following:

then." In China, no woman was taught much more than cooking and sewing and the graceful art of pleasing her husband. "First Daughter also tells me you were friends, that you cared for my children when others did not. I am grateful. But more than that, I would ask a great favor."

I believe it is inherently racist to claim that "no woman in China" was taught—China is a large country, and to claim that every woman is alike is inherently racist.

Or take this:

Madam Chin lifted her head in a small gesture of defiance. "You know how the women of the household behave. We remain inside the walls of the women's compounds; we are demure and quiet, as our mothers have trained us to be. We walk with eyes lowered politely, and may not look higher than a man's breast. Young unmarried women are even more modest and submissive, so they will make good wives." She drew a deep breath. "Wan Li-an was one of the most polite, the most modest. She rarely spoke a word, and kept her eyes lowered always, fixed on the tea tray or her hands in her lap or her embroidery."

This matter is deeply personal for me. My great-great-grandfather came to Hawaii to open a store in the 1870s, the time period during which this book is set; my great-grandfather arrived soon after. I was raised on family oral histories of that time. Husbands, uncles, and sons were halfway around the world. My mother told me stories of my maternal ancestors, who ran the household, fended off bandit attacks, raised children through famine, and fled angry ghosts, all while their husbands were absent.

The notion of the submissive Chinese woman is a racist stereotype which fuels higher rates of violence against Asian women. (See https://nnedv.org/latest_update/stereotypes-asian-women/). That this is sincerely my belief—and that this sincere belief is driven by my personal experiences—is obvious upon even a cursory search of my Twitter feed. On March 13, 2017, I told a story of how my education was disrupted by a fellow classmate who believed Asians were submissive. (Exhibit Q, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitq>). I have also previously discussed why I believed that writing submissive Asian women in fiction was problematic, particularly if the character was submissive simply because of her heritage. (Exhibit R, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibitr>).⁶ Finally, Diana Gill at Tor recently sent me a book for review which had a half-Japanese protagonist, and was written by a white woman. I praised the book for exactly the reasons I criticized Davis’s book. (Exhibit S, available online at <http://bit.ly/cmexhibits>).⁷

I *am* emotional about these issues. Negative stereotypes of Chinese women have impacted my life, the life of my mother, my sisters, and my friends. They fuel violence and abuse against women like me. And they dishonor the memory of the strong women who I am descended from on my mother’s side of the family. I have strong feeling about these stereotypes, and when I speak about them, I use strong language. It is hard not to be upset about something that has done me and my loved ones real harm.

Far from being “dishonest,” I am deeply sincere. I do not believe that it serves RWA’s interests or purposes to ask members to refrain from sincere, emotional discussions of racial stereotypes in romance fiction; instead, I believe that open discussions of how to avoid negative depictions of characters of color are absolutely necessary for RWA’s future.

Finally, a brief note about Tisdale’s conduct in filing this claim. She states that the community objected to only two tweets liked by Grimshaw. This is not only false, but is knowingly false, given the direct messages between her and Rhonda Merwarth, which she has clearly read. Tisdale’s failure to mention the degree to which she injected herself in a discussion of this important business matter—by releasing a video which she knowingly admitted was inflammatory—is also deeply troublesome.

It is not a violation of RWA’s Code of Ethics to mislead the Committee, but this complaint is vexatious.

Sincerely,



Courtney Milan

⁶ This is not the only time I have discussed this on Twitter; by my count, I found at least four other prior instances in which I have expressed nearly the exact sentiments as I did in my tweets about Davis:

<https://twitter.com/courtneymilan/status/774666412887461888?s=20>,
<https://twitter.com/courtneymilan/status/1133362099554406400?s=20>,
<https://mobile.twitter.com/courtneymilan/status/952219543228760065>, and
<https://mobile.twitter.com/courtneymilan/status/1162404344009854976>.

⁷ I don’t want this to sound too much like, “I have a white friend so I can’t be racist against white people,” but I don’t hate white people, and will and have praised their books when I think they do a good job, especially if they’re writing about half-Asian characters.