

Andrea James believes a straight cis woman is a better choice for the GLAAD Board than queer trans women

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Abstract

In her latest cognitive-dissonance-filled diatribe, “comedian” Andrea James attempts to maintain her waning relevance by criticizing the GLAAD Board of Directors for having too much trans representation. The piece, published on Queerty (a blog with its own problematic racist and transphobic history), forwards the idea that GLAAD has been subjected to a “trans takeover” because [...]

Article

In her latest cognitive-dissonance-filled diatribe, “comedian” Andrea James attempts to maintain her waning relevance by criticizing the GLAAD Board of Directors for having too much trans representation. The piece, published on Queerty (a blog with its own problematic racist and transphobic history), forwards the idea that GLAAD has been subjected to a “trans takeover” because trans women are more common on the board than they are in the LGBT population as a whole. James claims that the presence of trans women on the board, particularly writer Jenny Boylan and sports journalist Christina Kahrl, is causing “mission creep” in GLAAD’s operations, and it is responsible for the “conflict” between trans women and the rest of the LGBT community on media issues. Ms James then returns to viciously flogging her favorite deceased equine: accusing queer trans women of all manner of sins including: “hating drag”, being assimilationist, oppressing drag performers, and being “newly minted queers”, all in the name of protecting mainstream LGBT culture.

Let’s begin by looking at the very first beginning of Andrea’s piece. She begins:

“Meghan McCain’s recent appointment to the GLAAD board of directors is promising. LGBT rights are not a partisan issue, and allies are critical. Her appointment is most important, however, because she was socialized as female from birth, a point of view that is slowly being squeezed out of the GLAAD board, replaced by people who were socialized as boys from birth, including four current transgender board members.”

If you aren’t familiar, Ms. McCain is the daughter of Arizona Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain. She is a white, wealthy, straight, cisgender member of the GOP. She is quite literally the picture of privilege in the United States. Andrea expresses excitement for McCain’s appointment at several points in her piece, primarily because she was “socialized as a girl”, a demographic that James feels is underrepresented on the GLAAD board, and she goes on to criticize

both Boylan and Kahrl for being “socialized as boys.” So, in James’ opinion, the input of a very wealthy straight cisgender woman on matters of LGBT media representation is considerably more important than those of queer trans women because of “socialization.”

James next launches into a slap-dash comparison of the demographics of the GLAAD board as compared to the queer demographics of the US. Here, she makes perhaps the only useful points of the entire piece: that there is an astonishing majority of cis gay men on the board, and a disappointing dearth of bisexuals and trans men. But, instead of focusing on those salient points, James decides to focus her energy on railing against the four trans woman on the board for being the wrong kind of trans women (which, according to James, is queer and later-in-life transitioning). Particularly galling is how James then attempts to accuse Kahrl of this exact same behavior by misrepresenting a tweet in which Kahrl expresses appreciation for the writing of another trans writer. Misrepresenting tweets without context is a technique that Andrea appears to be quite fond of. James makes the point that trans representation on the GLAAD board is a new phenomenon, and appears to long for the days when she still gave presentations to the trans-excluded Board. It’s unclear whether this because she bemoans the reduction in her own influence, or she has simply internalized the transphobia of the gay male community to such an extent that she fears life without their dominance.

It’s at this point that James descends into frightening incoherent series of accusations for which she provides absolutely evidence or rationale. She writes:

“Now that we are gaining greater rights and acceptance, a few comfortable elitists in the trans community suddenly want to exclude those who are not “true” transgender people. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the recent campaign led by Boylan and Kahrl to make “tranny” a slur under any circumstance.”

So, after praising the inclusion of Meghan McCain - the very picture of American elitism - Andrea accuses two far less wealthy and considerably less influential trans women of being “comfortable elitists”. Never mind the fact that the entire GLAAD Board of Directors is made up of elite and respected members of the media; James makes zero attacks on the “elitism” of the rest of the board. Beyond that, her accusations of attempts to “exclude” people from the trans umbrella are both unfounded and astonishingly hypocritical, considering how recently she defended Calpernia Addams for her assertions that young queer trans activists had not “earned their place at the table.”

Interestingly, both Addams and James were featured quite prominently featured in the photos from this years GLAAD Media Awards and both have bragged about their influence and Hollywood connections in their writing. Could this be nothing more an ugly case of projection from an LGBT elitist threatened by the rise of other activists who don’t share her narrow gay-male-preferential view of the world? James then gets into what appears to be the ACTUAL point of her article, finding another excuse to rant on and on about how important the word “tranny” is. A good long search of Twitter and Google turned absolutely no evidence that either Boylan or Kahrl had led any kind of “campaign” against the word, only that they support ceasing to normalize the use of a slur used frequently to harm and demean trans women, in line with GLAAD’s current media guidelines.

As she seems to do just about every time she finds another outlet to print her drivel, James then returns to her obsessive need to make absolutely every conversation about drag performers. She states:

“This “tranny” debate exemplifies how many transwomen socialized as straight boys dislike drag. They did not come up through the club scene, they were not forced to seek refuge among the LGBT community. People socialized as straight males (myself included) enjoyed respectability and privilege, and now many of these newly minted queers are trying to impose their brand of respectability politics onto a group they joined after transition. They want to exclude drag from the trans community, because they don’t like its countercultural in-your-face offensiveness.”

Here again, James appears to hold the gay-male dominated drag club scene to be the be-all-end-all of queer culture and denigrates anyone who did not take part in it as “socialized as straight boys”. This categorization is an absolute absurdity. Many queer trans women lived their own versions of gender non-conformity for years before transition, with a relatively small minority living anything approaching a socialized straight male existence right up until transition. In fact, many of us who lived in non-binary identities prior to transition found the gay-male-controlled LGBT culture that James appears so fond of to be hostile and unwelcoming, and had to seek refuge elsewhere- most frequently in each other. Simply put, James’ continued labeling of queer trans women as “newly minted queers” is functional erasure of our queer experience simply because it doesn’t align with the standard narrative of the monolithic mainstream LGBT culture. For queer trans women, the rejection of James mainstream LGBT culture represents a rejection of the iconography of a culture that consistently views us as less-than, shoves us to the outside, and ignores our concerns.

James wraps her piece by, once again, making a point to defend RuPaul and attempting to connect Boylan to another “campaign” that doesn’t exist, this time one supposed started by Parker Molloy in her infamous (and now multiple retracted and multiply apologized-for) tweet. James’ reliance on the term “campaign” for any instance of the queer trans community expressing a view is nothing more than a propaganda-derived technique to cast us in a conspiratorial light, making it all the easier to denigrate and discount the views all of us at once. In another glaring moment of hypocrisy, James both attacks the state of LGBT activism as “mainstream and bland and corporate”, and praises RuPaul (arguably one the most mainstream, corporate LGBT people out there, given that his popular cable TV show) for his “huge donations”. It seems mainstream and corporate are okay, so long as they’re the right kind of mainstream and corporate.

Following the publication of this piece, James took to Twitter to engage in trolling of the queer trans community, including some disturbingly ableist tweets in which she attacks her “haters” by accusing them being on the autism spectrum.

Andrea is no stranger to being a bully on the internet, but this kind of grade-school name-calling is disgusting. When she was repeatedly called out for her abusive, ableist trolling, she created a Twitter list of anyone who criticized her:

For someone who happily writes lengthy hit pieces on anyone who criticizes her or her friends, Ms. James appears to have an awfully thin skin when her own behavior comes under fire, and she compensates for it in the same manner that all bullies do - by lashing out.

Sadly, Ms. James was not at all wrong to be critical of the composition of the GLAAD Board. Better representation of bisexual people and trans men would add vital voices to the organization (far more vital than a cis-het white woman’s voice), and the gay male contingent could stand to lose a few seats.

But, James' decision to attack the queer trans women on the board, and to make absurd stretches of the facts to connect that attack to the same tired talking point she's been using for months, point not to a legitimate concern for diversity, but instead to a personal agenda.

At the end of the day, Andrea James seems to have reduced her role in the trans community to little more than a classless irritant of fading provenance. Years of swallowing and internalizing the transphobia of the mainstream LGBT culture appears to have made her willing to subvert herself and attack other trans women to appease the gay men who control that culture, and further their agenda. Given her connections to the wealthier members of the LGBT media community (which she happily flaunts on Twitter), I suppose it can come as no surprise that she functions as their lapdog. It would just be nice if they'd keep her on a shorter leash, because we're tired of listening to her bark.

Suggested citation

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