

TRANSADVOCATE

Victoria Brownworth: this is who you pay to write about queer issues?!?

By Cristan Williams

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Abstract

Before you read further, check out this Storify wherein Victoria Brownworth claims that I am a pedophile who pays to have sex with children: [View the story “More Lies From Victoria Brownworth ” on Storify] Earlier this year, I wrote a piece about cisprivilege and how it showed up in a print article wherein Victoria [...]

Article

Before you read further, check out this Storify wherein Victoria Brownworth claims that I am a pedophile who pays to have sex with children:

[View the story “More Lies From Victoria Brownworth ” on Storify]

Earlier this year, I wrote a piece about cisprivilege and how it showed up in a print article wherein Victoria Brownworth was curious about what the genitalia of a trans kid looked like - someone she says she believed to be a minor - and got the kid to allow her to gawk at his genitals. She detailed what the minor's genitals looked like for her readers and our culture wholly endorsed and supported what would be, had this not been a trans kid, viewed as a crime. I additionally detailed the way TERFs rushed in to support an adult's right to look at the genitals of a minor.

That story can be read here:

Gawking at TransKid's Genitalia is “Freedom of Speech” says Philly PD

In the article, Brownworth says - numerous times - that she believed the kids to be minors. I ask she if she believed that the youth she talked into exposing himself to her was a minor and she said yes:



Figure 1. "it felt creepy/wrong because I was an adult"

Note that she herself says that her actions made her feel "wrong" and "creepy."

Brownworth then tried to change her story. She then began claiming that these kids were emancipated minors. It should be noted that this is never mentioned in the article. I'd like to also note how preposterous it is to assert that these homeless and/or poor kids had the legal wherewithal to go through the court system and become emancipated.



Figure 2. "Emancipated minors, ALL"

I guess she thought that changing her story to say that all the kids were over 18 was a strategy worth trying:



Figure 3. "I assumed everyone was 18 or over"

"I assumed everyone was 18 or over" - which is the exact opposite of what she wrote in the article I critiqued:

As I scanned the room, I realized the 24-year-old Rolanda was likely the oldest person there except for me... Two young boys -- or girls on the way to being boys -- looked sullenly at me from a corner of the room. But the others -- all budding MTFs -- swarmed around me like I actually knew Oprah and not just her favorite spritzer... They remained in the corner, trying to look as tough as their 16- or 17-year-old selves could muster... I ask him how old he is. He turns away as he mumbles "18" and I subtract two, possibly three years. - Victoria Brownworth

Brownworth responded - not by offering an apology for her behavior - but by going on the offense. She felt that it was incredibly mean of me to point out that her actions were privileged, unethical and that I reported her actions to Child Welfare.

In retaliation, she took to Twitter and began a concentrated, purposeful campaign of libeling me that has continued for most of this year.

It began with Brownworth publicly lying, claiming that her paper was filing suit against me. I fact checked that and it was proven false.

She then freaked out and publicly claimed that I had threatened to rape, assault and murder her. That's a lie and for more than 100 days, I've asked that she produce evidence to support those claims. She claimed that my threats scared her so much that she had to file a police report. That too turned out to be a lie.

She then began claiming that I told her that I want her to die in a fire. After she made that public lie, I

challenged her to provide any evidence to support her assertion. She's failed to do so.

Lately, Brownworth has begun claiming that maybe the article I critiqued was actually "revised" by me in photoshop:



Figure 4. 2013.10.26 - Photoshop lie

Which a strange claim since, until today, I had not published any scans of her print article. I'd love Brownworth to explain how I photoshopped this word document. Others, of course, joined her bandwagon in demanding that I publish the print article - as if I were hiding something:

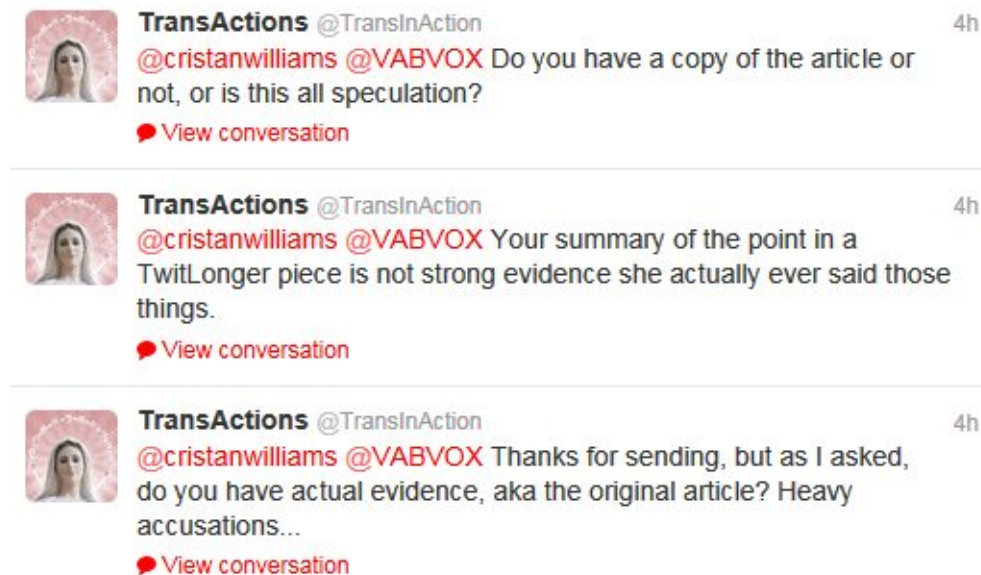


Figure 5. twitter-derp

Here's the print article with this one caveat: the Philly Child Welfare department informed me that it may be illegal to reproduce Brownworth's descriptions of the minor's genitals. I have therefore censored the parts which may be illegal. If you would like to request an uncensored copy of the article, you can do what I did: contact the Philly public library for a copy. Send a request for this article to erefNEWS@freelibrary.org and for a small fee, the library will scan and email you a full copy of the article.

JULY 4 - 10, 2008

Second of a two-part series

By Victoria A. Brownworth
PGN Contributor

Rolanda Paris* had invited me to the party after we struck up a conversation outside the post office one warm afternoon.

"Miss Victoria, Miss Victoria!" Her voice was low and drag-queen sexy-breathy.

"Are you Victoria Brownworth? Really?" her voice was charmingly excited.

"When I heard your name in the post office and I just *had* to meet you. You *have* to write about me," she said, with the earnest sureness that her story was one I wanted to tell.

We sat for 45 minutes in my car and talked about Rolanda's life. At the end of our conversation, I agreed — Rolanda had a story I wanted to tell, and I had an invitation to a pumping party.

For those not conversant with TG life, a pumping party is a cross between a Tupperware party and at-home plastic surgery.

If that combo sounds a little scary, it is.

Meeting Rolanda was serendipitous. I had wanted to do a story on the perils of being young and transgender for a long time and Rolanda had presented me every aspect of the story I wanted to tell—the who, what, where, and why.

Transgender youth — those between the ages of puberty and mid-20s — are turning more and more often to the do-it-yourself brand of transitioning. The effects can be immediately gratifying, but devastating in the long-term.

Sex reassignment is extraordinarily expensive and time consuming. Hormone treatments and surgeries cost thousands of dollars. But teens

Google "buy estrogen online" and you get a half-million hits. Most offer top-of-the-line hormones like Premarin *without a prescription* for half the market price or less. Testosterone creams and gels are equally easy to buy. As are anabolic steroids or androgens to build the kind of muscle mass FTM transpeople seek — as well as to deepen voices and grow facial and body hair.

All one needs to begin transitioning can be found in a basic how-to online without ever leaving the house — or the high-school library.

Finding people to enhance the drug therapies for your transition process can be as easy as going to the post office on a sunny spring afternoon.

When I turned up at Rolanda's apartment in a not-so-nice part of Nicetown, I was greeted by seven transgender people, mostly MTFs, in varying states of transition. I looked and felt like a party. Dance music — Wawa's "Outsiders" — was playing, the lights were draped with scarves like a 1970s New Orleans brothel or a teenaged girl's bedroom and the air smelled of too much perfume, cigarettes and just a little weed.

I had brought sparkling pomegranate juice and told Rolanda it was Oprah's favorite summer drink. I looked for a place to sit down in the crowded living room.

I had no idea what to expect, nor did I know for sure whether this was going to be one of those stories where it would be difficult to stay objectively outside the action. As I scanned the room, I realized the 24-year-old Rolanda was likely the oldest person there except for me.

Everyone in the room had been warned I was coming and apparently been told by the breathlessly Rolanda that I was "famous." The pomegranate juice and the signed copy of one of my recent books that I had brought for Rolanda solidified my status. Two young boys — one girls on the way to being boys — looked sullenly at me from a corner of the room. But the others — all budding MTFs — swarmed around me like I actually knew Oprah and not just her favorite spritzer.

A tall and light-skinned MTF with smallish breasts accentuated

*Names have been changed.

JULY 4 - 10, 2008

by a two-light, low-hanging shade up. Long, slender, bottle-like with heavy, flat shoulders, the offered me her gift at the back of a headscarf covered with a bright African-patterned cloth and murmured her name — Starnice.

Then other MITs introduced themselves to me — Chentoya, Kalina, Tamara, Lesia. Rolanda introduced the boys — Devon and Jeron. They remained in the corner, trying to look as tough as their 16- or 17-year-old selves could muster.

Rolanda's story I knew. She left home at 16, kicked out by a stepfather ("He wasn't married to my mom, so I don't know why she always called him my stepfather"), who ridiculed her for being a "he-she."

Now 24, Rolanda is a veritable high priestess of the pump and all the other goodies that help a penniless TG to enter looking high femme or more butch.

The tricks of Rolanda's trade were laid out on the kitchen table just beyond the living room. Where the living room screamed party, the kitchen had an aura of fluorescent-lit efficiency that reminded me of corner-doctors' offices I had visited as a child.

I pulled a bottle of Evian from my bag, took out a notepad and my cell phone and asked if I could look at the products she was going to use and if I could photograph them. She eagerly gave me the tour while the others whispered, smoked and looked nervous.

Lexter's "Freedom to Love" bounced behind us as I perused Rolanda's wares. On the table were a series of syringes with large needles, what looked like several caulk guns, a small hair dryer, alcohol and cotton balls, a bottle of hydrogen peroxide, a tube of Vaseline, some tubes of cream with blurred labels, round packets of birth-control pills, small glass vials of a clear liquid and a breast pump of the kind lactating mothers use.

The mundane array belied what would happen next. After all, they were not doing repairs on Rolanda's dilapidated kitchen, but altering the bodies of the seven people in the other room.

Rolanda, who never finished high school but did get her GED, and who worked part-time in a nursing home as an aide, was the plastic surgeon who would begin — or continue — the process of altering the gender of the people in the living room.

Since the 1960s, silicone has been the subject of lawsuits and testimonials. For years, silicone implants — not caulking guns — were banned for use in the U.S. because so many women who got breast augmentation complained of side effects ranging from autoimmune disorders to gangrene to

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Figure 6. 1

JULY 4 - 10, 2008

by a too-tight, low-cut teal top stood up. Long reddish braids fell well below her shoulders. She offered me her seat at the end of a third sofa covered with a bright African-patterned sheet and murmured her name — Sharnise.

Then other MTFs introduced themselves to me — Chentoya, Kalina, Tanessa, Lesia. Rolanda introduced the boys — Devon and Jeron. They remained in the corner, trying to look as tough as their 16- or 17-year-old selves could muster.

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Now 24, Rolanda is a veritable high priestess of the pump and all the other goodies that help a penniless TG to enter looking androgynous and leave looking high femme or more butch.

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disfigurement.

The girls and boys waiting for Rolanda's expertise knew nothing about Carol Doda, a young San Francisco stripper who made international headlines in 1964 when she had a gynecologist inject her breasts — then size 34B — with silicone, enlarging them to size 44D. She had repeated injections throughout her stripping career.

Allegedly Doda has never gotten ill from the silicone injections. But other women have not been so lucky and pumping parties — whether among the transgender or housewives who want to save on the expense of plastic surgery — have become increasingly popular while the risks remain largely unreported.

Sharnise is there to have silicone injected into her small hormone-created breasts. She's 21 and has been taking hormone therapy with Rolanda for two years.

See Editorial

Page 11

In 2004, a young TG woman died from convulsions after being injected with silicone at a pumping party. In 2005, two MTFs were rushed to a San Diego hospital near death from injected silicone. Last year, a woman in Florida died from an embolism when silicone injected into her cheeks and lips migrated to her lungs. She had 36 puncture marks from the silicone injections she endured.

These are just a few of the cases that have been reported where the cause of death was immediately known to be illegally injected silicone.

Pumping is possibly one of the most dangerous things a person can do to his/her body that doesn't involve guns or knives. MTFs looking to make a faster transition than their minuscule bank accounts will allow go for the fast silicone fix, as do desperate housewives.

I'm uncomfortable with the idea of watching the pumping take place. I want to talk to the kids in the other room about what they are doing. This is a story in which I cannot be a casual observer.

I sit down and tell them about informed consent. I tell them that Rolanda could go to jail for what she's doing, even though everyone is consenting and everyone says they want this. I tell them that silicone travels into the bloodstream

PHILADELPHIA GAY NEWS

and can cause all kinds of horrendous illness 'and even kill them. The music plays on — I have no idea what I'm listening to now — and while everyone is watching me, I'm equally sure that they would prefer I just leave so that they can just go on with it.

But I don't leave. I go to the kitchen, sit down on a chair and watch Rolanda prep her first patient, one of the boys.

Devon tells me he should have been a boy, that everyone says so and when I look at him in his baggy jeans and shirt, short curly brown dreadlocks and soul patch under his lower lip, I think maybe everyone is right. He's handsome and, in the loose shirt, so one would ever guess he was born female.

I ask him how old he is. He turns away as he mumbles "18" and I subtract two, possibly three years.

Devon has been getting testosterone and steroids from Rolanda for over a year. Rolanda tells me she tries hard to "only get good stuff — you know, from Canada" and I believe her. She shows me the labels and I see that the drugs have indeed come from Canada. I wonder if they made any other stops along the way.

Devon drops his pants and gets a cartoon-large injection in his thigh. Then Rolanda applies the breast pump to what was once his [redacted] and what is now being turned, slowly in this cut-rate plastic surgery clinic, into his scrotum. Rolanda says she is very pleased with how Devon is progressing.

It's awkward, but I ask if I can look. Devon looks away and then asks Rolanda to remove the pump. He turns toward me and places his hands on his thighs.

There is thick black [redacted] and in the middle of this is a budding [redacted] — his [redacted] is growing from the testosterone injections and now looks like a small, [redacted]

[redacted]. It's very [redacted] but perfect looking. The [redacted] had become [redacted] also, and looks almost like a [redacted]. When this [redacted] is [redacted], Rolanda explains, she will inject it with silicone.

I ask Devon how it feels. His right hand moves involuntarily toward the [redacted] and he squiles a little for the first time. "Good," he says softly.

Sharnise comes in then and puts her arms around Devon's waist as he pulls his pants up. She tells him how fly he looks and I agree. Devon is definitely fly. And Sharnise is very pretty, if less convincingly of the other gender than Devon.

Sharnise is there to have silicone injected into her small hormone-created breasts. She's 21 and has been taking hormone therapy with Rolanda for two years. The two met

See TRANS Page 13

Figure 7. 2

W.E.B. Dubois' quote: "There is in this world no such force as the force of a person determined to rise. The human soul cannot be permanently chained."

"Bread & Roses' mission is to support groups working for social change in the Delaware Valley, and we really saw that this quote relates to the work of the grantees and what motivates them," said Casey Cook, Bread & Roses executive director.

Cook said nearly 40 local groups applied for Bread & Roses grants this past year, and that the organization's selection process is a

This year, the committee chose to give ACT UP Philadelphia a \$5,000 grant, which Hannah Zellman, an ACT UP organizer, said will fund its efforts in local HIV/AIDS work.

"The money will go toward the different campaigns we're working on right now, and especially the primary one the last couple years of getting condoms distributed in high schools," Zellman said. "Since we started, we've gotten condom distribution in 11 high schools and have plans to open new health-resource centers in a lot of other schools. And right now we're

around HIV/AIDS, but we can't do that work without breaking down the structures that create racism, classism, sexism and homophobia. Bread & Roses funds grassroots change and is about empowering the community and organizations that take it upon themselves to work on the issues affecting their members."

Jose DeMarco, a representative of Proyecto Sol, a new organization dedicated to training and guiding Latino leaders in the local HIV/AIDS communities, said his organization will use its \$2,500 Bread & Roses grant to establish its

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TRANS

From Page 9

at a North Philly pumping party three years ago when, Sharnise says, "I was still scared to do it all, you know what I'm saying?"

I glance at the table. I think I do know what she's saying.

Rolanda tells me what she will do with Sharnise. First the breast pump goes on for 10 minutes on each breast. This "puffs out" the breast tissue, Rolanda explains. Then she makes a series of injections underneath the breast area and fills each section with silicone. She then turns the hair dryer on hot and blasts it at the silicone-filled breasts "to keep it soft so it goes in smooth."

The experience at Rolanda's was compelling, heartbreaking and frightening. Transgender men and women who can't afford the body modification they crave have two avenues open to them: online shopping for drugs and back-alley "enhancements" from people like Rolanda.

Rolanda views herself as a sort of neighborhood healer. She doesn't charge a fee beyond the cost of her equipment. "I know what it's like to want to see what you feel," she explains, meaning the female or male body to go with the emotions within.

But as I explained to the group before the hard-core pumping began, not only is injecting silicone illegal, it's potentially deadly. And silicone is being injected at pumping parties wherever an individual wants

"plumping" — cheeks, lips, breasts, butts. Anywhere that softens the angular lines of the male body and turns it curvy and feminine.

The Food and Drug Administration had outlawed the sale of liquid silicone of the sort that is encased in sleek, impermeable, high-quality rubber for breast implants in 1992; it approved the use of some new silicone implants in 2006. However, most surgeons still prefer to use saline implants.

And while a quick surf of the Internet will catch more than one unscrupulous doctor willing to look the other way, the majority of silicone being pumped illegally — whether at a TG party or a suburban desperate housewives' soiree — is the same stuff you would use to fix your bathtub or insulate your attic.

Except now it's in your face, breasts and ass.

Silicone was banned because it's an uncontrollable substance — it migrates in the body, shifting from one place to another, leeching into the bloodstream and lymphatic system. Silicone injections can — at best — cause infection and blot clots, immune disorders and cancer. At worst, they can kill.

Unregulated use of testosterone and estrogen might provide the transformation that these young TG men and women are seeking, but at what cost? Both hormones have been implicated in cancer when prescribed in small doses. But the unlicensed use for transitioning exponentially increases the amount of hormone being absorbed into the

body. How that impacts the immune system and the liver is unknown, but damage to the liver from long-term steroid use is a very real concern, as is cancer.

FTMs who do not have hysterectomies will stop menstruating from the testosterone injections alone, but their ovaries and uteruses are still being overrun with hormones; the risk of cancer rises with every year the hormones are taken.

As I leave Rolanda's after receiving hugs and kisses from everyone, the backbeat of Geo Da Silva's "I'll Do You Like a Truck" almost obscures the lyrics. I feel too much a part of this story, and suddenly wish I hadn't met Rolanda that day at the post office. Because now I know she's there, and what she's doing. I worry about her and the parade of young men and women who will keep finding their way to her like stray cats to scraps of food.

There are many questions still unanswered about the whole transgender experience, but one thing is certain — people will seek out what they want to change their bodies, whether it's provided in the relative safety of a doctor's office or a hospital or in someone's kitchen. And Rolanda's kitchen is only one of many theaters in operation for body modification, and one cannot help but wonder how many "patients" will die from the treatments they are seeking so desperately because it's all just a little too easy — but much, much too dangerous. ■

Figure 8. 3

For those who wish to quibble over whether it would be legal for you as an adult reporter - not a doctor, not in a hospital and not with parental consent - to talk a 15 or 16-year-old to letting you look at their genitals, please post into a reply an example of wherein a reporter - without parental consent and outside the context of a hospital - gained access to a minor's genitals and then went on to report, in explicit detail, what the minor's genitals looked like.

If you can't do it, I'd say there's a reason for it (even if you refuse to acknowledge that reason). I'd also say that there's a reason that when this was done to a trans kid, it suddenly became both legal and ethical, to the point where the adult is given an award for it:



And, to add to the various lies Brownworth keeps spewing, now she claims that I'm a stalker and a slanderer:



Figure 9. stalker

Notice that Brownworth again fails to support her assertion with any evidence, even when she @s me on twitter to inform me that I'm a stalker. And let's be honest here. It's been...

[countup date=2013/07/08-22:34:00][timer][countup]

... since I requested that Brownworth produce ANY evidence to substantiate her libelous claims and she's failed to do so. Here, yet again, this professional "award-winning" journalist is caught in the act of spreading more malicious lies about me. Lying to libel others seems to be a pattern for Brownworth.

If you think it's only trans people who have a problem with Brownworth's behavior, consider what cisgender feminists think of Brownworth's supposed professionalism:

This excerpt is from a HuffPo Live roundtable discussion on feminism. In the discussion were feminist opinion leaders, including Victoria Brownworth (the voice on the phone line).

At this point, I have to ask the Advocate, SheWired, The Real Curve, The Philly Gay News, and the Huffington Post why they continue to pay this individual to be the voice of queer people. Why do they time and again hire this white, affluent, hubris, liar? How many times must her obdurate behavior be exposed before you finally figure out that there's a problem and that you're enabling it?

Suggested citation

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