

Not Against Stealth But For Being Out

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Abstract

Editor's Note: This is part of a series on "stealth." The goal of this series to examine the nuanced ways trans opinion leaders conceptualize stealth and how they feel about it. Suzan Cooke kicked off the series with her article, The Many Shades of Stealth. It should be noted that TA is not endorsing any [...]

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Articles in this series: The Many Shades of Stealth | A Rant About MTF "Stealth" | Passing and Stealth: Two Words We Should Lose? | Stealth Doesn't Help The Trans Community | You're Only as Transitioned and Stealth as the Next Person Says You Aren't | Not Against Stealth But For Being Out

The world is indebted for all triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression.

~Thomas Jefferson

Before Harvey Milk was assassinated, he stated he stated his belief a couple of times that gay and lesbian people should be out of the closet. One of those quotes was this one:

Gay brothers and sisters,... You must come out. Come out... to your parents... I know that it is hard and will hurt them but think about how they will hurt you in the voting booth! Come out to your relatives... come out to your friends... if indeed they are your friends. Come out to your neighbors... to your fellow workers... to the people who work where you eat and shop... come out only to the people you know, and who know you. Not to anyone else. But once and for all, break down the myths, destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake. For their sake. For the sake of the youngsters who are becoming scared by the votes from Dade to Eugene.

Another was this one:

“Every gay person must come out. As difficult as it is, you must tell your immediate family. You must tell your relatives. You must tell your friends if indeed they are your friends. You must tell the people you work with. You must tell the people in the stores you shop in. Once they realize that we are indeed their children, that we are indeed everywhere, every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and all. And once you do, you will feel so much better”

The T is part of the LGBT community. I believe what Milk said about gay and lesbian people is just as applicable to trans people: trans people are hurt both in the voting booth and within the halls of state and federal legislatures because society doesn't know us.

I know that there are transsexual separatists who believe in assimilation over public presence. For example, Elizabeth of the Notes From The T Side blog recently wrote a blog entry responding to both Cristan Williams' recent piece on stealth, as well as Monica's Roberts' piece on the subject. In Elizabeth's blog entry, entitled Transgender Activists and Stealth, she wrote:

Living an authentic life does not mean what CW claims it does. If in your heart and soul you are female then you are being true to yourself by living as the person you believe you should have been. It is your life to live and you deserve to live it as you see fit as long as you are not hurting others and these fallacious claims by clowns like NR and CW that somehow your life hurts the “trans” world makes the basic assumption that we are required to believe in the trans agenda and it assumes we accept the premise you represent us. You do not represent us and we do not buy the man in a dress is a woman because he says he is.

And...

Back then the goal of everyone born transsexual was to blend into society and live as a girl and a woman. If that is not the logical conclusion for the nightmarish ride those of us born transsexual have survived then why were we doing it? We lived this nightmare so we could reach our dream and then walk into the nightmare of having everyone know of our past so we can “support” a group of men in dresses and their “social” need to cross-dress?

She wrote those questions as a rhetorical questions -- rhetorical question that she answered this way:

I and others were supposed to travel that road again because some dipshit activist can tell the world “they are the same as I am” when there is nothing that can or could be farther from the truth. Our only common thread is we belong to the same species although sometimes I wonder.

Elizabeth writes from the place of rejecting the idea of belonging herself to any public trans community, and looks to her wants as a woman that are served by not being out to coworkers and society as having a gender identity that doesn't match the gender that was assigned to her at birth.

And in that rejection of the idea of trans community, Elizabeth writes from the place of the logical fallacy of the No True Scotsman:

This error is a kind of ad hoc rescue of one's generalization in which the reasoner re-characterizes the situation solely in order to escape refutation of the generalization.

Example:

Smith: All Scotsmen are loyal and brave.

Jones: But McDougal over there is a Scotsman, and he was arrested by his commanding officer for running from the enemy.

Smith: Well, if that's right, it just shows that McDougal wasn't a TRUE Scotsman.

Elizabeth holds this as hers and her likeminded peers truth about those who they consider No True Transsexuals: "[W]e do not buy the man in a dress is a woman because he says he is."

It's a similar kind of No True Transsexuals fallacy that Jennifer Usher of the Just Jennifer blog also holds true; it's a similar kind of No True Transsexuals fallacy that Evangelina Carters of the Cassandraspeaks[pullquote]An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

~Martin Luther King Jr.[/pullquote] blog holds true; it's a similar kind of No True Transsexuals fallacy that Lisa Thompson & Sharon Gaughan of TS-SI also hold true.

The beliefs relating to who is a true transsexual, the beliefs relating to what the requirements are to be considered a true transsexual, and what the goals of a true transsexual should be are arguments that transsexual separatists put forward with the logical fallacy of No True Scotsman. And if one of the goals of being a true transsexual is to "blend into society," such as what Jennifer Usher and Elizabeth believe, then laws won't change.

There are a number of states -- states such as Idaho, Tennessee, and Ohio -- where even after genital reconstruction surgery one cannot correct one's birth certificate to reflect one's transitioned to gender. And even if one does correct one's birth certificate, Kansas, Texas, Florida, and Tennessee have court rulings or laws in place that state that the gender marked on one's original birth certificate is the one that applies when one attempts to marry someone -- and these are states that don't support marriage equality.

Only 17 states and the District of Colombia have legal antidiscrimination protections of any sort based on gender identity. Such as, when one begins transition -- whether one begins as an 18-year-old or as a 50-year-old -- in 33 states one can be legally be evicted from rented housing just because one has begun the process transitioning. In fact, one can have transitioned decades earlier and be evicted from one's rented housing if one's legal gender doesn't match one's assigned gender at birth.

What about youth who know that their gender doesn't match the sex at birth? California, as of this moment, has a bill before it -- AB 1266. The bill "make[s] it clear to school districts, teachers, parents and students that California's nondiscrimination law requires public schools to respect a transgender student's identity in all school programs, activities, and facilities." Beyond this, there's harsh reality of rampant school bullying of youth who know that their gender doesn't match the sex at birth.

And then there are those whose medical insurance companies have exclusions for treatments related to transsexualism. There are only four states (California, Colorado, Delaware, and Oregon) that have changed their laws and/or regulations to require that insurance companies don't discriminate against

patients because of gender identity and the medical treatments associated with gender dysphoria.

The trans activists who work on those issues are generally out as trans. They prepare society for the reality that many people whose gender identity doesn't match the gender assigned to them at birth are members of families (such as being children, parents, aunts and uncles), hold down jobs (such as lawyers, nurses, and fast food workers), go to primary and secondary schools, and not only vote but have friends, family, and allies that vote too.

The organizations who work on issues such as identity documentation, discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodation, access to education, and access to appropriate medical care have "transgender" in their titles, in their mission and/or vision statements, and/or have trans people and issues covered by their organizational enabling objectives. It is the out trans people who either are the leadership at these organizations, or the out people that the leaders of these organizations that they've met, are people who seek to change the lot of those whose gender identity doesn't match the gender assigned to them at birth via direct services, laws, or government regulations.

Out trans people have the awesome opportunity of changing the hearts and minds of those in broader society about those whose gender identity doesn't match the gender assigned to them at birth.

I don't make the case against stealth -- if one doesn't want to be out to one's friends, family, coworkers, and legislators, then no one, in my opinion, should force you to be. There are real social and financial costs due to stigma that can result from being out to one's coworkers, friends, families, and or society as a whole.

But even with those costs, I still make the case for being out. I believe in community; I believe in the idea about community that Cesar Chavez once expressed:

We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.

It's a perspective based on the golden rule; it's a perspective based on the postulation put forward by Martin Luther King Jr.:

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'

For those whose gender identity doesn't match the gender assigned to them at birth, applying Harvey Milk's belief about being out to one's own life seems to me a most persistent and urgent question. And I would argue that being out to one's friends, families, and coworkers -- and even broader society -- is a something in and of itself that those whose gender identity doesn't match the gender assigned to them at birth can do for others.

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