

TRANSADVOCATE

Trans Panic Violence and Defamation on SyFy Channel's Lost Girl Goes Unanswered

By Guest

Published January 17, 2013 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/trans-panic-violence-and-defamation-on-syfy-channels-lost-girl-goes-unanswered_n_8313.htm

Abstract

By Diana O'Brien 16 Jan 2013 The third season premiere of Lost Girl just demonstrated the well-worn path for advancing gay/lesbian/bisexual themes in the media. That path continues to be walking over the crushed public image of transgender people. Lost Girl has received a lot of attention for its sexually charged plot lines and positive [...]

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The third season premiere of Lost Girl just demonstrated the well-worn path for advancing gay/lesbian/bisexual themes in the media. That path continues to be walking over the crushed public image of transgender people.

Lost Girl has received a lot of attention for its sexually charged plot lines and positive portrayal of lesbian and bisexual female characters. Even GLAAD has taken notice of the show, promoting it in The GLAAD Wrap and What to Watch.

Season 3 Episode 1 titled Caged Fae brings transphobia and trans panic violence back into the mix. Originally broadcast on 14 Jan 2013, the villain of the week, portrayed by Sarain Boylan, a sadistic and sexually abusive women's prison warden and the female leader of the amazon prison guards. The warden violates the inmates and secretly impregnates them to sell their babies.

This whole scenario sets up the moment when Bo and her female love interest decide to make their lesbian relationship status official.

The episode's egregious false stereotype of transwomen as male sexual predators that want into women-only facilities to "trap" and violate women is defamation at its worst. The acceptance of trans panic violence as justified promotes a culture of hatred and fear that increases the danger that trans women face. Trans women are cast in the role of villains and tricksters that deserve whatever severe punishment their discoverers decide to meet out.

It is particularly offensive that SyFy Channel takes a page out of the defense playbook of Angie Zapata's murderer. Trans panic was the supposed justification for beating Angie to death in 2008, after her boyfriend "found out" she was trans. A jury saw through this defense and found her murderer guilt of first degree murder and a bias-based hate crime. This episode shamefully exploits

trans panic violence as justified.

The LGBT community often looks to GLAAD to address incidents of defamation like this in the media. GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, holds itself out as a watchdog, as they say on their website, “because words and images matter”. Indeed, they claim this mantle:

GLAAD as a Watchdog

GLAAD creates change. We hold the media accountable for the words and images they produce. When media is used as a platform to defame and stereotype LGBT people, GLAAD takes action. We leverage 25 years of media relationships and countless hours of media advocacy to send important messages against homophobia and discrimination.

GLAAD has yet to respond publicly to this outrageous defamation of transgender people. To this point there has been no public acknowledgement of the defamation. There has been no public acknowledgement of the outcry. There has been no public accountability for the defamation or the damage it can cause. There have only been private assurances that GLAAD is aware of the outrage of the transgender community and others, and that “they are on it” working behind the scenes.

Public defamation cannot be corrected by private admonition. When GLAAD and other organizations handle things quietly, their failure to respond publicly is rightly perceived as acquiescence. Every day of silence is an endorsement of the defamation.

Having defamation like this swept under the rug is far too high a price for a seat at the table. If GLAAD thinks that not rocking NBC’s boat over something as awful as this is the fair price of being able to give an executive, producer, director or writer a call to say “pretty please don’t do that again”, then GLAAD is no longer able to fulfill it’s mission.

It is false to assume that meaningful progress cannot be made after calling out an offending media portrayal. GLAAD owes its existence and relevance to the fact that they have brought media outlets like NBC to the table by calling them out. They have successfully used public outrage as leverage to affect change, while calmly discussing the issues with media representatives.

This kind of defamation has to stop. The media needs to take responsibility for its continued promotion of transphobic stereotypes and justification of trans panic violence. NBC Universal and the SyFy Channel need to be held accountable and take corrective action. GLAAD needs to be held accountable for its lack of public action as well. The lives and well-being of many marginalized people depend on it.



Figure 1. syfy

From TA Editor: GLAAD just posted a response:

Despite being one of the most inclusive science fiction programs on television, the SyFy series Lost Girl unfortunately hurt and offended many of its fans with its most recent season premiere this week, which featured a shapeshifting villain that gets her comeuppance in a scene (as seen in the below image from AfterEllen) that was disturbingly evocative of real life anti-transgender violence. Following complaints from viewers and outreach from GLAAD, the producers of Lost Girl have now released a statement in response...

Read more at GLAAD

Suggested citation

Guest. "Trans Panic Violence and Defamation on SyFy Channel's Lost Girl Goes Unanswered." TransAdvocate, January 17, 2013.
https://www.transadvocate.com/trans-panic-violence-and-defamation-on-syfy-channels-lost-girl-goes-unanswered_n_8313.htm