

A Required Reading for "Flame War 101" Course

interchange

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A Collection of Online Babblings by Emi Koyama

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interchange

What is this ‘zine about?

Interchange is originally a section within **Eminism.org**, the online propaganda center created by Emi Koyama (that’s me!). Interchange basically archives some of the most interesting postings Emi made to various electronic mailing lists and message boards, although sometimes I include things that don’t fit into this criteria. This ‘zine is the “best of” collection of the online version, so to speak.

You can find the entire Interchange archive online at:
<http://eminism.org/interchange/>

Who is this Emi chick?

Emi Koyama is a multi-issue social justice slut who synthesizes feminist, Asian, survivor, dyke, queer, sex worker, intersex, genderqueer and crip politics. Emi is the founding director of **Intersex Initiative** (www.intersexinitiative.org) and has presented extensively on intersex activism, working-class sex worker feminisms, and the domestic violence “industry.”

Emi is also the founder of **Confluere** (www.confluere.com), an “alternative speaker’s bureau without the (centralized) bureau” and is responsible for putting the “emi” back in feminism via **Eminism.org**.

#59: Feminism is Not an Existential Shield

Forum: camp_trans list

Date: 08/04/2003

- > True, only those who hold the power can oppress others, but not
- > across the board. women don't have power in the gender realm,
- > so they can't oppress men. but what about race? age? ethnic origin?
- > sexuality? class? are you saying that white women can't oppress
- > women of colour? rich women can't oppress poor women?

On 8/4/03 3:08 PM, "Bobbi Hume" wrote:

- > Again, we were talking gender, not race, physical ability, class, or even
- > sexual preference.

No, we are talking about being transsexual. Non-transsexual people have power and privilege over transsexual people in this society. Being a female non-transsexual will not negate her cissexist privilege any more than being a white female would negate her white privilege.

- > Why can't we hold a respectful conversation about the topic at hand
- > without throwing around accusations?

Since when is talking about power and privilege an "accusation"? Are feminists "accusing" men of having male privilege, or simply stating their analysis?

- > In my humble opinion, this is one huge reason the dykes and the trans
- > community can never seem to communicate.

Yes, I have to agree that some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dykes' inability to recognize that they too can be privileged in some way is one of the obstacles for them to communicate with trans people, as well as dykes of colour, working-class dykes, dykes with disabilities, etc.

Emi K.

Date: 08/04/2003

On 8/4/03 6:44 PM, "Bobbi Hume" wrote:

- >> No, we are talking about being transsexual. Non-transsexual people
- >> have power and privilege over transsexual people in this society.
- >> Being a female non-transsexual will not negate her cissexist privilege
- >> any more than being a white female would negate her white
- >> privilege.
- >
- > Aren't transsexual issues in part gender issues?

You could say that. You could also say that homophobia is in part an issue of gender. Does that mean that gay men or straight women do not have any

power and privilege over lesbians?

- >> Yes, I have to agree that some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dykes' inability to recognize that they too can be privileged in some way is one of the obstacles for them to communicate with trans people
- >
- > I would like to remind you that communication is a two-way street.
- > My point, Emi, is pointing fingers and throwing around accusations is no way to solve a problem. By using the words "dykes' inability to..." you are not only labeling all dykes, but you are accusing.

Interesting. You keep complaining about being "accused," and yet there is no "accusation" except in your mind. Sure, anything can be turned into an "accusation" if you intentionally leave out important words in someone else's comments or otherwise misquote those you disagree with.

If what I said above amounts to an "accusation" that's wrong and should not be made, then that must mean that every single (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dyke recognizes (intellectually as well as through their actions) that she can be privileged because of her race, class, ability, cissexuality, etc. This is obviously false, and trivializes many women's experiences within women's and lesbian communities.

And describing women of colour, working-class women, women with disabilities, transsexual women and others as "pointing fingers and throwing around accusations" when they start discussions about racism, classism and other oppressions that operate among women is a traditional tactic used by some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) women to silence these discussions.

- > My point was to come together in a positive manner
- > and see how we can help each other.

Somehow, your intent and behavior seem to be in contradiction.

Emi K.

Date: 08/05/2003

- On 8/5/03 6:51 AM, "Bobbi Hume" wrote:
- >> You could also say that homophobia is in part an issue of gender.
- >> Does that mean that gay men or straight women do not have
- >> any power and privilege over lesbians?
- >
- > I am sorry, I am missing your point here.

To say that the issue A is in part the issue B does not mean that people who are oppressed by the issue B (but not by the issue A) cannot be privileged in the issue A. In this case,

- A = transphobia, homophobia, sexism
- B = "gender"

For example:

a) Gay men are targeted by homophobia. So in a way they suffer from gender oppression. But they still have male privilege.

b) Straight women are targeted by sexism. So in a way they suffer from gender oppression. But they still have heterosexual privilege.

c) Lesbians are targeted by both sexism and homophobia. So in a way they suffer from gender oppression. But they still have the privilege of being non-transsexual.

In your post, you negated c), so you would be logically inconsistent, hypocritical and self-serving if you also didn't negate a) and b).

- > I think this is what the festies fear. This sounds distinctly patriarchal
- > and reminiscent of women hearing, "it's all in your mind" since the
- > beginning of time.

You said "By using the words 'dykes' inability to...' you are not only labeling all dykes, but you are accusing." However, before "dykes" I put a long qualifier to show that I was only talking about "some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dykes." You made up the part that I was "labeling all dykes." You made it up, because it does not exist anywhere except in your mind.

And yet, you call it "patriarchal" when someone corrects your mischaracterisation of their comment – which, again, is a classic tactic used by some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) women to stall discussions about the issues of race, class, ability, cissexuality, etc.

- > I didn't misquote anyone, I cut and paste everything from text,
- > I did pull phrases I had questions about.

You took my comment wildly out of context and even pretended that there weren't any context (i.e. I specified "some white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc. dykes," and yet you pretended that I was talking about all dykes). That is misquoting.

- > When did I do this again? I didn't once comment on the lives of WOC,
- > differently-abled women or etc.

You keep using the same old tactics to which generations of women of colour, working-class women, women with disabilities, transsexual women, and others have said "enough, stop silencing us." Of course that's offensive to all of these people because it shows complete disrespect for what they have been saying for at least three decades.

- > What I said was that the trans community aimed accusations at dykes
- > and that I didn't see that as a worthy approach.

You haven't shown a single evidence of an "accusation" except the one that you made up by butchering someone else's statement.

- > Your job is complete. I no longer feel safe to speak here and will
- > unsubscribe from this board immediately.

Go away. Don't expect others to tolerate your offensive comments and tactics just to make you feel safe. While I can't possibly undo all the damages you are causing, I can at least make it as uncomfortable as possible for you to continue spewing hate and ignorance disguised as "feminism." To me, feminism means dissenting and contradicting the way things currently are: it's unfortunate that some people have turned it into an existential shield to dismiss all criticisms, thereby preserving the status quo.

- > The sad thing is, you have all of these potential allies in the lesbian
- > community and you don't see how your patriarchal approach negates
- > women,

As I point out, calling legitimate criticisms of individual lesbian or the "lesbian community" as "patriarchal" to dismiss them is a tactic used by some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) women to silence the critics.

- > yet your mission is to be accepted by this same community.

I sense a thinly veiled threat here: if you want to be accepted, silence your criticisms, however legitimate they might be. Again, a classic tactic used by some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dykes. But a commitment to social justice should not be conditional on the oppressed group being passive and obedient. I hope that we are talking about social justice here, and not whether or not to include certain people into your high-school clique.

- > I now see what they mean when they speak of how frightened
- > they are that allowing T's into the fest will change the dynamic.

I hope it will change the dynamic, because as it is the existing dynamic within the "lesbian community" (such as that represented by your comments) often result in silencing of women of colour, working-class women, women with disabilities, transsexual women, etc. In fact, if transwomen are welcomed but the fundamental dynamic didn't change, I'd consider that only half a success.

Nonetheless, I don't represent Camp Trans. I've never even attended it. So it's probably not fair for you to judge Camp Trans based on your communication with me – that would be as wrong as "labeling all dykes" as racist just because some are.

Emi K.

Date: 08/05/2003

- On 8/5/03 5:20 PM, "Bobbi Hume" wrote:
- > Go away? How dismissive, thank you.

You are welcome. But I thought you said you were going to leave this list

“immediately” – what’s keeping you here? Did you change your mind?

> I expected nothing but dialogue.

And you have chosen to terminate the dialogue when you stated “I no longer feel safe to speak here and will unsubscribe from this board immediately.” Don’t act like you are being asked to leave against your will.

> My feeling safe has nothing to do with conversation but has
> everything to do with the name calling I have experienced.

You were not called names. You made offensive, hateful, and/or ignorant comments, for which you were confronted. If you think this is not the case, show me a single evidence where I (or others on this list) called you names. You can’t.

Your use of “feeling safe” as a tool to dismiss criticism is tired and old. And it’s at the core of the controversy at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival: a certain group of people, the dominant group, feels entitled to exclude or dismiss those who criticize or confront it, because the presence or voices of the marginalised group makes the majority “feel unsafe.” It’s not about safety at all – it’s about entitlement and privilege.

> Again, you don’t know anything about me other than how to
> twist what I have said.

Show me a single evidence where I “twisted” what you said. “Twisting” someone else’s comment is like saying that I “labeled all dykes” negatively, when the truth is that I specifically referred to “some (white, middle-class, able-bodied, non-trans, etc.) dykes.” If you think I’ve twisted your comments like you did mine, show me where. Or else, stop making false allegations – it doesn’t help your position at all.

> Keep alienating everyone who attempts to understand.

This is a classic passive-aggressive attack employed by members of the dominant group to shift the responsibility to educate them about oppressions they don’t experience to those who are marginalised by them.

> Do as Sadie suggested and stop wasting your time on everyone who
> disagrees with you or challenges you, that way only those who
> currently see your position will be the only ones that ever do.

I’m not wasting my time. I don’t think I’m going to change your mind about anything, but as I’ve said before, my goal is to make it as uncomfortable as possible for you to continue spewing ignorance and hate on this list. And it worked – it made you feel so “unsafe” (which must mean “uncomfortable,” since you can’t physically get hurt over an email dispute) that you’ve decided to leave! Now, do as you said yourself and go away.

Emi K.

#60: Analytical Vigorousness Does Not Equal Good Activism

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 07/05/2003

On 7/5/03 11:50 AM, "Gillian Wickwire" wrote:

- > Kim Q. Hall's article "Queerness, Disability, and the Vagina Monologues" is an excellent piece that addresses both the essentialist
- > discourse of the play as well as the way in which VM otherizes and in
- > fact, demonizes certain bodies. I don't believe this piece is published
- > as of yet. Kim Hall is at Appalachian State University.

As someone quoted in Hall's article: she does not seem to understand that press releases I wrote on behalf of Intersex Society of North America (regarding the use of intersex "vagina fairy tale" in "The Vagina Monologues") were written in activist context, with specific realistic activist goals. They were written to influence a specific group of people in order to bring about a specific result.

Okay, to be more specific: the discussion of intersex in "The Vagina Monologues" was trivializing and offensive, and my goal was to use it as an opportunity to raise awareness about intersex experiences. I chose to do so not by calling for boycotts or pressuring Eve Ensler to change the text, but by urging campus organizers of V-DAY events to compensate for the play's problems by educating their campus about intersex issues through film, discussion, and handouts.

In this process, I intentionally left out other criticisms I could have made about the play, such as its essentialism or its colonialist "othering" of non-Western women. Had I made these arguments, it would have seriously undermined my ability to influence campus V-DAY organizers (which is evident by the fact that even the minor criticisms we've made about the play were dismissed by some feminists as unproductive and unfeminist).

Kim Hall critiqued my activist statements for not going far enough, which is that I failed to address the play's more fundamental flaw of essentialism. But if I had criticized the play's essentialism, I would be criticizing the whole basis of the play rather than just a small portion of it, which would have made it impossible for me to convince V-DAY campus organizers to collaborate with us. The end result of this theoretically vigorous stance would be that there wouldn't be any education about intersex issues.

In activism, being effective is often more important than being theoretically flawless. Effective activists don't simply go around blasting everything they disagree: they carefully devise strategies to change it. Any scholars reading activist statements thus need to recognize the political context in which such statements have been made. I believe that Hall took my statements out of context when she critiqued them as if they came from a scholarly project, demanding them to prioritize analytical and theoretical vigorousness over political usefulness.

Just so that you won't misunderstand me: I am not arguing that activists should be allowed to be less than honest, but that they should be allowed to have priorities that are different from academics who study social issues. ISNA's goal was to raise the awareness of intersex experiences, not to deconstruct binary gender system or to challenge essentialist association between vagina and womanhood.

#61: Transsexual Women and the Male Privilege

Forum: Strap-On.org

Date: 08/24/2003

<< Transsexual womyn are not men, and although many of us learn to imitate male and masculine behaviors it rarely comes naturally and falls far short of anything that could be considered oppressive of anyone. >>

Are you saying that male gender roles/stereotypes "come naturally" for non-trans men?

<< There are other criteria required to qualify for male privilege; The ability and willingness to conform to a type of herd mentality which, to varying degrees, determines what is acceptable in terms of gender based behavior and presentation. >>

I disagree: you do not have to be the alpha male to access male privilege. In fact, you don't even have to be a man to have a limited access to male privilege (e.g. a woman with a male-sounding name whose job application is viewed more favorably). That is because privilege is not something that individuals "have" or "do not have," but a social structure upon which individuals are positioned.

<< Men and boys, for the longest time, were not to wear anything pink, play with dolls as children, "be a sissy" etc. These rigid gender stereotypes serve to reinforce oppression, but the oppression is also directed at non-conforming male assigned (re;trans)people. >>

Gender role oppression hurts everyone who do not conform to the expected gender norms. But to argue this to negate male-assigned trans people's access to male privilege is to sidetrack the original concern that is the male privilege.

This is a dangerous move for the trans movement, because if male-assigned trans people use gender role oppression as a way to negate their male privilege, we will lack frameworks to address the non-trans privilege that non-trans women have access to. In other words, if we said that trans women didn't have any access to male privilege because of being oppressed by gender, we won't be able to stop non-trans women from saying that they don't have non-trans privilege because they are oppressed as women. When one oppression is said to cancel out the privilege coming from another oppression, it is ultimately those who experience both oppressions who will be marginalized and erased.

#62: Battles to Claim the Martyr Turn Disrespectful

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 09/25/2003

On 9/25/03 4:40 AM, "Carolyn Gage" wrote:

- > I have a conference paper, "Teena Brandon: The Unmaking of a Lesbian"
- > My paper explores the life and choices of Teena Brandon (who never went by the name "Brandon Teena"), in light of her status as a traumatized survivor of prolonged child sexual abuse...
- > The paper makes a case that, in the case of Brandon, the diagnosis of gender identity dysphoria served to reinforce internalized homophobia and misogyny and to downplay the seriousness of her syndromes of child sexual abuse. Further, the recommendation of transsexual surgery in Brandon's case constituted the imposition of a dissociated identity on a survivor whose body was already the site of massive, invasive trauma.

Carolyn,

I have not read your paper (and yes, please do send a copy to me), but it appears, based on your synopsis, that its "facts" leading up to Brandon's death (and "Brandon" is the name he went by around the time of his death) are heavily informed by the "true crime" paperback "All She Wanted" written by Aphrodite Jones (in fact, the sole citation you have in this synopsis is the one for Jones).

Many consider "All She Wanted" to be sensationalistic and devoid of awareness around transgender experiences that in 1998, when there was a project underway to produce a film based on this book, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) expressed concerns about it, urging the producers to consult with them. (The film was abandoned since.)

Jones was interviewed by Statewide, a "Nebraska's weekly news journal," on January 14, 2000. In this program, she blames Brandon — not the two convicted murderers — as the central "villain" of the story. "Why was this person such an obsessive compulsive liar? What about this person fed into this crime itself? If this person had not been so pathological in her lying, his lying, would this triple homicide never have occurred? Probably wouldn't have." You can watch the interview online at:

<http://net.unl.edu/swi/pers/tbrandon.html>

Overall, I find Jones' telling of Brandon's story sensationalistic and biased. Further, I find her writing not only transphobic, but also anti-lesbian, as it portrays Brandon as the stereotypical predatory lesbian who gets what's coming.

Personally I feel pained that years after his death his gender and sexuality

are still fought over in an effort to claim the famous martyr. I do not know for certain how he came to call himself “Brandon” or “Billy” or other male-sounding names, or why he chose to pass as a man. But I do know that, at the time of his death, he went by the name “Brandon” and lived as a man. I hope that we can respect that, at the very least, if we were to talk about his life and death.

It was disrespectful when a sheriff said, referring to Brandon, “you can call it ‘it’ as far as I am concerned,” and it is disrespectful to continue to refer to him by the name or gender he did not call himself at the time of his death. It’s not even about what his “true” gender was – we cannot know this conclusively – but it’s about what is respectful.

Emi K.

#63: Defending Free Exchange of Ideas and Information

On September 25, someone contacted me about one of the posts I archive on my website, requesting a page to be removed because my quoting her public comment created “erroneous impression.” Her argument was that because I did not include her reply, the page failed to provide the context for the statement that I was quoting and commenting on. The original interaction took place in the Women’s Studies list (WMST-L) and her posts are archived in the WMST-L File Collection, which was fine with her because it gave the whole context. Fair enough. Below is the response I sent her in which I offered several remedies, and another email I sent after she kept requesting the page be deleted altogether.

Forum: Private Email Correspondence

Date: 09/29/2003

Thanks for sharing your concern with me, but I am weary of complying with requests to “delete discussions.” If you feel that I am not giving enough context to your quote, I would be happy to address that by a) add a link to the WMST-L archive so readers can see the whole exchange, b) include your subsequent comment in the page, or c) include this email you sent me. Would either of these options satisfy you?

Emi K.

Date: 09/29/2003

The reason I do not agree with “total deletion” is because I believe that comments published in a public mailing lists are publications just like any other, which would mean that others may quote the comment without the author’s specific permission for the purpose of review or criticism (WIPO Copyright Treaty of 1996, Article 10). I did not seek your consent for me to quote your comments in my post or website because I strongly believe that

to require consent before one's published comment can be quoted would be morally wrong, as it would stifle free exchange of ideas and information that is vital for democratic and creative processes.

I am very concerned about recent copyright legislations in my country that purport to "strengthen" copyright protections, when in reality they would only protect certain commercial interests (music and movie industries attacking otherwise legal re-uses of CDs and DVDs, pharmaceuticals blocking the production of cheaper AIDS drugs, etc.). When I say that I do not need your consent, I'm not doing something just because I legally can; I truly believe in defending the "fair use" convention in any way I can, which I view as the foundation for democracy and culture. Given the current climate of ever-expanding powers of the copyright holders that threaten our society, I find your request for "total deletion" based on lack of "consent" immoral, which is why I do not feel obligated to comply with it legally or morally.

I am very much concerned about fairness, and that is why I offered you various options. For me, being respectful of those I quote means that I do not intentionally twist their words or take them out of context. It means that I correctly and prominently attribute each comment to the author who stated it. It means that I would be open to discussion and redress when the person I quote tells me that I mischaracterised their words. But it does NOT mean that I seek consent before quoting them, or deleting mentions of their comment altogether simply because it is requested. That is not respect; it is stifling of intellectual exchange.

Frankly, I do not even feel that I mischaracterised your comment, but I realise that you disagree with me on this. Because fairness is important to me, I offered you several options that would resolve the potential problem that you felt existed. Thank you for your specific permission to reproduce your later comment on my website – I think my readers would benefit from having access to the whole exchange. I will make the change to the website sometime this week.

Best,

Emi K.

—

<http://eminism.org/> * Putting the Emi back in Feminism since 1975.

#64: What Part of “We Want Decrim” Don’t You Understand?

Forum: protalk list

Date: 01/27/2004

On 1/27/04 10:27 AM, “drtm” wrote:

- > It is my belief that what the public is offended by is street
- > walkers who embarrass and draw undesirable traffic to neighborhoods.

Oh, excuse me for embarrassing your middle-class sensibility. The fact is that street walkers are your neighbours as are the johns – they are entitled to be there as much as anyone else.

- > The solution is to bring sex workers off the streets and redefined
- > as health care providers.

When going off the street is a plausible and more preferable alternative from the perspective of a street walker, they will. Can we start by building these alternatives by creating affordable housing and social services that aren’t paternalistic, instead of relying on the police to drive people off the streets?

- > Sex workers should be routinely and regularly be examined for
- > STD, HIV & hepatitis by the City Health Department.

And create an underground market of “positive” whores who are treated even worse than they currently are? I don’t disagree that it’s a good idea for anyone to be tested for STDs regularly, but get the government out of this, please. If we were to encourage more people to get tested for STDs, it must be offered anonymously.

Your “solution” only works for a very limited – and privileged – group of “sex workers” (note the term “sex worker” itself is foreign to most street walkers outside of San Francisco). It will deepen the divide between the “good” prostitutes and “bad” (or “undesirable” to borrow your word) ones.

What part of “We Want Decrim” don’t you understand?

Emi K.

#65: “Lesbian Caucus” Betrays the Fired (Black) Lesbian Scholar

Forum: NWSA Lesbian Caucus list

Date: 09/29/2003

Themorgangirl wrote:

>> On September 23, 2003, the Equal Employment Opportunity
>> Commission (EEOC) found in Pat Washington’s favor and
>> recommended tenure and promotion to associate professor, back pay,
>> benefits, etc. [...] At this time, we do not know the full implications of
>> EEOC’s determination—other than its being a major step forward on
>> our road to justice. [...]

On 9/29/03 3:32 PM, “Eileen Bresnahan” wrote:

> Please be aware that the attached message was posted to the Lesbian
> Caucus list by Pat Washington herself (at least, she is the possessor of
> the email address from which it originated), and did not come from me
> as chair of the caucus. The caucus has taken NO POSITION on this
> matter and it is not the caucus that urging you to write to anyone.
> Please be sure, before you take sides in this complex matter, that
> involves one of the oldest the most prominent Women’s Studies
> departments/programs in the country, that you have all the facts from
> BOTH sides of the controversy. Sometimes things are not as interested
> parties try to make them seem.

Eileen,

It is obvious that the post did not come from the Caucus itself, just like all the other stuff that have been posted here. Why did you feel that it was necessary to send out this clarification about this particular post and not any other posts? Would you send out such a notice if the discrimination complaint in question was against another academic department (say, school of business)?

Also, has the Lesbian Caucus considered taking a position? Has the caucus discussed this matter? This case is over whether or not an “out” Black lesbian faculty has been unfairly treated by the Women’s Studies department, so the Lesbian Caucus should certainly have some interest in this issue. Where do you stand personally, and what information is that based on? Where can I find “all the facts from BOTH sides” that you speak of?

Emi K.

Date: 09/29/2003

“Eileen Bresnahan” wrote:

> No, the matter of Pat Washington’s disappointment over her tenure
> case has never come before the caucus in any context of which I am
> aware. I do not believe it is the place of the caucus to take sides on

- > issues such as this one, which are “inside” women’s studies and involve
- > lesbians and NWSA members on both sides of the controversy. [...]
- > Where I stand personally on the issue of Pat Washington’s tenure case
- > is, frankly, none of your business. My position as Lesbian Caucus chair
- > is as outlined above, as well as in my post that spurred your inquiries,
- > i.e. that I urge fairness of our members and that the caucus itself
- > should take no position on issues such as this.

Eileen,

Thanks for the quick reply and for answering some of my questions, although I noticed that you didn’t quite respond an important question. Where exactly are you suggesting that we could find “all the facts from BOTH sides” that you speak of?

While it is perfectly fair to suggest that we need to look at all available information before jumping to the conclusion, I feel that it would be irresponsible for the chair of the Caucus to urge Caucus members to “look at all facts” and then fail to provide a pointer to such “facts.” Doing so would only function to discourage members from taking any actions whatsoever, and to permit any alleged discriminator to stifle criticism by simply not disclosing all the information because, according to you, one shouldn’t jump to the conclusion unless s/he knows all the “facts.”

What matters to me is that I have respect for Dr. Washington’s scholarship and leadership within NWSA, and also that Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) made a recommendation in her favour. In the absense of any strong evidence to the contrary, that is the enough reason for me to urge the California State University system to reinstate her. That said, for the sake of fairness I am willing to and interested in considering the other “side” of the controversy. Please let me know where I can learn about the facts from the other “side” so that I can make a more informed judgment about the case.

Also, I’d like to say that I am disappointed to hear that this case has not received any attention from the Lesbian Caucus (I was unable to attend this year’s NWSA conference), as it seems to be an issue that should concern lesbians, especcally lesbians of colour, who are part of the caucus.

Emi Koyama

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#66: Danger of “Speaking For”: Activism Without Accountability

Forum: APIQWTC list

Date: 11/14/2003

On 11/14/03 9:17 PM, “Cris Widjaja” wrote:

> Subject: Iams Brand Pet Food = Cruelty to Animals

>

> If animals could speak, they will say: “Thank you for your

> kindness and compassion”.

Oh no, please don’t speak for animals. I find any social movement that claims to speak for someone other than itself automatically suspicious.

Sometimes I feel that certain people pick animal rights of environmental protection as their cause because they won’t be confronted by those they claim to defend or speak for. When you advocate for *people*, these people might confront or contradict those who present themselves as their saviour when their actions stray from the interests of those being advocated. When you speak for animals or the environment, however, you are safe from this kind of criticism.

How, then, do animal rights and environmental activists hold themselves accountable in the event their actions stray from the interests of those being advocated? I’ve asked this question to others before, but I haven’t heard any reply...

Emi K.

Date: 11/15/2003

On 11/15/03 4:37 PM, “Cris Widjaja” wrote:

> First of all, I am free to speak for the animals if I want.

I see. Do you also believe that white people are free to put words into the mouths of people of colour? Do you believe that men are free to “speak for” women by inventing what women might say? Or straight people telling other straight people “donate money to this organization and LGBT people will say “Thank you for your kindness and compassion””?

I don’t think any of the above is okay.

Why, then, is it okay for humans to speak for animals?

Could it be because you put humans above other animals?

> Additionally, I am free to pick to whatever cause I want to pick!

Certainly. I never questioned that.

- > However, based on your twisted argument below, I supposed we
- > should all just stop caring for animals and the environments, because
- > our intentions are suspect and our actions are unaccountable!
- > Ahh....! Brilliant!

You seem to not only put words in animals' mouths, but also in other people's. Did I suggest that we should stop caring for animals or for environment? No, I didn't.

The question of accountability is very important. We live in a complex society where good intentions do not necessarily bring about good result: think about the "pro-life" terrorists who kill doctors in order to prevent, in their own minds, the greater "evil" of abortion. While their behaviour is wrong and irresponsible, their motivation is mostly good, again, in their own minds.

I do feel that activists on the left or progressive side are equally capable of making the very same mistake these pro-lifers made, which is that we substitute our good intention for accountability. I've seen this turn into a big problem in some of the activism I've been involved in, particularly within the feminist anti-rape, anti-domestic violence organizing that have become paternalistic toward survivors who seek services.

I think there is a parallel between pro-lifers who "speak for" fetus "who cannot speak for themselves" and animal rights and environmental activists who "speak for" animals or the planet "who cannot speak for themselves," and this is a cause for concern. I am not saying that both are the same or that both are wrong, but there is a shared weakness to both movements which is that they cannot rely on feedbacks from the very group they claim to advocate for to hold themselves accountable.

In the end, I'd like to see animal rights and environmental movements develop their own methods of accountability. These movements need to accept the possibility that they could be doing something harmful despite best of their intentions and build structures of accountability to keep that risk under control.

And if you think this comment is an attack on animal rights or environmental activism, you are not paying attention to what I am actually saying.

Emi K.

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#67: Rules for Talking About Third Wave Feminisms

Forum: WMST-L

Date: 01/19/2004

On 1/18/04 12:25 PM, "SHEREEN" wrote:

> I'm using Manifesta this semester. It's very student-friendly. One of the
> authors, Amy Richards, has a strong presence on the internet with her
> feminist.com column "Ask Amy." Young women relate to her.

Certainly, some young women do. But which ones? I'm thinking mostly white, because "Manifesta" repeatedly dismisses "accusation of racism within feminism" as backlash against feminism rather than a real concern for feminists of colour and anti-racist white feminists (later in the book, the authors do offer one sentence that says, well, there were some racist stuff too).

I'm also thinking mostly straight, because "Manifesta" positions bisexuality as a convenient tool for straight women to experiment with their sexuality rather than its own legitimate sexual identity or experience.

And I'm thinking mostly middle-class, because the particular feminist achievements and advances "Manifesta" speaks about – e.g. thirty years ago it was hard for women to go to college; now women can go to college if they want to, or thirty years ago women were to stay at home but today women can pursue career – are specific changes experienced by the middle-class American women.

Which is not to say that that book is all bad, or that it should not have been published. I realize that it's not fair to expect a book to speak for all of its authors' generation, and so my criticism is directed not toward the book itself, but to those who use the book as the representative of young women's thinking.

My "research" on third wave feminisms used to consist of reading scrawled letters and words of obscure feminist 'zines and listening to the almost incoherent lyrics of Riot Grrrl tapes recorded at someone's bedroom. Today it has become so much easier because there are tons of books and anthologies on the topic being sold at the bookstore, but I fear that the presence of established intermediaries such as publishers and editors have contaminated what people hear about.

Rules for talking about third wave feminisms:

1) "Third wave feminism" does not equal "young women's feminism." Many older (and not so old) women have moved beyond their starting point and are now part of the third wave. And someone simply being young does not make it third wave feminism any more than someone being a woman makes her a feminist.

2) "Third wave feminism" is older than what you think. Certainly older than "Manifesta." Earlier "third wave" anthologies, especially "Third Wave Agenda," make it clear that the "third wave feminisms" sprung out of the work of women of colour and working-class women.

3) Don't believe everything you read or hear about young women or feminists in the media – if you don't want young women to believe everything they hear about the "70s feminists."

4) "Third wave" publications are not the direct representation of the third wave feminisms itself, but a product of the power dynamics within the third wave feminisms, amplified by its interaction with the broader social structures of power. Think about what's *not* being published.

5) Let students teach you about their feminisms.

Emi K.

#68: Seek Structural Reform, Not Quick Retraction

Forum: TransectingTheAcademy list

Date: 02/16/2004

On 2/16/04 12:38 PM, "Emilia" wrote:

> I am very disappointed in Lambda Literary's response below. To
> summarize, Lambda nominated a book (The Man Who Would Be
> Queen, by Michael Bailey) that has been identified by many academics
> and transsexual/transgender people to be unscientifically unsound and
> highly insulting to transsexual/transgender women.

[snip]

> The situation is equivalent to having a book from the National
> Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (a group that
> believes that homosexuality is a mental illness and supports reparative
> therapy) nominated for a Lambda Literary Award. The response from
> others and myself was to ask Lambda to remove the book from the list
> of nominees for best Transgender book. However, Lambda's response
> raises some concerns.

I am also appalled by the Lambda Literary Foundation's selection of The Man Who Would Be Queen as a Lambda Literary Award finalist, but I feel that Mr. Marks' response is reasonable, within the bounds of what has already happened.

I would imagine that this is the same exact response he would have made even if it were an anti-gay book coming from NARTH instead of an anti-transsexual book that somehow fell through the cracks. That is, instead of singlehandedly disqualifying the offending book, he would have asked the committee to reconsider the selection, which is precisely what he is doing regarding this case. Yes, it would have been nice if Mr. Marks would directly acknowledge that

the book is offensive and the committee had made a clear mistake, but I can understand his commitment to maintaining the integrity of the award selection process. Had I been in his position, I would have made the same decision (that is, to have the committee re-consider its picks with all the new inputs, rather than simply overruling the committee).

Of course, an anti-gay book has not and will never just “fall through the cracks” at the Lambda Literary Foundation, and that is where the problem lies: the selection committee is not competent in judging the merit of trans-themed books. This probably does reflect the internal culture of the Lambda Literary Foundation, which may not be transphobic in the sense of holding hatred or bigotry, but nonetheless ignorant about trans people’s lives and indifferent to trans people’s needs. That is what needs to change, not just the list of Lambda Literary Award finalists.

For this end, I think we should seek 1) a reform of the nomination and selection process for the next year’s Lambda Literary Award to give trans individuals (in and out of the “book industry”) leadership roles in judging trans-themed titles; 2) an increase in proportion of trans-identified judges in the selection committee; and 3) the formation of trans-specific task force within the Lambda Literary Foundation to increase and improve the coverage of trans literary scene in Lambda Book Report and in other activities.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Bailey’s book received undeserved publicity, but even if it were not for this book, something similar to this was bound to happen. And it will happen again unless we make structural changes to how the Lambda Literary Foundation and its award committee operate. Simply removing the book from the list of finalists is not enough; we should take steps to make the Lambda Literary Foundation truly inclusive of trans issues and interests – or else ask it to stop selecting the Best Transgender Book(s) of the Year.

Emi K.

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#69: Politics of “Abused and Abandoned Children”

Forum: tgpc list

Date: 01/30/2004

On 1/30/04 9:13 AM, “Wivel” wrote:

- > The latest bill to include his sponsorship (HB 358) would prohibit
- > adoption and foster care in a home where a parent is homosexual,
- > bisexual, or transgendered. What a shame that Mr. Harmon considers
- > it a priority to limit the opportunities of homeless, parentless,
- > abused, or otherwise disadvantaged children to live in a loving home
- > with a caring and responsible adult. This piece of legislation goes
- > beyond any moral agenda to spread hurt and hate at the expense of
- > innocent and abandoned children.

I agree with the idea that potential adoptive or foster parents should not be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, but I don't like the sound of this paragraph at all.

I don't like how this paragraph mirrors the dominant social perception of children being “abused” and “abandoned” by their parents when in reality they are often being abducted by the State for what the child welfare agency calls “neglect” – i.e. parents being unable to provide enough supervision, food, medical care, and other basic needs due to poverty, homelessness, “workfare” requirements, (anti-)immigration laws, war on drugs, and the prison industry.

The paragraph blames these parents for being less than loving, caring or responsible when we as the society continuously fail to provide what it takes for poor families, especially poor families of colour to remain together – but of course it's nothing new, because the United States of America has been splitting families of colour ever since the time of colonial expansion and slavery. George W. Bush is giving millions of dollars in upper and middle-class welfare disguised as tax credits to encourage well-off families to foster or adopt the abducted children, and somehow we don't have the money to help poor families to spend quality time with their children and to provide them with basic needs in the first place? What kind of family values is that?

I feel that some queers view children as commodities and for them it's all the better that there is a virtually unlimited supply of “abandoned and abused” children for them to pick from. But we can't call for justice in how the State makes decisions on potential foster or adoptive parents without also calling for justice in how the State makes decisions on when it steps in to take the children away, because they are both about the State regulating who is fit to be parents. If the State cannot be automatically trusted in this decision because of its history of homophobia and transphobia, it also cannot be trusted because of its history of colonialism and economic repression.

Emi K.

#70: Real Child Rape Photos

Forum: a personal uJournal site

Date: 02/03/2004

plastic kodama (konekomimi) wrote @ 2004-02-03 02:13:00:
<< I've always said that gynecology texts should really have photos. well, here are many, of congenital anomalies. kind of fascinating in a train wreck kind of way, however where else can you see a photo of intersex genitalia. it does satisfy my curiosity. >>

Curiosity is fine, but did you think about how these pictures are taken? There is a standard procedure in medicine that some of us refer to as the "medical display," which involves repeated and unnecessary display of children's naked bodies to doctors, nurses, medical students, and others for the sake of satisfying their curiosity. Typically, parents are asked to leave the room when they bring in the child for a "medical exam," and then medical professionals and students will come in and out of the room as the child is held down with legs spread apart so that they can come and oggle at the freaks of nature. They touch, poke, giggle, whisper to each other, take photos (some of these photos end up in a book like this, while others remain a personal collection of the doctor), etc., all the while liberally expressing disgust as if to maintain their sanity. The child experiences this event as nothing short of ritualized gang rape.

Perhaps some picture-taking may be necessary in order to advance medicine and educate medical students, but the way it is currently done is extremely damaging to the child and the harm far outweighs the benefit. Medicine needs to serve the needs and interests of the patient first and foremost, rather than satisfying the perverse curiosity in the medical gaze.

- ek @ <http://www.intersexinitiative.org>

Date: 02/17/2004

twoeyesleft 2004-02-17 02:56:
<< what i was trying to say is that it's ONLY rape if the child says it is... like it's only rape when the woman feels like she was raped. not ALL the children who were photographed felt oh so 'abused and raped', infact i think some of them.. didn't even know what was happening. at the time. >>

Oh, so if the child doesn't immediately realize s/he is being abused, then it's not child abuse. If the child doesn't remember every details of it, it's not child abuse. Sounds like a child molester's rationalization to me.

<< what you're doing is akin to watching another couple have sex and saying 'oh this is morally wrong, the girl is probably getting raped'. >>

The difference between sex and rape is "consent." Since very young children

can't provide "consent" for sexual acts like adults could, we should assume that there is no "consent" for the child to engage in sexual contacts or display (e.g. posing for porn). Any touching, probing, displaying, etc. of child's sexual organs beyond what is medically or otherwise necessary and in the interest of the child, then, is abuse.

- ek @ <http://www.intersexinitiative.org>

#71: Feminist Alternative to "Unborn Crime Victim" Law

Following is from the discussion about the "Unborn Victims of Violence Act" (HR1997) which treats attack on a pregnant woman as separate crimes against the woman and her fetus.

Forum: Strap-on.org

Date: 02/28/2004

lori hollet wrote:

- > Its implications about outlawing abortion aside, I've actually always
- > been sympathetic to the logic behind part of this bill.
- [...]
- > If I'm pregnant, and I intend to continue the pregnancy to full term,
- > and someone, say, commits a felony, like assault, on me, which ends
- > the pregnancy, then it sort of makes sense to me that the person
- > would be charged with manslaughter or felony murder.

If you agree that abortion is not murder, then the killing of the fetus cannot be manslaughter either. What would make sense is if the crime you are describing (i.e. an attack on the pregnant woman that ends her pregnancy) is construed as an offense against the woman, and not against the fetus. She should be entitled to compensation specifically for her loss of the viable fetus in addition to other damages caused by the criminal act; the perpetrator would be held accountable to the crime of ending a woman's pregnancy against her will in addition to other charges.

In fact, the proposed bill could win bipartisan support and meet the same exact stated goals if it were re-written to protect the right of the pregnant woman to her fetus, rather than protecting the rights of the fetus as a separate person. Of course Republicans won't agree to such a change because they don't really care about the pregnant women at all; they are only using this bill to further curtail women's right to choose. They are trying to manipulate us with the phony logic.

Emi K.

#72: Gender Identity Disorder in DSM: Proposal for Reform

First comment is from a discussion about the DSM-IV diagnosis of “gender identity disorder” and pros and cons of removing it from the list of psychiatric conditions. The second comment is from another discussion forum where the question of whether or not transsexualism should be considered intersex, given some evidences that it may be biologically rooted. I put the two posts together because I felt they dealt with the same issue.

Forum: Strap-on.org

Date: 04/05/2004

Classification system such as DSM has been developed in order to identify needs and make available social and medical resources to meet them. Of course that’s not how it works in the U.S., so many are feeling only the stigmatizing effects of inclusion without any personal benefits. But I have reservations about attempting to remove GID from the classification system without seriously challenging the stigmatization of mental illness and the fact that diagnoses are being used to dismiss and discriminate against people rather than to help allocate resources to people.

Some arguments for removing GID from DSM are faulty, as others have pointed out:

- 1) It’s a biological condition! -> Many conditions listed in DSM are physiological conditions that occur in the brain.
- 2) It’s not an illness! -> Many conditions listed in DSM are not illnesses.
- 3) Transsexual people are not crazy! -> People with many conditions listed in DSM are not crazy.

These arguments seems to be saying that “we are better than those crazy people, we don’t deserve to be stigmatized like they do!”

That aside, I think there are two changes to GID classification in DSM-IV-TR perhaps we can agree on.

First, 302.6 Gender Identity Disorder in Children should be striked immediately. Some trans people fear losing services if GID were to be removed from DSM completely, but since no child in America is currently receiving any services under that diagnosis that are supportive of who they are anyway, we won’t lose anything by removing GID in Childhood from DSM-IV. And it will make it difficult for the medical community to abuse children perceived to be gender-different (unfortunately, I predict that they will continue to do so, using the diagnoses of Conduct Disorder and Disruptive Behavior Disorder).

Second, the criteria C of 302.85 Gender Identity Disorder in Adolescents and Adults should be removed. The criteria C states that “the disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.” Intersex adults who pursue gender transitioning are diagnosed with 302.6 Gender Identity Disorder Not Otherwise Specified instead, whose treatment is pretty much the same as the plain old GID. There is no reason to distinguish between the two here, and by removing the criteria C there will no longer be a need to “rule out” intersex conditions before the diagnosis of GID can be made: that means less physically invasive examinations.

By the way, they also need to fix the stupid numbering system. As you see above, GID in Childhood now has the same diagnostic code, 302.6, as does GID NOS. GID in adulthood is given 302.85, which by the way used to be the code for GID NOS back in DSM-III. “Transsexualism” in DSM-III and DSM-III-R had been 302.50, which somehow disappeared. It would have made more sense if GID in Adulthood had replaced “Transsexualism” as 302.50 in DSM-IV, with GID in childhood being 302.60 and GID NOS 302.85. How did they get into this mess anyway? Whoever it is, the people who are writing the GID portion of DSM aren’t very smart, and that worries me.

Forum: Bodies Like Ours Forum

Date: 04/10/2004

uriela,

- > I think that Transsexualism is more and more being accepted as a
- > biological condition rather than psychological.

Actually, many psychiatric conditions are considered biological, so two categories are not mutually exclusive.

And even if a psychiatric condition (say, schizophrenia) is biologically rooted, we would not consider it a physical disability.

Likewise, even if transsexuality is caused biologically in the brain, we probably would not consider it to be a physical intersexuality.

But there’s one condition under which I might consider transsexuality an intersex condition: That’s if and when they start diagnosing GID in infancy and performing brain surgeries to fix it without the child’s consent. That’s when I feel that the treatment of transsexuality is similar enough to other intersex conditions that it makes sense to join together as a movement.

#73: There Would Be No Foreign Adoption Without Violence

Forum: Strap-on.org

Date: 05/04/2004

lori hollet wrote:

- > Also, there was a very chilling article in the New York Times Magazine
- > a few years ago on the Cambodian baby trade and how in recent years
- > there have been freezes of adoption while investigations of corruption
- > in the adoption system (and potential exploitation of birth parents) are
- > being made.

“Corruption” and “exploitation” are inadequate to describe what have been happening in Cambodia, as well as in Guatemala, Honduras, and several other countries: there have been many cases of blatant kidnapping by the organized crime to fulfill the demand for healthy infants (diseased and older children have lower values) in the West.

Of course, even when the organized crime is not involved, how is it different from when the U.S. government would come in to their countries to support military dictatorships or right-wing militias that kill hundreds of thousands of people in political repression or civil war, then as the result the children become orphans?

Or for that matter, when the U.S. government forces other governments to adopt privatization and laissez-faire economy through the IMF which results in massive poverty and unemployment in the said country, causing many parents to give up children for economic reasons?

Considering the fact that no U.S. children are being adopted by foreign families, I would question if there would be any international adoption had it not been for “corruption and exploitation.” The whole concept of international adoption was invented by Christian fundamentalists in rural Oregon, who supposedly felt sorry for the poverty and malnutrition Korean orphans were in in the 1950s but not sorry enough to have done anything to stop the American troops from killing Korean adults. You can read the story at:

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/people/holt.htm>

- ek

#74: On Criticizing Reagan's Legacy Upon His Death

Forum: QueerDisability list

Date: 06/06/2004

On 6/6/04 6:05 PM, "Ron Johnson" wrote:

- > Consider this: What if your best friend died? What if it were someone
- > you idolized—say a parent, teacher, sports figure, clergyperson,
- > politician, etc.? Suppose it were your own passing? Now, imagine
- > others circulating eMails full of vitriol, & hate—reviling that special
- > person, or you, pointing up *every* bad or improper thing done, in
- > death?

But what if the dead person is not your friend, but instead his behaviors while he was alive was responsible for the deaths of many of your friends? And if the only medium in which people could talk about that fact were email--since television, newspapers, radio, etc. are not saying anything about it?

Besides, it is ridiculous to compare the death of a former U.S. President with the death of any person in the world. Of course his life and legacy is put under closer scrutiny than that of an average person--after all, he was at one time the Most Powerful Person Of The World.

- > and the bad things, remember them as the simple human failings we
- > all have - even Presidents!

That's what I'd call something like having sex with an intern and lying about it. *That* would be a "simple human failing." Intentionally neglecting the pleas of tens of thousands of sick and dying people as the silent epidemic overshadows large segments of population while you are the Most Powerful Person Of The World is definitely not.

- > In short - turn this page in America's history—look back to the past
- > and see it for what it is—the past, but look boldly towards the future
- > and the boundless possibilities it holds!

Yes, but we desperately need to preserve history for what it was. The relatively recent history of early AIDS crisis is quickly being forgotten and lost as we speak. Many conservatives today claim, for example, that at the time nobody knew what was going on and therefore Reagan could not have done much to address the epidemic anyway.

That's simply not true. That's historical revisionism. We must keep pointing that out, and refuse to let our respect for those mourning his death reduce us to silent complicity to historical revisionism.

Emi K.

#75: There Is No Unproblematic Cultural “Appreciation”

Forum: Strap-On.org

Date: 08/04/2004

IamARobot wrote:

- > I'm going to give it a try and if anyone takes offense, please let me
- > know. First off, I'm white. And here's my problem. I feel I have a very
- > real interest in India. [...] As a white girl I'm not sure how to express
- > real interest without it being taken as appropriation or something
- > along those lines. I mean, I don't wear saris or bindis. I don't do henna
- > or anything like that. I just really want to learn about the culture and
- > the people, etc.

That you are so worried about “being taken as appropriation” (rather than, for example, being exploitative and oppressive) indicates that you do not “get it.” The issue here is not whether or not someone “takes offense,” but whether or not you are critically evaluating your participation in the continuation of colonialist discourse and resisting it from within (since there is no way to detach yourself from it and criticize it from outside).

There is no such thing as an unproblematic way to express appreciation and interest toward the colonized culture as a member of a colonizing nation. Not wearing cultural symbols is not the point; it is that you cannot escape from the historic, political and economic contexts by the mere virtue of individual good ethics and behavior.

It is not wrong for a white person to express an interest in foreign cultures. But any such appreciation, no matter how sincere and respectful, takes place within the colonialist context in which there is a vast historic imbalances between the subject and the object of the appreciation.

In conclusion, I believe that you should pursue your interest in Indian cultures even as you interrogate and resist how you participate in the postcolonial global political and economic systems. I believe that you should agonize and lose sleep over it. Reject simplistic theories that claim that there is a clear line between disrespectful cultural appropriation and sincere appreciation because they are simply meant to take white people off the hook and sell you more of the appropriated cultural symbols.

- ek

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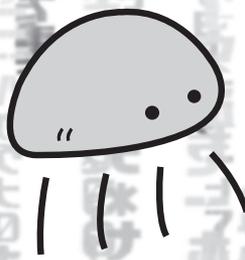
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