

Open Letter: 200+ Trans Women and Transfeminine People Stand Against Calpernia Addams and Andrea James

By Guest

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Abstract

We, the undersigned trans women and trans-feminine individuals, are appalled at recent attacks on trans woman journalist Parker Marie Molloy published by Calpernia Addams and Andrea James on the Huffington Post and Boing Boing. Addams' and James' hit pieces exhibit a pervasive hostility to young, queer trans women, and indeed any trans woman who is [...]

Article

We, the undersigned trans women and trans-feminine individuals, are appalled at recent attacks on trans woman journalist Parker Marie Molloy published by Calpernia Addams and Andrea James on the Huffington Post and Boing Boing. Addams' and James' hit pieces exhibit a pervasive hostility to young, queer trans women, and indeed any trans woman who is uncomfortable with the use of transmisogynist slurs by cisgender drag queens like RuPaul. They display homophobia, transphobia, ignorance, dishonesty, and hatred throughout.

We believe that these pieces should not have been published, and that they are not representative of the views of trans women as a community. Calpernia Addams and Andrea James do not speak for us.

1. Absence of good-faith arguments

James variously describes trans women who take issue with RuPaul as “hecklers”, “shut-ins” who “spend their waking lives online”, “victim cultists”, “self-haters” engaging in “attention-seeking behavior”, “elitists”, “the language police”, “finger-wagging schoolmarms”, “fucking stay-at-home transactivists”, and “trans separatists” with “internalized transphobia” who “transition from male to female with the zeal of a religious convert.” Unlike James, we do not believe that objecting to transmisogynist slurs makes someone any of these things. We also find it doubtful that James genuinely seeks to “resolve this dispute like professional journalists”, as her column exhibits very little sense of professionalism at all. If, as James says, “experienced activists seek to build bridges and establish empathy”, we are skeptical of her experience.

2. Misleading personal attacks

Addams and James have chosen to focus on an individual trans woman and personally attack her at length. In doing so, they give the impression that opposing the use of transmisogynist slurs by

cisgender drag performers is an isolated and marginal position held by, as Addams puts it, “nutty trans hacktivists”. In reality, the conduct of RuPaul and others has been widely criticized by vast swathes of trans women. This is not a new critique that has only arisen due to a lack of experience among young queer trans women. It is a long-standing and well-supported objection, one which has been articulated by trans women of all ages and sexualities. Addams and James ignore this in favor of needlessly inflammatory rhetoric, a regressive defense of gay and lesbian transphobia, and unmitigated contempt for the gender and sexuality of queer trans women. Their columns do not contribute to this discussion in any meaningful way.

3. Traditionalism and ageism

We reject Addams’ portrayal of young trans women like Molloy as “newcomer[s] to transition and lesbian/trans issues”, a description which suggests young trans women are less informed, less competent, and less qualified to argue their viewpoints on these topics. To the contrary, young trans women can offer a fresh and contemporary perspective to balance the traditional and stagnant views of those like Addams and James. Whatever decades of experience with trans issues that Addams and James have had, it has not served them well in these recent columns.

4. Misgendering and accusations of “privilege”

We find it completely unacceptable that Addams would accuse queer trans women of being “conditioned to bully and take by a lifetime of white, heterosexual, male privilege”, using “the gains and habits of this privilege”, and having “lingering ‘cis-het privilege.’” It is baffling and incomprehensible to imply that an out queer trans woman is somehow capable of wielding heterosexual, cisgender, male privilege to her advantage. This isn’t a new tactic - it is commonly used by transphobes to misgender trans women and dismiss anything we say as coming from a place of supposed “maleness”. Here, Addams has done exactly that. This is not a meaningful argument; it is only more of the same classic transmisogyny.

5. False hierarchies of trans women

We oppose Addams’ and James’ oversimplification of queer trans women’s sexualities, unique personal histories, intersectional experiences, and self-understandings. Addams describes her own “feminine and soft nature” and experiences of being “rejected from participating in heteronormative culture”, while claiming that queer trans women “presumably lived most of their lives with the tacit approval and support of a society that viewed them as heterosexual, white men”. Her presumption is unwarranted, as is James’ description of these women as “newly-minted queers”.

If a trans woman is attracted to women, this does not mean that she always lacked a “feminine and soft nature” (whatever Addams thinks this means), that her sexuality was never called into question by others, that she was not “a participant in LGBT culture”, or that she was never attracted to men. Many queer trans women who are attracted to women share these experiences - their queerness is not “newly-minted” by any stretch of the imagination. Addams’ and James’ false dichotomy uncomfortably echoes the long history of straight trans women being judged as more legitimate in their womanhood and more “feminine” than queer trans women. This constitutes the same kind of implicit misgendering as Addams’ claim that queer trans women possess “lingering” privilege, while Addams herself supposedly does not.

6. Hypocrisy and feigned offense

While any use of “drag queen” to deny or delegitimize a trans woman’s gender is obviously unacceptable, we decry James’ hypocrisy in taking offense to the accurate description of Addams’ history as a drag performer. James herself notes that trans women have a history of “working alongside drag performers”, and that there “was no separation of drag and trans” in “pre-Stonewall Manhattan LGBT social life”, but then claims that “drag queen” is a “transphobic slur” when referring to Addams’ involvement in drag performance. This is, at a minimum, inconsistent. It is absurd that James would denounce this accurate statement of fact as “transphobic”, while she and Addams promote false generalizations about queer trans women and implicitly misgender them with accusations of “male privilege”. We particularly note the hypocrisy of Addams’ call to defend “trans people who choose to... associate with gay and lesbian people”, given her own hostility toward queer trans women.

7. Siding with mainstream prejudice

Contrary to James, we do not accept that drag performance is itself a valid excuse for cisgender people to use transmisogynist slurs. James believes that “taboos around language” - language such as “shemale” - are “practically begging drag queens and kings to violate these taboos”, and that drag is an “art form with countercultural subversion at its heart”. Such a rationale is nonsensical. When a word becomes so closely associated with open hostility toward a marginalized group that it is widely considered a slur by the group it targets, this is not itself a justification to continue using this word. It is rather obviously a compelling reason not to use it.

Cis people using transmisogynist slurs are not violating a taboo when the use of such slurs is already broadly accepted among cis people. Most of society does not consider it taboo to refer to trans women in these terms - there is no taboo to break. Repeating a one-word distillation of a culture’s hostility to trans women is neither countercultural nor subversive. It is mainstream. In light of this, James’ commitment to “siding with offensive artists” is hardly a laudable choice.

8. Disingenuous conflation of “transgender” with drag

We reject James’ classification of RuPaul as transgender, as well as any implication that cisgender male drag queens are therefore entitled to use transmisogynist slurs. Cisgender male drag queens are assigned male at birth, and they neither consider themselves to be women nor live as women in their everyday lives. Unlike trans women, they are not the ones who regularly face the consequences of widespread transphobia and transmisogyny, and they are not confronted with the fallout of normalizing transmisogynist slurs. Likewise, Addams’ statement that she “hate[s] the term ‘cisgender’” shows a lack of understanding of the importance of this distinction.

9. Hiding behind “homophobia” to defend transphobia

We further reject Addams’ argument that trans women’s criticism of the use of transmisogynist slurs by cisgender drag performers is a form of “homophobia” or “hatred or derision for gay and lesbian culture”. Trans women’s objections to transphobia do not become any less legitimate when that transphobia comes from “gay and lesbian culture”. This transphobia is no more excusable - it is equally deserving of scrutiny. While Addams recognizes that “being trans is not a free pass to be transphobic

or homophobic”, she appears to believe that being gay or lesbian is indeed a free pass to be transphobic. We do not share this belief.

10. Elitism and exclusion of queer trans women from queer culture

Addams attacks trans women who object to RuPaul’s slurs as “hate-filled, angry and inexperienced folks” who “hop the fence at this late stage and try to dictate our culture rather than learn and build and participate in it”. We believe that trans women have every reason to be angry at the mass media legitimization of transmisogynist slurs by cisgender men, and we question the value of learning from this culture or participating in it, let alone building upon it. It is no point of pride to tolerate a transphobic culture. Accusing young queer trans women of trying to “dictate our culture” implies that they have less of a claim to gay and lesbian culture than Addams, and lazily dismisses legitimate objections to the harms of this culture and the attitudes it has normalized.

Our aims

We ask that Calpernia Addams and Andrea James refrain from publishing further columns exhibiting this variety of homophobia, transphobia, transmisogyny, misgendering, ageism, and unwarranted hostility toward other trans women. We further ask that Huffington Post, Boing Boing, and other outlets refuse to give a platform to any columns endorsing such prejudice, whether by Addams and James or by others. As Addams notes, “you choose your community’s voices and heroes.” We reject Calpernia Addams and Andrea James as voices of our community.

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1. Lauren McNamara, defense witness, United States v. Manning
2. Amelia June Gapin, software engineer
3. Thorin Sorensen, activist and writer
4. Katherine Prevost, software developer, Carnegie Mellon University
5. Anne Cognito, activist and author
6. Kat Haché
7. Andrea Borquez Brito, law school graduate
8. Sarah Brown, politician and trans woman
9. Kristina Foster
10. Teri Dawn Wright, student, activist
11. Lauren Voswinkel, software developer
12. Bobbi Joseph, activist
13. Dr. Mirah Gary, physicist
14. Vivian Doug, public speaker and systems analyst
15. Breanna Clayton, web content strategist
16. Danielle White, SAS Platform Administrator
17. Rachel Ripstra, software engineer

18. Jessica Reardon Smith
19. Kimberly Horne, software developer
20. Josephine Doggett, artist
21. Dr. Aoife Emily Hart, lecturer
22. April Daniels, writer
23. Morgan Smith, Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies student and activist
24. Sabine, activist
25. Chelsea Tera Boyhan, field support engineer
26. Fallon Fox, Mixed Martial Arts fighter
27. Sophia Banks
28. Sarah Foreman, activist and software developer
29. Josefina Vineyard, graphic designer
30. Rebecca Hargate, software developer, University student
31. Schell Carpenter, Vice President of Engineering
32. Kayley Whalen, trans activist
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34. Erika Sorensen, software developer
35. Laurelai Bailey, journalist for TransAdvocate.com
36. Emily L Kwolek, activist
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38. Winter Hardin, student
39. Skye Arixe
40. Melissa Savage, activist
41. Dana Lane Taylor, TransAdvocate.com, University of Pennsylvania
42. Rhianne Stevens, lecturer, activist and Transgender Support Group Officer
43. Willow Dobmeier
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45. Chelsea Richards, emergency medical responder
46. Emily Prince, Esq.
47. Morgan Rose, artist
48. Casey Coughlin, student
49. Zoe Gagnon, software engineer and activist
50. Kathryn Anna Fortunato, IT systems administrator and activist
51. Rebecca Putman
52. Ellie Green, artist

53. Coda Gardner
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59. Annetta Gaiman, trans feminist
60. Diane Tejera Monaco, scientist and educator
61. Alex Ray, web admin
62. Claire Siegely
63. Ally Clarke
64. Aria Smith
65. Devi Smith
66. Bethany Turner, market researcher and webcomic author/artist
67. Cristan Williams, Senior Editor for the TransAdvocate
68. Madison Turner, singer/songwriter
69. Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor, author and activist
70. Amy A. Dobrowolsky, trans feminist geographer
71. Autumn Sandeen, Editor for The TransAdvocate
72. Christina Ann-Marie DiEdoardo, Esq., criminal defense attorney
73. Melissa Jensen, sex worker
74. Octavia Reising
75. Naomi Ceder, IT director, Pythonista, advocate
76. Kris Simon, disability, gender, and sexuality activist
77. K.L. Tremaine, author and publisher, Artemis Flight Books
78. Kelli Anne Busey, contributor TransAdvocate, blogger planetransgender, activist
79. Serana Storey
80. Kylie Brooks, gender, disability, race and sexuality activist
81. Amber Dawn Redman, International Media / Commercial Aviation / Communications / Equality Journalist
82. Reverend Erin Fish, Professional Twitterer
83. Sarah Noble, transgender and equality activist, university student
84. Paige Sullivan, software engineer, trans* activist, wife, and parent
85. Amélie Erin Koran, Executive Office of the President of the United States (Detaillee) & President of U.S. Department of the Interior GLOBE
86. Morgan Mullaney, software engineer

87. Lisa Harney
88. Meryl Scarlett Fortney
89. Dani Pettas, videographer/advertising creative
90. Forth Sadler, queer transwoman
91. Ayasha Pope, writer and musician
92. Sara Ross, activist and game developer
93. Kylie Jack, ux designer, activist
94. Kathryn Long, technical artist and software engineer
95. Kaitlyn Richardson, system administrator
96. Hannah Cutler, archaeologist
97. Miranda Lukeman
98. Karin Engström
99. Harriet de Kok, student, aged care personal care worker
100. Freja Falson, student, writer, and trans feminist
101. Shadi Petosky, creative director
102. Jennifer Kitney, student chef
103. Megan Danielle Turcotte, software developer
104. Annie Mei Shen
105. Lauren Moffatt PhD, Professor of Physics
106. Rani Baker, destroyedforcomfort.com, noise musician/freelance artist
107. Amy Wilhelm, trans activist, network engineer
108. Amoreena Crees, interior design
109. Zoey Marie Bedenbaugh, student, writer
110. Dominica Deal
111. Eva Odland, IT worker/author
112. Mara Emily
113. Phoenix Lee
114. Katherine Cutting
115. Cassidy Drake
116. Drew Stroud, web and game developer
117. Amara Sugalski, geneticist
118. A.J. Hunter, activist and writer
119. Rhea Vichot, graduate student
120. Trinity Pixie, blogger
121. The Right Honourable Max, Lairde Harmony

122. Dr. Myriam J. Johnson, physicist
123. Charley Matz, trans lesbian artist
124. Jess Rowbottom, IT consultant
125. Zoe Alexandra Adams, physics student and trans woman
126. Frida Viñas, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya architecture student
127. Sabrina Kane, Elections Project Officer
128. Maria Ramnehill, transfeminist
129. Addie C.
130. Rebecca Turner, software engineer
131. Colin Sandel, indie games developer
132. Anathema Jane McKenna, journalist and poet
133. Stephanie Springflower, self-employed bookkeeper
134. Michelle Emily Cloud, student, poet & lyricist, musician
135. Julie Rei Goldstein, Actress / Voice Over Artist
136. Samantha Llywela Thornton, photo technician, student
137. Alice Wilde, drafter
138. Erin Susan Jennings, trans liberation activist
139. Jessica Ferguson, Sr. Information Security Manager
140. Alison Chan, advanced networks researcher, uni student, LGBT student leader
141. Jessica Fay Speed, artist/postwoman
142. Henry-Katherine H., student
143. D.J. Freedman, MSW, queer social worker
144. Michelle Spicer, BA, Writer/Activist
145. Jennifer Lavender Winn, seamstress
146. Alyssa C. Smith, student, activist
147. Alice T., comedian
148. Aurora Michelle Danes, activist and nursing student
149. Jenna Stewart, student
150. Jennifer Caitlín Eller, English teacher and writer
151. Sarah Spohn, system administrator
152. Jasmine Erricka Glenn
153. Alexie Scanlon, activist
154. Christina Kahrl, sportswriter and activist
155. Amy Rebecca Boyer, Software Architect
156. Dee Emm Elms

157. Androgyne Partridge, noise musician, graphic designer
158. Emily Joh Miller, student/writer/musician
159. Chloe Skedgell, web developer
160. Stephanie Wilson, retired, civil engineer, program manager
161. Natalie Roman, web developer, LGBT youth mentor
162. Rowan Davis, student
163. Chris Malarky, IT professional
164. Laine DeLaney, transwoman, author, columnist, activist, and community organizer
165. Maddy Love, podcaster and clinical laboratorian
166. Marja Erwin
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168. Clare Davis, bookkeeper
169. Jane Natoli, Financial Crimes Consultant
170. Amy Roberts, writer, game designer, software QA
171. Danielle Burgess, web developer
172. Sophie Taylor, aerospace engineer
173. S. Allen, charity worker
174. Elizabeth Rossiter, software engineer
175. Emilie Geary, trans advocate
176. Sarah Savage, activist and writer
177. Julie Harper Lynch, registered nurse
178. Roberta Joanna Manners, software engineer
179. Rachel S. Adelhyde, writer and activist
180. Cadence Valentine, board member of Transgender Leadership Council, co-chair and lead organizer of Transgender Leadership Summit, Program Coordinator for Transsafetycounts, secretary of Transgender Service Providers Network
181. Johanna Wolf, game developer
182. Alexandra Robin Clodge, software engineer/activist
183. Juli-Ann Richmond, Kind Hearted House Sitting, pet and plant services
184. Abby Malson, software developer, transgender woman
185. Allison Lara Keene, software developer
186. Janet Logan, software engineer and transgender woman
187. Katherine Norcross, molecular biologist and artist
188. Alison Edwards, writer and educator
189. Rachel Determann, musician, data journalist and engineer
190. Nicole "Nicky" Roberts, activist, 2013 JCF grantee

191. Jamie M. Kerrigan, Sales Associate
192. Kara Johnson, animal rights activist
193. Inga Hensing, Research Analyst
194. Margaret Laughlan, Residential Social Worker
195. Harper Sylvia Sanford, software QA
196. Victoria Solís Quintillá, student, activist
197. Alexandra Pitchford, writer, game designer
198. Skyla Marchel, activist
199. Ashley Wells, library technician and artist
200. Zoey Bartlett, research chemist and legal activist
201. Gemma Seymour, Sorcière Itinérant, Writer, and Activist
202. Jennifer Mason
203. Donna Levinsohn, attorney and activist
204. Elizabeth Flanagan, Trans/Geek Feminist
205. Madison Rae, HIV Outreach Educator of the Transaction program
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207. Nina Yorty, freelance caregiver
208. Tommilynn Janelle Travis, Customer Support and Sales
209. Jessica Ottowell, software engineer, small business owner, PR officer for the British Liberal Democrat party
210. Rye Silverman, comedian and writer
211. Christina W., Software Engineer
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214. Erica Jones, software developer
215. Michelle Jené Wedge, Writer / Activist
216. Danielle Newberry, author, culinary engineer
217. Nuala Shields, retired network engineer, trans activist, human being
218. Lily Connor, Pagan priestess and nursing student
219. Miranda Radik
220. Charlie Hale, student and author
221. Aisling Fae, college student, physics
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223. Laila Villanueva, United States Army Nurse - currently silently serving on Active Duty
224. Ellen Faye Harvey, Sales Specialist
225. Mica Hind, storyteller/historical interpreter

226. Claudia Jean Adams, Online Community Manager
227. Nancy Scott Burke Williams, Associate Professor of Chemistry
228. Kelsie Brynn Jones, ILGA Advocate
229. Lara Boons, Belgium, a little bit a solo activist on disability, hit by PTSD
230. Allie Andrews, software engineer
231. Aleshia Brevard
232. Anne Rowlands, librarian and pagan
233. Alena Bruening, model
234. Eli Erlick, student, activist, and director of Trans Student Equality Resources
235. Vera Vartanian, writer
236. Alex Sennello, student and cofounder of Trans Student Equality Resources
237. Tina Kent, truck driver
238. Dawn Alderman, systems engineer
239. Lynn Cyrin, student, activist
240. Nic Llewellyn, cleaner and musician
241. Aubrey Schaefer, writer
242. Bella Bellucci, writer, activist, entertainer
243. Lilith Barri Routh, network engineer
244. Lilith Annabelle Rios, Customer Service Representative and Trans Feminist/Activist
245. Laura Watson, Singer/Songwriter/Musician
246. Kathryn Isaacs, software developer
247. Jena Lewis, trans* diversity educator, community activist, feminist
248. Jade Juhl, trans advocate
249. Lily Wolf Solomon, owner of Greenpath Transcripts
250. Gwyneth Yeh, Artist at ArenaNet
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253. Veronica Garrett, Nuclear Professional
254. Emma Bready Larson, student, library worker, and activist
255. Morgan Sea, Tranzister Radio
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257. Sena Riley, blogger/programmer
258. Caitlin Howarth, student
259. Christina Williams, IT manager and newbie trans advocate
260. Kendall Cunningham, pastry chef

261. Miranda Rae Lunabel, barista and musician
262. Alexandra Bard, medically retired Marine
263. Chelsea Allens, Artist/Student
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265. Julie Danielle Barnett
266. Coraline Ada Ehmke, Software Engineer and Activist
267. Isabelle Jones, law student
268. Gwen Carlson, student and activist
269. Lisa Severn, IT Architect
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280. Elizabeth Izatt, software engineer
281. Bitmap Madelyn Prager
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284. Ellie Howard
285. Eleanor Robyn Carson II, author, photographer, video game reviewer
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290. Rachel Evil McCall, writer
291. Sophia Gold, performance artist
292. Kathryn Cowie, writer and editor
293. Johanna Marseille, graphic designer
294. Kori Evans, student

295. Morgane Oger, small business owner
296. Amanda Melody Barna, student and pizza delivery driver
297. Rachel Collier
298. Michelle Jane Perez, writer
299. Lauren Gartrenlaub, Case Manager at a social service agency
300. Robyn A. Montgomery, student
301. Vikki Valimir
302. Alyson McManus, Staff Writer at Persephone Magazine
303. Ryder Goodwin
304. Ash Shields, artist, student
305. Stephanie Wallace, Wine Professional, Software Developer
306. Johnnie Ramona Peel, College Instructor and Blogger
307. Rebecca Dobie-Watt, Helpdesk Analyst
308. Sarah Robinson, IT Tech
309. Bridgett Josephine Waxman, student
310. Dana Ashleigh Goodyear, LPN
311. Tali Gaither, trans*femme Disability justice activist, feminist, queer writer
312. Trina Hanson, IT support/web developer
313. T. Walpole, trans officer, Goldsmiths LGBTQ
314. Maya Martinez, US Army Infantry
315. Christina Lynn Johnson, studying for a Paramedic certification
316. Jasmine Doherty, Air Traffic Controller
317. Cheryl Ann Davidson, advocate/hotel front desk clerk
318. Jacquelyn Kjar-Meyer, student
319. Corinne McCreery, Customer Service Representative
320. Tara Franks, student
321. Joli Shempert, university student
322. Antoinette Coles, Information Technical Professional
323. Julia Kreger, systems engineer, photographer, support group meeting facilitator, retired alternative lifestyle community leader
324. Mackenzie Jade Compton, artist
325. Vanessa Kindell, IT support
326. Tori Amanda Foote
327. Lily Lambda, leathergirl
328. Jayna L-Ponder, Podcaster, Educator

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