

TRANSADVOCATE

My Letter To The Editor Of The Toronto Star

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Abstract

*Sometimes, one just has to call out pure, unadulterated bullsh**. The following is my letter to the Toronto Star editor as submitted. Dear Letters to the Editor, I'm concerned about the question in the most recent that Ethically Speaking columnist Ken Gallinger posted in his most recent [Toronto Star] column entitled Transgender woman's behaviour in [...]*

Article

Sometimes, one just has to call out pure, unadulterated bullsh**.

The following is my letter to the Toronto Star editor as submitted.

Dear Letters to the Editor,

I'm concerned about the question in the most recent that Ethically Speaking columnist Ken Gallinger posted in his most recent [Toronto Star] column entitled Transgender woman's behaviour in changeroom unacceptable. The question maligns both transgender women and the management of YMCAs and YWCAs, and it wasn't fact-checked for accuracy.

The question in the column was:

I am a senior woman. Recently, a "man" claiming to be transgender, who had not yet begun physical treatments, was permitted by our local Y to use the women's locker room. There are no secure change rooms. The person they allowed in was not courteous and stared at me while I struggled out of a wet bathing suit. He was naked, had an erection and playfully asked 'do you come here often?' I understand that gender is no longer judged solely by genitalia, but does a brief contact with the duty manager mean that men not yet committed to gender reassignment are free to disrobe anywhere they choose?

The story put forward in the question conforms exactly to the "bathroom bill" meme -- that trans women are predators of cisgender females in girls and women's public restrooms and locker rooms. It's a meme that's been used by MP's Rob Anders and Dean Allison to argue against passage of C-279 into law, as well as by Canada Family Action, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Catholic Organization for Life and Family, the Campaign Life Coalition, and the REAL Women of Canada.

Besides the story too neatly conforming to the "bathroom bill" meme, this story also sends a message that locker rooms at the local Y's are dangerous places for women to enter. With those thoughts in mind, my editor at The Transadvocate blog, Cristan Williams, contacted the all four of the Y's in the

greater Toronto area, and to a Y all of them stated that no one had reported such an incident to a duty manager as alleged in the story.

I contacted the Toronto Police Service to see if they'd received a report of such an incident at a Toronto. A representative of their Corporate Communications Office stated that their LGBTQ liaison had heard of nothing of such an incident. Their representative also stated that such an incident would have peaked the Police Service's interest.

When I contacted Ken Gallinger to see if the question was fact-checked, he responded:

You express the concern that this question was put forward as a news story -- but of course it was not. It was a question in a Q&A column -- and that's a very different thing. It was a reader's claim -- no more and no less. I've had to learn to accept the fact that sometimes the questions people put contain various degrees of factuality; people present situations as they see them, and that's not quite the same, sometimes, as the hard facts of a matter.

Continuing, he added:

It is, of course, not possible for me to substantiate most of the stories I'm told, and frankly I don't try -- my general policy is to deal with issues as they are presented, because there really isn't any viable alternative. However, because of the sensitivity of this subject, I did take the step of at least substantiating that the e-mail address from which it came was valid; it was.

This is not responsible journalism. There was a viable alternative, and that alternative was calling the four Y's in the greater Toronto area, as well as the Toronto Police Service, to see if the story presented by the alleged "elderly woman" reader was true -- just as Cristan Williams and I did.

Many who read that story presented as a question in that Q&A column no doubt assumed that the story was fact-checked and true. The "Transgender woman's behaviour in changeroom unacceptable" is obviously not an accurate headline because it's pretty clear that no transgender woman in the greater Toronto area engaged in the alleged illegal behavior that the alleged "elderly woman" in the column stated occurred.

The standards of the Toronto Star uses for fact-checking readers' claims should be much higher than it was for the column in question.

Sincerely,

Autumn Sandeen

[Address]

[Cell Number]

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