

Et tu, Caroline Criado-Perez?

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Abstract

At first, I wasn't going to write a response piece to Caroline Criado-Perez (CCP) article concerning the term "cis", because many of her ideas were similar to those in Sarah Dium's post I recently responded to. Then I realized those similarities should be pointed out. There are patterns emerging where otherwise respected feminists are injecting [...]

Article



At first, I wasn't going to write a response piece to Caroline Criado-Perez (CCP) article concerning the term "cis", because many of her ideas were similar to those in Sarah Dium's post I recently responded to.

Then I realized those similarities should be pointed out. There are patterns emerging where otherwise respected feminists are injecting thinly veiled transmisogynist bigotry within self-congratulatory "bravery" narratives, as well as, patronizing pro-trans-sounding platitudes. So, when trans activists respond to their seemingly conciliatory knives-in-the-back with anger, the pre-poisoned well of viewing trans activists as "anti-feminist...haters" activates in full force.

CCP is currently selling the situation as her causing “something of a stir”. (If you were wondering, the change in her last name is referring to a fellow feminist.)



Figure 1. ccpastir

And the criticism she has received as coming from “misogynistic men”.



Figure 2. ccpmen

And in the most perversely insidious spin, her supporters are claiming that her attack on trans identity is “standing up to bullying”.



Figure 3. jbbullying

The first thing CCP does in her post explains that she is “cross” and dives into an inexplicably passive-aggressive introductory paragraph implying that she’s angry about something but is instead going to discuss something else she’s been meaning to say. So, what has CCP been bottling up inside? Well, it seems that long ago she googled “cis” and eventually figured out what it meant (sort of) and supposed that “cis” was a word that described her because she isn’t transgender.

True enough.

She also explains why the term exists and how it can be a powerful way to linguistically avoid having an adjective that describes transgender women but none that describes [word does not exist] women.

Moreover, as a woman, I understood the importance for an oppressed group to fight against the designation of them as other, counter to an unmarked default normal.

However, that was then and this is now. She now rejects the term “cis”.

Why?

Well, you see - she’s seen things (uncited, unreferenced, vague things). Do these things involve the definition of “cis”?

No, not really.

She claims:

I saw women being told that cis privilege entailed wanting to wear the clothes that were created for their gender.

Then she goes on an odd jag about how she can’t be bothered to find a pair of jeans with decent pockets and some women’s shoes are uncomfortable. She claims that clothes marketed to women are “impractical, uncomfortable clothes” with the notable exception of summer dresses. Summer dresses are awesome and everyone should wear them, according to CCP.

How does this relate to the term “cis”? She calls wearing clothing marketed to women as “this cis clothing thing”. However, that seems strange since trans women also tend to wear clothes marketed to women.

Within the same paragraph, however, perhaps unwittingly, CCP specifically alludes to oppressive social norms that lead to trans women being violently marginalized. “For [someone perceived as] a man to trade down, well, that’s unthinkable.” She also alludes to oppressive social norms that lead to trans men being violently marginalized. “We [people perceived as women] are trading up and that is OK within reason, so long as we don’t get too manly...”

She all but explicitly describes a commonly articulated aspect of cis privilege within the radical feminist framework of patriarchy, but that is NOT what she claims is said to be “cisgender privilege”.

No.

The premise was that unnamed people were insisting that “cis privilege” involved “...wanting to wear the clothes that were created for their gender.” When CCP was asked to explain who had said such an odd thing, CCP tweeted a screen cap of a google search of “clothes” and “cis privilege”. In the screenshots you can see these phrases: “to not be fired”, “more likely to allow me”, and “without being refused service/mockd by staff”.



Figure 4. TERF-tw

So, she did not produce a single quote or an article or even an anecdote of someone saying that wanting to wear certain clothes was inherent in cis privilege. Even if she were to dig through all of the internet and find such a thing, her claim is that this attitude is so pervasive that the very definition of “cis” is affected.

That seems unlikely, but no worries, she provides one more specific example and alludes to “other things” existing.

I saw other things. I saw women being told that their female bodies were a mark of their cis privilege.

As Zoe Kirk-Robinson points out in her reaction to CCP’s article, “Having a female body is not a mark of cisgender privilege. If it was, cis men would not be able to be cisgender.” CCP explains in detail how

her “female body” is perceived by society and that it causes her to be treated poorly. She mentions later in her article that trans women experience much of that same treatment, but fails to make the connection. The bulk of what CCP describes is not cis privilege, but the lack of male privilege.

The only thing she mentions that is typical of women assigned female at birth and not women assigned male at birth is her periods. Setting aside the hurtful notion that not potentially having the ability to birth children is a privilege, how could having periods possibly be “cis privilege” when transgender people assigned female at birth also tend to have those parts? I would certainly like to know who is telling cis women “their female bodies [are] a mark of their cis privilege.” Perhaps I’ll tweet CCP and ask so she can google “female bodies” and “cis privilege” for me; but really, I think it’s not too much to ask that she does her research before publishing her work and not only after she is challenged.

And yet again, CCP isn’t just claiming that someone somewhere said this once on a tumblr or a tweet, but that the sentiment is so pervasive that it has irredeemably changed the term “cis” in such a way that she now has a duty, as a feminist, to reject it.

So, what is this brand new meaning for the term “cis” that is causing her to be “cross”?

Why, lo and behold, the meaning of the word “cis” has magically changed to the definition that TERFs use.

Why?

How?

Well, for reasons that CCP essentially just pulled out of the air. So, according to CCP, what does it mean for someone assigned female at birth to be “cis”?

But I will not say that I identify with the womanhood that has been enforced on me since the day I was born.

So, there you have it, the common cognitive obstacle that I see over-and-over-and-over again among fellow cisgender feminists. Fundamentally, it’s not the word “cis” they have a problem with but the phrase “gender identity”. Having used the term “gender” to refer to a culturally constructed class for so long, that definition simply refuses to be refined.



Figure 5. ccpheirarchy

To CCP, having a “gender identity” of “woman” doesn’t simply mean literally identifying yourself as a woman:

I do not identify as cis. I am not cis. I am a woman...

Instead, she equates identifying as a woman with identifying with the social construction of “womanhood”.

To her, this is the womanhood she refuses to identify with:

I do not identify with being silent
I do not identify with being pink
I do not identify with being soft
I do not identify with being scared
I do not identify with being weak
I do not identify with being submissive
I do not identify with being irrational
I do not identify with being hysterical
I do not identify with being bad at maths
I do not identify with being unintelligent
I do not identify with being followed
I do not identify with being grabbed
I do not identify with being assaulted
I do not identify with being raped
I do not identify with being inferior
I do not identify with being a woman as society has created it.

Figure 6. *ccpidentify*

So, what are the implications of a trans woman who is a woman, and is described as “identifying as a woman”? What CCP has done is set up a dichotomy where she is a woman and trans women simply “identify” as women; something that she says she will never do because of what a horrible, anti-feminist, thing that is.

I doubt she thought that through, her “ducks weren’t in a row” so to speak. She is promising follow-up posts, so I’d like to make a request.

Dear Caroline Criado-Perez:

Please clarify if you think that being a woman who identifies herself a woman, means she has accepted or supports that list of horrors; because that is a very direct logical consequence of what you have written.

You also state:

Woman as defined by society is not my gender identity.

No CCP, it isn’t. “Woman” is.

The title of your article asked a question. It’s a question that you did not seem to put a lot of effort into answering. I suspect if you did, your blog post would be much shorter.



Figure 7. CCPweek

You do not name.

You do not quote.

You do not link.

You treat transgender people as some monolithic faceless thing, to be talked about but not listened to or engaged with.

Why? Well, it's simple. Here's where you explain it:

Now, to return to trans women, I am not for one second denying that they suffer greatly from the same male violence that has made me who I am today. I am also not for one second telling them how to live their lives. I could not care less what another person decides to do with their body, how they choose to express themselves. I don't care, up until the moment where they start telling me that their identity depends on me defining myself in a certain way.

You are in a social position where you are able to sanctimoniously give other human beings a license to survive as their authentic selves under the condition that they ask nothing of you.

You know what you call that?

Privilege.

I suggest you check it.

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