

Of expectations and education

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https://www.transadvocate.com/of-expectations-and-education_n_12292.htm

Abstract

I recently posted the following to my FaceBook page: Is it me or is there a lot of “JESUS! STFU already! I’m complementing you and think you should have rights! What, now I have to stop asking about your genitals TOO?!? Are you never happy?!?” going around. I saw this sentiment in the fallout over Katie [...]

Article

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Is it me or is there a lot of “JESUS! STFU already! I’m complementing you and think you should have rights! What, now I have to stop asking about your genitals TOO?!? Are you never happy?!?” going around.

I saw this sentiment in the fallout over Katie Couric’s focus on the genitals of Laverne Cox and Carmen Carrera in her interview. I again saw this sentiment expressed after the Janet Mock interview on Piers Morgan’s show. Morgan felt both attacked and victimized because he was called out for insisting upon using his preferred language to describe Janette Mock’s experience. Some trans allies felt that the trans community should chill; trans people should expect that professional journalists who work with the trans population won’t know how engage trans people in a respectful way.

Recently the TransAdvocate FaceBook page erupted when I posted the following image:

It looks like you're a cisgendered person trying to discuss trans issues.

Would you like help?

- Get help with checking your privilege
- Just engage in discussion without help

☐ Don't show me this tip again



B	I	N	G	O
"But some people jump into decisions!"	Ignores preferred pronoun and gets defensive when corrected.	"Gender doesn't really matter to me! But..."	"You seem defensive/angry. Shouldn't you calm down?"	"Transwomen and/or transmen just reinforce the gender binary."
"I don't act like a stereotypical gender role. How can I have cisprivilege?"	"But my friend doesn't mind when I call him a tranny!"	Compares transitioning to some other optional safety law/procedure, like seat-belt laws.	"I don't think I should have to respect your X, so I'm not going to. I have rights!"	Ask questions about transperson's life "before."
"But a doctor/therapist has been trained! Surely they know what would be best!"	"I know I'm not trans, but on this important trans issue I think..."	FREE SPACE "But why?"	"But how do you <i>know</i> you're trans? Gender doesn't <i>really</i> exist."	"I wish more exotic people would tell me about their exotic customs."
Conflates and compares transwomen and drag queens or butch lesbians and transmen.	"But I don't believe in the gender binary/ have a trans friend/relative! How can I be transphobic?"	Resents the involvement of an actual transperson because it "stifles discussion."	"Genderqueer/ Young transpeople are just going through a phase/not really trans."	"I don't like terms like cisgender/ cissexual. Isn't that just reverse discrimination?"
"How can transwomen ever <i>really</i> interact as women? They were socialized as men."	Compares trans gender dysphoria to cisperson's awkwardness in traditional gender roles.	"My taxpayer dollars shouldn't have to pay for someone's personal choice."	"My trans friend/co-worker/relative said..."	"Transmen are just women repossessing male privilege!"

Figure 1. 1609851_10151927026547532_1224825013_n[1]

Here's how some cis allies responded to the above image:

This a page for people to advocate for the trans community. I am a straight female who is curious about these decisions and this post makes me feel wrong for asking questions.

Why would it be a cispriv thing to ask about their life "before?"

You can only be accepted if you WANT to be accepted. You don't, so fuck off and die

Then received an indignant message from a cis person:



Figure 2. Image shared on the TA FaceBook Page: “What cisprivilege looks like”

I'm certain that the [cis] writer is being honest and that their feelings are valid. I am also certain that the writer is exercising cis privilege. In 99.9999% of the world trans people's feelings of discomfort and exclusion are routinely pushed aside in support of making cis people comfortable. As cis people we don't have to notice this practice (that's the nature of privilege, it 's the ability to NOT have to think about a thing). This page is part of the 0.0001% of the world where the comfort of cis people is not preeminent. As cis people, we're trained to assume that our comfort and education is the default priority, and it's those feelings of discomfort (very real and valid feelings) that are being expressed here. This is an example of privilege because it is predicated on the assumption that trans space should be constructed to help educate and make cis people comfortable.

Others pulled a Morgan:

I give up trying to be an ally because obviously I am too privileged to recognize when something is unjust

Privilege

The issue all of the above posts and events touch on are various degrees of cisprivilege. Before it was internet-cool to talk about things like privilege, back in 2008 Calpernia Addams made a pithy (and totally badass) video for trans folks who were overly-fatigued with cis people who expected that trans people would accommodate their rude behavior:

Queer artist Elias Ericson dealt with similar frustrations in his piece, *Hetero/Cis People's Ideal Trans Person*:



Figure 3. 419179_10151303084482532_1746767697_n[1]

So what's pissing off so many trans people? Here's the deal, when a non-trans person uses a trans person or space to:

- Make themselves feel good about how awesome and progressive they are
- Have their curiosity satisfied
- Inform trans people how right they are about their perceptions

... folks are gonna have a bad time. At its core, these 3 behaviors are issues of consent; each behavior uses - without explicit permission - a person or community. To again quote the cis person who got it, "This is an example of privilege because it is predicated on the assumption that trans space should be constructed to help educate and make cis people comfortable."

Empowerment: What does it look like?

Is it reasonable to expect that people will know not to ask about another's genitals upon meeting them? Is it reasonable to expect that you won't be objectified as an object of curiosity? Is anger an appropriate emotional response when someone crosses these universal boundaries? What does it mean to move through life knowing that you can't reasonably hold those expectations? Is that what empowerment looks like?

If someone wants to talk to you about deeply personal issues, is your honest consent important? Is it reasonable to expect that professional journalists will read the GLAAD Media Guide prior to conducting an interview with a trans person?

Avoid pronoun confusion when examining the stories and backgrounds of transgender people prior to their transition. It is usually best to report on transgender people's stories from the present day instead of narrating them from some point or multiple points in the past, thus avoiding confusion and potentially disrespectful use of incorrect pronouns.

Referring to a sex change operation, or using terms such as pre- or post-operative, inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.

- GLAAD Media Guide

These are serious questions and the way the trans and cis communities choose to answer will - in significant ways - define the quality of life for generations of trans people to come.

What are your thoughts?

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