

Faggot Ru Paul: trannys need to “get stronger”

By Cristan Williams

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Abstract

The faggot, RuPaul Andre Charles, claims that trans people are “bitches” who need to “get stronger” with regard to his use of tranny. In an interview on WTF with Marc Marron, RuPaul said: You know, if your idea of happiness has to do with someone else changing what they say, what they do, you are in for [...]

Article

The faggot, RuPaul Andre Charles, claims that trans people are “bitches” who need to “get stronger” with regard to his use of tranny. In an interview on WTF with Marc Marron, RuPaul said:

You know, if your idea of happiness has to do with someone else changing what they say, what they do, you are in for a fucking hard-ass road... I dance to the beat of a different drummer. I believe everybody -- you can be whatever the hell you wanna be, I ain't stopping you. But don't you dare tell me what I can do or what I can't -- say or can't do. It's just words, like, 'Yeah, you hurt me!' Bitch, you need to get stronger. If you're upset by something I said you have bigger problems than you think.”

Within drag culture, tranny has an in-group meaning that does not mean what the rest of the world means when they use the term. For the rest of the world, tranny is a term one might use while beating or killing a trans person. RuPaul believes that because his in-group context does not align with the rest of the world's usage of the term, he should be able to associate the term with Logo's brand.

Therefore, the standard RuPaul advocates for is that when a term has a non-slur meaning within the context of a smaller in-group culture, people shouldn't question its use when members of that in-group use the term in the wider culture, even though the wider culture views the term as a slur.

In a recent HuffPo Live segment, a rap group who appeals to youth culture asserted that faggot doesn't mean what gay men think it does. In essence, the group made the same argument RuPaul made regarding his use of tranny. The group said that in their in-group, faggot doesn't mean what gay men think it means and therefore, their casual use of the term in the wider culture should be supported.

“In an ideal world, we'd be able to explain it and it's all good. There has to be a category for everything, so us saying 'faggot' has to be homophobia... What a crazy world it would be in which we were the evolved ones? It all comes down to context.”

This group's view of faggot isn't new. Back in 2011, this same group said “I have gay fans and they don't really take it offensively, so I don't know. If it offends you, it offends you... Some people might take it the other way; I personally don't give a shit.”

Defending in-group usage of fag, SouthPark devoted an entire 2009 episode to explaining that fag

doesn't mean what the larger culture thinks it means. Louis CK likewise advocated for his in-group youth culture use of faggot:

It should be noted that the rap group claims that faggot has a positive context while the SouthPark/Lois CK context is negative. However, both claim that faggot doesn't refer to gay people. Therefore, according to RuPaul's standard, those coming from youth culture in-groups should be able to use gay slurs without gay people confronting them.

However, when the then 26-year-old Amanda Bynes wrote, “Follow me on twitter you faggots!” RuPaul blasted Bynes tweeting, “Derogatory slurs are ALWAYS an outward projection of a person's own poisonous self-loathing.”

But, for RuPaul, tranny is somehow different. When Lance Bass apologized for his use of tranny, Rupaul said:

[Laughter] It's ridiculous! It's ridiculous! Words -- it goes back to grade school: Sticks and stones, you know the rest. The thing is you have to look at the ego, you have to follow the money, and the payoff. And the payoff is that the ego wants attention no matter what. It will try to get it wherever the hell it can, whether it's positive or negative. So you have to ignore it basically -- you have to starve it out. And unfortunately in our culture one person can write a letter to the network and they shut something down. It's unfortunate. But I love the word “tranny.”

And no one has ever said the word “tranny” in a derogatory sense. In fact, you have to go to the intent of the person saying it. Of course Lance Bass, his intent would never be to be derogatory. Never. So, you know, that's really ridiculous. And I hate the fact that he's apologized. I wish he would have said, “F-you, you tranny jerk!”

It should be noted that Bass cited RuPaul's usage of tranny in his apology.

My purposeful use of faggot with regard to RuPaul is meant to draw attention to the tension that can exist between in-group and out-group meanings. Being a gay man, RuPaul has undoubtedly had faggot used against him. For most LGBT people, the term gets its context from the fact that it is the go-to slur people use while they are beating and/or killing us. However, youth culture asserts that the term has a different meaning.

As a non-gay person, what are we to make of my use of faggot regarding RuPaul? Do I mean it in the rap group's positive context, the Louis CK/SouthPark negative context or am I using it as an anti-gay slur? Herein lies the issue with the casual use of tranny.

The majority of people who use both tranny and faggot mean it as a slur. Moreover, these are the slurs people use when they are murdering us. When the non-trans gay man, Neil Patrick Harris said his deep voice sounded like a tranny to a largely cisgender heterosexual audience, what and more importantly, who was the heterosexual cisgender audience laughing at?

That, then seems to be the issue for the trans community. While a gay man might know who he's laughing at, the trans community seems to know who the cis community is laughing at when a gay man uses tranny.

Note: A FAQ has been set up to address anticipated criticisms regarding this article on the author's

blog. However, you can see some of the FAQs in the below drop-down:

Criticism: While I agree with your point, you didn’t need to use faggot.

Answer: I’ve noticed that most articles about the use of tranny are about definitions, freedom of speech issues, historical usages, etc. This is not what my article is about. I state, “My purposeful use of faggot with regard to RuPaul is meant to draw attention to the tension that can exist between in-group and out-group meanings.” The point of this article is the tension between in-group and out-group meanings. To drive my point home, the tension needed to be a palpable specter haunting each sentence.

Criticism: Why not just say what you meant with your use? If you meant it to be the positive rap meaning, then why not just say it?

Answer: As the author of this piece, for me, the point of the article is the tension inspired by the casual use of terms people used when I had beer bottles, eggs, and rocks (at various times) thrown at me, when I was beaten and when I was bullied as a kid. Deflating that tension by saying that I meant it in a positive way would have missed the point.

Criticism: This is clickbait!

Answer: When folks write a title, “10 kittens playing, but then you won’t believe what happens next!” it is to bait you to their site where you will hopefully experience advertising they make money off of. I’ll point out that TA doesn’t have advertising. The purpose behind inspiring tension before you even read the article is that it brings the point of the article front and center even before the point is contextualized.

In other words, this is the experience many trans people have when cis people take to the media to yet again promote a term cis people use while they bash us.

Criticism: You’re just being childish. This is all about saying, “see how you like it!”

Answer: Again, I’m very clear about what my purpose is. If you notice, the tension is created at the very beginning of the article and is, at that point, entirely left alone. My last article on tranny was an evidence-based review of the term’s history. That article ends with the following:

- What impact does an obviously very popular context of framing the trans experience (tranny) have on social justice movements?
- When the majority clearly associates “tranny” with the sex industry while the gay and drag community associates the term with performance and partying, will this affect the ability of the GLBT community to communicate well?

I am talking about the very tension on display in this article.

If you choose to believe that all I’ve done in this article is to name-call for the purpose of getting away with it in the way that RuPaul does, then at this point there’s probably nothing I can say or do to change your mind. I will say that the instinct to find insult embedded with the use of terms like faggot/tranny beautifully illustrates the reality of the word’s dominate context, regardless of what context smaller in-groups claim.

Criticism: How about a trigger warning?!?

Answer: I struggled with this. As someone who’s had these terms used against me while experiencing violence, they have a very tangible flavor and immediately bring up memories that aren’t happy. At the same time, I couldn’t think of a way to bias the reader before they even read the piece without employing this rhetoric. For the tension I am bringing front and center to only then contextualize, I felt that this was the only way to go about it. Without following the same narrative trajectory the media uses with reporting on tranny, I would not have been able to recreate the experience many trans people face each and every time tranny is used in the media.

When tranny is front and center before we even get into the story, video, movie, interview, etc, that trigger has already been pulled. Trans people are then expected to deal with it and contextualize the use in a way that is removed from hate. Recreating this experience for the cis - and especially for the cis gay community - was central to driving my point home.

I don’t believe this could have been accomplished without copying the way much of the cis media handles tranny.

Criticism: You’re just modeling the same behavior RuPaul is! You’re both gross!

Answer: Again, I totally understand the instinct for outrage. However, this is equivocation. RuPaul frequently privileges the use of tranny over the pain caused from his callous use as a point of personal privilege. I, on the other hand, can’t recall the last time I’ve used faggot outside this very specific story for a very exacting purpose: illustrating the tension inspired by the casual use of terms people use while they murder us.

Criticism: You need to check your white privilege. This is a PoC term. Who are you to tell me that I can’t use this term

Answer: I’ve not once asserted that people should not use this term; what I have done is both document and point to the tension these terms inspire when in-groups assume that their meanings will translate to the wider community. The reality is that whatever meaning your in-group gives to these terms, when you speak to the wider community, you might not want to make the mistake of assuming that the rest of the world knows, accepts or understands the explicit niche definition your in-group has assigned to that term.

Criticism: If you really wanted people to understand why you used that term you wouldn’t have hidden half the article in a fold-down box!

Answer: When cis media presents tranny in the title of their media trans people are expected to make an effort and to go the extra mile to be accommodating. If the trans person wishes to be deemed reasonable, they must try to see the term in a different light (usually the cis person’s light). Valid criticism must be predicated upon an acknowledgment of a cis narrative; a trans person can’t simply assert that the presentation of tranny in the title of a story is problematic without being challenged. For example, even before the movie came out, trans people were told that they were wrong for not being happy with the movie, Ticked off Trannies with Knives. Trans people were told that because they’d not even seen the movie, they could not hold an informed opinion about the term Trannies.

By constructing the article in this way, it forces the observer to go the extra mile to be accommodating. Even though it's just a simple click, should the observer wishes to be deemed reasonable, they must click a button to read the rest of the article. Many would probably agree that a valid criticism can't be predicated on having read only half of this article. Constructing the article like this was the only way I could think of to, in some way, represent the system of privilege encountered by trans people in most cis media.

To be clear, this expectation of accommodation of cis people by trans people is part of the tension this article examines.

Criticism: I don't care why you used it! I think there is never any circumstance wherein the F-bomb should ever be used by anyone! Ever!

Answer: I totally get that. I also know that for the piece to have relevancy as an exposé of the tension created between in-group and out-group casual uses, I needed to recreate the conditions many trans people face each time they are confronted with yet another article, show, interview, movie, etc with tranny in the title. For that tension to be felt - to be a tangible real thing and not some abstract trans complaint - this was the only way I knew of to accomplish it.

Suggested citation

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