

TRANSADVOCATE

On Free Speech, No-Platforming, and the Media's "Transgender Debate"

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https://www.transadvocate.com/predatory-publishers-and-their-dupes_n_15763.htm

Abstract

While it's well and good to call out those who denigrate trans people in the media, it's time to take it a step further. Making Money with Media Chances are that you've seen the clueless being used to generate ad revenue for corporate media interests. Have you ever wondered why the press has a habit of asking [...]

Article



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Figure 1. What cis privilege looks like.

Chances are that you've seen the clueless being used to generate ad revenue for corporate media interests. Have you ever wondered why the press has a habit of asking cis people what their thoughts are regarding trans people? A Guardian op-ed recently opined on this exploitative practice:

Here's how it works now: a famous older person goes off to give a talk or an interview. They are either encouraged to give their views on transgender people or do so of their own accord. Their slightly outdated views are then gleefully published everywhere by newspapers so as to encourage people to tweet and Facebook their outrage, ideally with links to the article, thus generating more readers. Think of the newspaper here as being like a mangy dog bringing in a half-eaten sparrow from the garden: "Look at this! Isn't it disgusting! Go on, be shocked!"

How many times can you recall in this year alone wherein publishers have exploited some cis person's ignorance, animosity, or stupidity in this way? How many of you noticed that the outrage publishers generate translates into ad revenue? How many times have we, the trans community, held publishers accountable for this predatory practice?

How many of us have stopped to question why so many media companies are forever trying to have a "debate" over the existence of trans people? How many of us have stopped to question how this never-ending debate serves the bottom line of these media companies?

Using trans people to generate revenue for corporate media outlets is nothing new to heteronormative discourse:



Figure 2. Cis media, 1915. | Courtesy of the Houston Transgender Archive

While the colliery to this 1915 article might come under the guise of concern trolling -as the Daily Mail columnist Richard Littlejohn did in his op-ed of the UK teacher, Lucy Meadows-- these “stories” and “debates” are no less predatory:



Figure 3. 2012: Richard "Free Speech" Littlejohn's 2012 Daily Mail article targeting a trans teacher

While Littlejohn's concern trolling certainly generated a lot of views for the publisher of Littlejohn's article, the Daily Mail, the subject of Littlejohn's concern trolling, the trans teacher Lucy Meadows, took her own life after filing a grievance with Britain's Press Complaints Commission. After the coroner's investigation was completed, the coroner referred to the press coverage of Meadows as "ill-informed bigotry" and said that Littlejohn, "carried out what can only be described as a character assassination, having sought to ridicule and humiliate Lucy Meadows and bring into question her right to pursue her career as a teacher." Littlejohn, of course, kept his job and the Daily Mail kept the extra ad and newspaper revenue their engineered "debate" created.

[Figure] Source: huffingtonpost.co.uk

While today's media companies may at least try to pass off their continuing predatory trans antagonism as being something other than what it is, their bottom line position remains the same: debating trans people's existence is profitable for publishers. This then is the never-ending "debate" corporate media is interested in having in front of their cis audience:

[Figure] Source: *NY Times*

When Target (**TGT ▼ -2.25%**) last week **waded into a contentious national debate** by announcing that transgender workers and customers can use the restroom aligned with the gender they identify with, the discount retailer trumpeted the policy as reflecting its embrace of diversity.

Figure 4. Source: Fortune.com

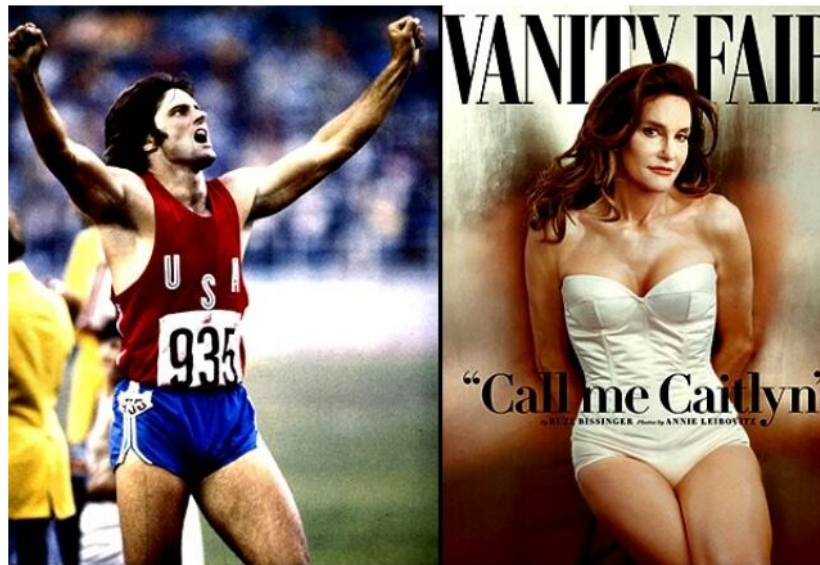
[Figure] Source: Reuters.com

When trans people agree to “debate” their right to exist as equal citizens on a corporate debate platform, we must remain clear about the context of such debates:

- In no small part, these “debates” attract a cis audience because it allows cis people the opportunity to hear hate directed at a trans person under the veneer of civility.
- Debating whether cis people should get to control the bodies, identities, or civil rights of trans people is an act of cis aggression and antagonism.
- When trans people perform for a heteronormative audience, trying to convince the audience that trans people are deserving, such performances reinforce the supremacy of heteronormativity.
- Corporate-arranged “debates” exist because it makes the media company money, not because they’re bastions of “free speech”.

Cis media is generally not interested in debates wherein independent judges score point-counterpoint and fact assertions are fact-checked. Instead, cis media will traditionally pair unrepentant (cis) bigots with trans people; the bigot is allowed to spew (firehose-style) misinformation while the trans person is supposed to civilly defend their right to exist in polite society.

GAY AUTHOR DECRIES TRANSSEXUAL GENDER SWITCHING, CALLS FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY



by [AUSTIN RUSE](#) | 6 May 2016 | 372

Gay writer Daniel Harris [says](#), "The whole phenomenon of switching one's gender is a mass delusion."

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Figure 5. Daniel Harris' work featured on Breitbart



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After the Antioch Journal's editor, Robert S. Fogarty greenlit an anti-trans journal article titled, The Sacred Androgen: The Transgender Debate by the gay author of The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture, Daniel Harris, the journal has answered growing criticism by claiming that to do otherwise would violate the ethics of free expression. The article targets trans people with outright lies in order to support the author's personal rage at the notion that it can be rude to move through the world presumptively gendering people into essential binaries. Harris seems to equally despise the discursive equality words like "cisgender" bring to gendered language:

TGs have ambushed the debate and entangled us in a snare of such trivialities as the proper pronouns with which to address them, protocol as Byzantine and patronizing as the etiquette for addressing royalty. They insult us with the pejorative term "cisgender," which they use to describe those of us who accept, however unenthusiastically, our birth gender, as opposed to the enlightened few who question their sex. Moreover, they shame us into silence by ridiculing the blunders we make while trying to come to grips with their unique dilemmas, decrying our curiosity about their bodies as prurience and our unwillingness, or even inability, to enter into their own (often unsuccessful) illusion as narrow-mindedness.

Harris feels that debating trans people's bodies for the past 60+ years on media platforms isn't enough; trans people must understand that their civil rights are subject to the "debate" cis people are having about trans people. For Harris, that it is impolite to ask trans people to describe their genitals to the cis people who are curious, such a burden is heretofore unknown to polite society. Moreover, it seems that refusing to silently endorse sex essentialism is tantamount to barbarism:

Such bullying interception of public debate should alarm anyone who seriously wants to understand the issues involved, which, while they may affect the transgender community most directly, are by no means their exclusive province, to be broached only by those on whom they most intimately impinge. TGs cannot expect to dictate to us the terms of the discussion, for we are thinking people, too, and nothing, notwithstanding many activists' attempts to embarrass us into uncritical consensus, can stop us from thinking our thoughts.

Nevertheless, Harris knows the true crux of the problem for trans women: they're actually gay men who change their bodies because they're too caught up in heterosexual gender roles. Harris further asserts that cis children are being talked into medically transitioning because they may express "the slightest hint of effeminacy or boyishness":

The message of the 1960s and 1970s was androgyny, and yet the TG regresses to an age before androgyny. A culture that recognizes only two possibilities of sexual response, either Adam's or Eve's, gives the TG only one alternative, an ultimatum to reconfigure her entire physiology in accordance with blunt, indiscriminate nomenclature that dulls our understanding of gender. The implications of this covert homophobia are particularly distressing for children. More and more, parents are encouraging their sons and daughters to transition when they spot even the slightest hint of effeminacy or boyishness on the grounds that such behaviors indicate desires to be the opposite sex when in fact their desire to play with dolls and throw footballs may reflect the desire to be something less exotic, even banal, namely, gay.

This demonstrably false hyperbole and sensationalism are being defended by the Antioch Journal as part of the "transgender debate" saying, "We believe commitments to the ideals of free expression and support for LGBTQ human and civil rights are not incompatible." So far, more than 3,000+ writers, editors, and librarians have denounced the Antioch Review's commitment to promoting anti-trans lies and hyperbole as fact under the guise of academic free expression.

Review the signatures [here](#).

You Might Also Like:



Some of you might remember that Germaine Greer, a TERF the Radical Feminist Andrea Dworkin took to task for trying to pass off patriarchy as feminism, made some small waves for appealing to the patriarchal vagina smell trope in order to claim that trans women aren't real women. However, what's making waves throughout the UK is that Green Party activist Beatrix Campbell, along with numerous other activists, are appalled that the trans community dared think they had the same rights as feminist or LGB activists:

Corporate media is not in the free speech business; they are in the business of producing infotainment that maximizes profit. There's a reason corporate media chooses to seek out and feature hate group propaganda concerning even the most mundane aspects of a trans person's life, casting it as a "debate." While it's important to call out journalists and celebrities when they promote anti-trans ignorance and hate, it's just as important to hold the publishers responsible.

Academic sources that choose to violate their own policies on harassment and discrimination in order to provide platforms to bigots who target groups of students with malicious lies, oftentimes enjoying (in the case of the Antioch Journal) a meteoric rise from obscurity to mainstream corporate media coverage, must be held accountable the same way that corporate media sources are. Cis media sources have had more than half a century to debate the existence of trans people. If one were to be honest, at this point, we need to admit that this ongoing "debate" by cis media -so often so eager to feature hyperbole, half-truths, and outright lies about trans people- is about something other than the free and open critical analysis of the facts.

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