

TRANSADVOCATE

Freak Of The Week: The Tabloid Media

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Published September 24, 2007 | Updated September 14, 2018

https://www.transadvocate.com/freak-of-the-week-the-tabloid-media_n_187.htm

Abstract

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Give 'em the old three ring circus" -- Richard Gere as Billy Flynn in the song "Razzle Dazzle" from the
movie "Chicago" What the hell is up with being trans? Seriously, why [...]*

Article

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What the hell is up with being trans?

Seriously, why is it such a heinous scandal to have someone attached to anything hinting of crossdressing or transsexualism? One would think that in 2007 we've progressed beyond that stage, but clearly that's not so.

A couple of items jumped out at me this week prompting this rant. One was a tabloid (Star or Enquirer, can't remember which) with a blaring headline replete with photos showing a sad looking Cher, and an alternate photo of daughter Chastity Bono in what appears to be a man's suit. The headline was: Cher's Heartbreak Over Chastity's Sex Change Decision.

The other item concerns photos released of Oscar DeLaHoya and trumpeted as lead story on Entertainment Tonight for multiple nights in a row, even bleeding over into the nightly six o'clock local news at one point. The photos have what appears to be the boxing champ in a fishnet bodysuit, spike-heeled pumps and even wearing a wig with a jaunty fedora in one photo.

It's very possible that both of these stories could turn out to have no veracity at all. We are, after all, talking about tabloid print and gossipy, paparazzi-esque TV tales (I hesitate to fix the word "news" to it).

The problem is why they make such a hugely salacious issue over them. It's because using transgenderism or anything that peripherally smacks of it for humor or titillation is still PC to America. Yes, anyone can gleefully and freely pick up the cudgel of "transgender" and beat the target of their derision into ultimate character assassination.

It's not a new phenomenon, to be sure. For years it's provided easy (and openly hateful) yucks for conservative pundits, but even daytime talk, sitcoms and night-time stand up comics have mined this subject with morbid fascination. Even a Gay Comedy Showcase on cable a couple years back had four of the five gay comedians tossing out tranny jokes early in their set. One comic even lamented the disappearance of transgender hookers in Times Square: "where are my tranny hookers?"

How nice ... after so many years of effort, we in the transgender community are still simply reduced to "Tranny = hooker." We're always open season for them all. We're the Freak of the Week!

In the case of Cher's daughter, Chastity, she did look good in the suit. She'll probably be able to transition over fairly easily, if indeed she decides that's where she wants to go. But there are good ways to go about announcing someone's transition, and not so good ways. This was a "not so good" way. Why, after years of being lesbian, is it suddenly so sensational a headline for her to be transsexual?

Keep in mind if Chas decides to transition to male, this will not (or should not) be a capricious decision. There's a lot of heart-wrenching changes this makes to both family and perhaps more importantly societal relationships. Many are the times I've heard of lesbians making the transition to male only to lose most of their friends, their lovers and their previous community support base. An activist I know who worked for the Human Rights Campaign for many years, and for many years desired to make the transition but never did. When I directly posed the question to her, she was taken aback by my bluntness, but also confirmed that indeed that loss of lovers, peers and even career to that point were what stopped her (or rather, him) from moving forward. These will not be small-time concerns for Chas, who's been long involved in the gay & lesbian community.

As for Oscar DeLaHoya, the story seems a bit more improbable. It certainly gives the tinge of someone vengeful wanting to put out a reputational hit on the pro boxer. However, if it is true, so what? I'm sure if you bring it up to his face, he's likely to beat your ass to a pulp, trans or not. Would his being trans somehow lessen his prowess in the boxing ring? We're not talking about steroids or other performance enhancement drugs. Should we place DeLaHoya in a lesser light than a Barry Bonds because America likes drug use better than transgenderism? For that matter, should DeLaHoya even be considered on the same level as the steroid-headed athletes populating much of sports today? If so, why? Simply because he wore what some would consider inappropriate clothing in what was supposed to be intimate (read bedroom) environs?

It's a safe bet that none of us would like our private moments, or private fantasies and any dalliances in costumed play-acting publicized widely. The DeLaHoya photos were obviously not at a public event. Republican presidential candidate, Rudy Giuliani's drag performances in front of live audiences were public. Note the airplay that's gotten, especially during an election season. There are photos of President Bush himself in a cheerleader costume - a female cheerleader outfit - during his prep school days. I'm sure that if these would've made the media mill in similar fashion that it would've drawn a strong rebuke from conservatives spouting the need to keep people's private lives private.

But apparently folks like Chastity Bono and Oscar DeLaHoya are, as Karl Rove would put it, "fair game."

The thing that truly bothers me is the ease with which media equates transgender with something automatically lascivious whenever it does choose to publish. You would think that after more than a

decade of transgender activism that I'd be more numbed to this practice. In my case, the endorphins didn't kick in. Instead it's been like an upper arm that's continually whacked in the same spot with a baseball bat until it becomes swollen with the bruising and perhaps even more tender than when it all began.

We've got innocent civilians in Iraq dying by the score daily in a war they didn't request. We've got American soldiers stuck in a long-term civil war between two power-grabbing factions doing an impossible task, bored, underpaid, scared, angry and coming home in by the dozens flag-draped coffins every week. We've got millions of people slowly dying from diseases in the richest country in the world simply because they can't afford insurance or healthcare. We've got people losing their homes to foreclosure, and workers being laid off while others get hired overseas, and income disparities like nothing we've seen since President William McKinley at the start of the 20th century. We've got people from New Orleans and a few who've returned there trying to piece together their lives in a country who doesn't want to be distracted by their problems.

No, we're a nation that would rather be distracted by more titillating news; something to get our heads wagging and our tongues clicking. Let's focus on the Freak of the Week and impugn someone's character by affiliating them with that! Yeah, that's gotta draw in a few advertisers!

Let me say, I'm sick of being considered nothing more than a freak, and I'd daresay the rest of my community - the transgender community - feels likewise. Go make your money casting aspersions on some other community, and leave us be.

*"Razzle dazzle 'em
and they'll never catch wise*

Give 'em the old flim flam flummox."

-- Richard Gere as Billy Flynn in the song "Razzle Dazzle" from the movie "Chicago"

"The longer we listen to one another - with real attention - the more commonality we will find in all our lives." -- Barbara Deming

Suggested citation

Cristan Williams. "Freak Of The Week: The Tabloid Media." TransAdvocate, September 24, 2007.
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