

Lateral violence in the trans community

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Published April 3, 2014 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/lateral-violence-in-the-trans-community_n_13304.htm

Abstract

[su_lbttop] Lateral violence is displaced violence directed against one's peers rather than one's true adversaries. Our true adversaries are kyriarchy and all those who perpetuate it. We live in an interlocking system of oppression; one oppression built on top of another with its core being white supremacy and white supremacist concepts of gender. Challenging transmisogyny and transmisogynistic concepts of gender [...]

Article

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Our true adversaries are kyriarchy and all those who perpetuate it. We live in an interlocking system of oppression; one oppression built on top of another with its core being white supremacy and white supremacist concepts of gender. Challenging transmisogyny and transmisogynistic concepts of gender are indispensable to anti-oppression. In part, this means challenging the idea that trans women have to "pass" (god I hate that word) to be truly transgender. Additionally, this means recognizing and challenging the transmisogynistic stereotypes that cis gay men and women perpetuate about the trans experience.

However, we sometimes lose sight of the source of our oppression and in an act of lateral violence, lash out against our own community. Lateral violence can become truly destructive when our "leaders" engage in this behavior. Yesterday, I saw a particularly nasty example lateral violence when Calpernia Addams wrote a scathing article about a popular trans writer, one Parker Molloy, who recently made the Trans 100 for 2014 in recognition for her writing and work for the trans community.

Addams' timing is, to me, suspicious considering her grievances against Parker were ignored by Addams until after Parker made the trans 100 list. While Addams made a valid point in that Parker had mistakenly referred to her a drag queen (because Addams regularly participates in drag shows), Parker issued a heartfelt apology for her mistake. However, Addams' list of grievances also included taking umbrage with the fact that Parker noted Addams refers to herself as a transsexual.

Addams then went on a bit of an ableist bent in her article calling Parker "... one of the nutty trans hacktivists who had been 'triggered' by the buzz generated when Jared Leto thanked me in his Oscars acceptance speech." Mocking PTSD triggers is something I take personal offense to as I actually have PTSD.

Moreover, Addams asserted something that has me very worried:

“Often in only a year or two, they drop the mantle of white, straight, male privilege, having wrung every benefit that a 20- to 30-year-old person can from it, and take up the currently unassailable position of being a queer female with all the zeal of a new conqueror. What’s the thing they rail against when not decrying other trans people? “Cis-het privilege”?”

This is the same kind of logic TERFs use to claim trans women have male privilege in order to deny us access to women’s spaces and that is an act of lateral violence. Addams just cosigned onto our oppressors attack of trans woman. This is unquestioningly an act of transmisogyny.

“To me it’s worse, because I believe RuPaul’s error is simply the tone-deaf carelessness of someone who has lived through and shaped many eras of queer and gender culture. The “gimme that too!” victimization grab of women like Molloy comes from not having earned their place as “inside” cultural commentators yet.”

Here Addams asserts that A.) it’s okay for cis men to use transmisogynistic slurs because they helped shape our transmisogynistic queer culture; and, B.) before we attempt to challenge this system, trans women must first “earn our places” within the transmisogynistic hierarchy. This view of community replicates kyriarchy within queer circles. This sort of more trans than thou attitude is one of the major contributors of lateral violence within our community. It is the idea that one voice is inherently more valuable than another and Addams is clearly stating who’s voice is more valuable: her own.

Worse, it seems that Addams completely fails to grasp the reality of what modern trans advocates have been talking about for a long time:

“If they express hatred and derision for gay or lesbian culture (and it’s almost always anti-gay, for some reason), we should call them on their homophobia. We should call out the transphobia of those who attack trans people who choose to wear makeup, associate with gay and lesbian people or embrace non-binary bodies, whether the negativity is coming from outside the community or from inside. (Molloy has attacked not only me but Carmen Carrera and Buck Angel.) Being trans is not a free pass to be transphobic or homophobic.”

We don’t express hate for gays and lesbians. We express anger toward the transmisogyny that cis gays and cis lesbians perpetuate while simultaneously demanding we stand in solidarity with them. Addams’ wording is, perhaps inadvertently, a nod to her own heteronormativity. Addams’ omission of cis in front of gays and lesbians belies the fact that many trans women are gay and lesbian as well.

Addams’ lashing out at Parker only after she made the trans 100 list, seems timed to me. Waiting weeks until Parker’s name was in the media to only then leverage her platform against Parker comes off as petty and personal. While I might not agree with Parker on all things, I know her heart is generally in the right place and she is doing the best she knows how to do. However, it’s hard for me to believe the same about Addams’ motivations.

Addams makes money off of selling trans women the idea of stealth. While being stealth is a very valid and understandable choice in our dangerous world, Addams’ and Andrea James’ marketing of stealth is problematic when stealth becomes, through marketing, an implied requirement for being trans enough. Addams and her partner’s company, Deep Stealth Productions, sells stealth as a normative value and Addams’ business partner is known for gender policing. For me, Addams’ motives are fairly transparent,

and typifies the lateral violence that's plagued our community for too long.

At the end of Addams' screed she asserted something that I can agree with:

"You choose your community's voices and heroes. You choose your entertainers, your thinkers and your fighters. Make those choices. "

Quite right.

And I do not choose you.

I choose to make my own voice. I choose to be my own hero. I choose to fight and think for myself.

Nobody speaks for me but me and I suggest other trans women do the same. Make your own voices heard. Be your own heroes. Fight and think for yourselves.

The time of having a select cadre of trans women who meet cisnormative appearance standards representing all women like us needs to come to a close. We need to create a new culture where all trans voices are valid, all trans experiences are valid, and all trans women are valid.

Our modern internet connected world gives us an opportunity to empower a lot more trans women to speak out for themselves, to create their own platforms and make their own narratives free of domination and control from others. The internet gives us the opportunity to learn about other trans people from all over the world and open our minds and eyes to their struggles and life experiences. We have a huge opportunity to share knowledge and wisdom with one another.

What we don't need is a small group of elite trans women continuing to dominate transgender discourse. What we don't need is a small group of elite trans women seeking to represent their personal interpretation of the trans experience to the public as being the trans experience. What we don't need is a small group of elite trans women committing acts of lateral violence against other trans women dare speak their own truth.

Suggested citation

Guest. "Lateral violence in the trans community." TransAdvocate, April 3, 2014.
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