

About Work It

By Cristan Williams

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https://www.transadvocate.com/about-work-it_n_5042.htm

Abstract

Since people are having a hard time understanding why trans folk seem to take issue with Work It, let me put it in terms that more folks might understand. What follows is the exact “About” section from the show’s homepage. I’ve made just one change: instead of transface, the show is now about blackface: Work [...]

Article

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Work It About Page:

About the show

Lee Standish is a quick-witted and likable family man. His best friend, Angel Ortiz, is a hotheaded ladies' man with no filter. The two of them worked at Pontiac -- Lee as a top salesman and Angel as head mechanic -- until the company went out of business. Out of work for a year, their job prospects don't look too bright. They've learned the hard way that the current recession is more of a "man white-cession" and their skills aren't in high demand. Then the almost-broke Lee finds out that Coreco Pharmaceuticals is looking to hire sales reps -- female black sales reps. He takes a chance and goes into the interview dressed in heels, a skirt and make-up blackface. The transformed Lee gets hired -- as a woman an African American.

Lee wants to stay true to his agreement with Angel that, if one of them is working, then the other will be too, so he tells Angel what he has to do if he wants a job at Coreco. Angel, who is miserable working

at a fast-food dump, is desperate to make a change; he decides to swallow his pride and go for it. Unfortunately he tanks his interview, but when he fixes the boss's car, he too is hired - also as a woman an African American.

To stay employed, Lee and Angel must put aside their alpha male racist selves and learn to navigate their all-female black workplace. Their presence at Coreco with their new female black coworkers initially raises a few eyebrows, but the company's two newest sales reps find ways to put almost everyone at ease: Enthusiastic and sometimes naïve Kristin is excited when the female black Lee tells her that she, too, is a single mom. Kelly, the office party girl, is thrilled to have two more friends to hit the town with. Only Grace, the somewhat icy regional sales leader, keeps a suspicious eye on Lee and Angel, convinced that there's something seriously wrong with them. To complicate matters, when Angel meets their new boss, Vanessa, he is immediately smitten with her. But there are some serious obstacles in the way of their romance: She's his boss, and -- no small detail -- she thinks he's a woman black.

For his part, Lee can't disclose his feminine black secret to his wife, Connie, or to their 14-year-old daughter, Kat, so he tells them he got a job at a drug company - as himself. Connie notices that, since Lee has begun working at Coreco, he seems to be more understanding and sensitive to her needs. The opposite is true of Connie's unemployed brother, Brian, who is also Lee and Angel's drinking buddy. Sensitive and understanding he is not, so they definitely can't reveal their secret to him.

Lee and Angel quickly realize how much they have to learn to get by in their new environment. It's not just how to walk in heels and tighten up with Spanx do stereotypical black things . For the first time, they're really listening to the women black people in their lives and opening themselves up to a whole new realm of experiences. In the process, they're learning that to be a better man white person may mean having to be a better woman black person.

IMHO, this show is nothing more than a trans minstrel show:



Transface: This is funny



Blackface: This is not funny

Yah, yah, yah... I hear you. You're going to say, "But this show isn't about real transgender people!" As I relied Sunday:

A more correct entertainment comparison would be a minstrel show. In a minstrel show, the audience knew they weren't watching a real African-Americans, they understood that this was a white person mocking the white perception of the black experience. Would the public support a show about two out of work white men who find both economic abundance and laughs while performing minstrel shows? Of course not. The point isn't that this show mocks the real experience of trans folk; rather, the huge issue is that the show purposefully mocks the experience non-trans people think trans people have.

Comment by Ekipasuko — Sunday, December 18, 2011 @ 7:45am PST [REPLY TO THIS POST](#)

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Do you get it? I understand that Work It isn't a show mocking real crossdressers, transsexuals or any other type of trans person; the show's stock-in-trade is inviting people to laugh at the EXACT representation right wingers claim to be the trans experience. This show trades in the exact same imagery powerful right wingers regularly use to increase the suffering of trans folk.

When and how did these disgusting people become a "Civil Rights" movement?



These are perhaps some of the most twisted, evil, and wicked people on the planet.

To kowtow to them is beyond reprehensible.

Of course non-trans folk; I totally hear you! Mocking imagery like the above that has been used to subvert 14th amendment guarantees for trans folk in employment, housing and medical care has absolutely, positively NOTHING in common with this show's shtick. Sure... right.



This isn't cruel; cisgender people say so!
And Soul Man wasn't offensive, white people said so (at the time)!



... until a number of years later...

Unlike *Watermelon Man* or *Black Like Me*, *Soul Man* uses blackface to portray the issue of crossing the color line as a farcical, frat-boy romp. Mark Watson's indignities seem to be limited to suffering the occasional bigoted apartment manager or tasteless racist joke from fellow students—hardly an inconvenience when compared to the “benefits” that he derives from being black. Moreover, *Soul Man* presents these incidents as comic fodder, intended to amuse rather than to provoke or disturb. As a result, the depiction of racist incidents in this film is stripped of affective power and validity and subsumed within Mark's dominant gaze.

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- *Critical white studies: looking behind the mirror*, page 271

Some claim that *Work It* is just another *Bosom Buddies* but I say that it's actually just another *Soul Man*. Like *Soul Man*, *Work It* uses transface "... to portray the issue of crossing the [gender] line as a farcical, frat-boy romp." Lee and Angel will suffer some indignities which will be "... hardly an inconvenience when compared to the "benefits" that he derives from being [female]." Moreover, *Work It* will present these incidents as "comic fodder, intended to amuse rather than provoke or disturb. As a result, the depiction of racist incidents in this film is stripped of affective power and validity..."

cross-posted from Ehipassiko

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