

No, I Still Won't be Watching "Dancing With The Stars" (With or Without Chaz Bono)

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Abstract

It is beyond sad that some people, trans and non-trans alike, think that Chaz Bono's upcoming appearance on the stupid reality show "Dancing with the Stars" amounts to anything more than a hill of beans. As trans people suffer tremendously from systemic and institutionalized discrimination and oppression (alongside many non-trans people) the trans "issue du jour" (after Lady Gaga's

Article

It is beyond sad that some people, trans and non-trans alike, think that Chaz Bono's upcoming appearance on the stupid reality show "Dancing with the Stars" amounts to anything more than a hill of beans. As trans people suffer tremendously from systemic and institutionalized discrimination and oppression (alongside many non-trans people) the trans "issue du jour" (after Lady Gaga's appearance in male drag on the VMAs...yawn) is the fact that D-list "celebrity" Chaz Bono has been offered a slot on the new season of this cheesy ABC TV show. Big Fucking Deal!

The media has a great talent of ignoring important issues, and this is a classic example. Trans people face unparalleled levels of oppression: job discrimination, homelessness, sex survival work, lack of health care, discriminatory health care, media defamation, familial rejection, substance abuse, suicidality, street-level abuse, bigotry, violence, hate crimes, police brutality, over-incarceration and placement in the wrong gendered prisons, juvenile detention centers, etc. There are a plethora of significant, serious issues we are facing, and the best the media can offer us is this-trans kid of music icon on a fifth rate reality show. Really?

Here's the thing: some of us really don't care about celebrities. And we don't think they are more important than regular, everyday people. While the bigotry that Bono faced from the public regarding his upcoming appearance is obviously wrong, is anyone actually surprised? I face that kind of bigotry every day of my fucking life. So excuse me if I do not join the "Oh My Gawd Can You Believe the Hate Out There?????" naiveté chorus. This clueless club apparently knows little about the trans community if they think the zenith of oppression is what a rich, white, masculine celebrity faces rather than what poor trans people, esp. women and multiply oppressed trans people, esp. POC, face day in and day out in this deeply hateful nation called Amerika.

What exactly will Bono's appearance on this insipid reality show actually give us in terms of tangible civil rights? It is a symbolic victory at best, in that it gives us a smidgeon of added cultural visibility. I certainly am not against him being on the show, but I get irritated with people who act like it is a

radical step in our collective liberation as trans people. It isn't.

Let us not forget just what a conservative "family" show (and Disneyfied) network we are dealing with here. The body fascism, sexism, gender role conformity and hyper-heterosexuality are all incredibly problematic on this show. Chaz Bono, transsexual or not, added in to this conservative landscape is hardly ground-breaking. In fact, I see the show as capitalizing on his transsexualism as yet another ratings-grab. It will help actual trans people just about as much as Jerry Springer "let's look at the freaks" shocksploitation format does. And it is a great way to deflect attention away from much more pressing issues that face trans people in this discriminatory nation. As a queer person, I do not enjoy the emphasis on gender conformity, not the expectations of heterosexual coupledness. Nor do I enjoy the meta-narratives of the show about women's outfits, bodies and overall physical attractiveness rated on a patriarchal scale. Nor do I relish the fact that so many bodies of color, queer people, and now a trans person, are there to "entertain" middle-class, white, heteronormative, cisgender Americans. This, while said "entertainers" do not even enjoy basic civil rights and social justice in our own society. I do not judge people's entertainment preferences and have my own "guilty pleasure" viewing just like the next person! But let us not pretend like this represents some big victory for the trans community. The real work is too important to be overshadowed by mass media foolishness.

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