

2012 Transgender Day of Remembrance

David Nylund

Vancouver School for Narrative Therapy

I've decided to tell a story to honor the real effects of transphobia. It's a description of a recent Thursday for me. It's entitled:

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WHITE, ABLED-BODIED CISGENDER MALE (DEFINE CISGENDER)

- So the day begins by waking up at 5 am. I almost hit the snooze button but I have to get up; if I don't work out now, I won't do it later. So, I drag my ass to 24 hour fitness, I check in at the front desk. The front desk person does not ask me what my "real name" or birth name is. (often the case with transgender persons)
- I then head to the male locker room (only 2 choices-Male or Female). There is a locker available, cool. I take off my clothes to dress in my workout attire.
- I worry about getting through the spin class...but one thing I don't worry about as a cisgender person is getting stared at or feeling fear in the locker room due to my gendered body. (frequently the experience of a transgender person)
 - In fact, I actually want some "hot" guy to stare at me noticing my efforts to get in shape with my normative body
- After Spin, I head out to Kaiser; I have a doctor's appointment. I have to pee when I get to managed care hell so I look for the "male" bathroom and have no thought or worry about being harassed, physically abused, or being arrested due to my gender. I can pee in peace.
- When I check in the desk at Kaiser, no stress as a cisgender person about being denied medical services due to the staff stating that the gender marker on my Kaiser ID card does not match my gender identity.
- As a cisgender person, I also take for granted that I have health insurance through my job and know I won't be fired due to my gender identity or expression
- And I also presuppose that I don't need a psychological evaluation to get medical care
- Next, I fill out the health questionnaire in the waiting lobby; the form says What Gender? I without any thought or distress, circle "M" (the only other option is "F").
- I also realize that the doctor will write some notes about me as his patient; perhaps a diagnosis he'll make. But I guarantee I won't be diagnosed gender identity disorder
- When the doctor finally enters the exam room I've been waiting in for who knows how long, I tell him that I'm feeling a bit "under the weather". I am 100% certain that he will not say that my condition is a result of my gender
- I also don't have to worry that if I disrobe, I won't be judged or stared at with an othering look by my doctor due to my gender presentation and body.

- Ok, clean bill of health. Now off Woodland to facilitate a supervision group with therapists getting hours for their license. They consult with me about their work with their clients. There is the assumption that all their clients are cisgender. Transgender persons are made invisible. The conversation is informed tons of binaries- Healthy/unhealthy, functional/dysfunctional, male/female. These binaries police people and don't account for the richness and diversity of lived experience. The beat of the binary is louder in my head than listening to Madonna in my car driving back to Sacramento.
- On the way to the Gender Health Center, I get in a car accident/fender bender. Shit, now I'm running late for group supervision...what about car insurance info? But I know for sure that if the police show up and ask for my driver's license, I won't be insulted or glared at by the officer due to my name or sex not matching the sex they believe me to be based on my gender expression. (often the case with transgender persons)
- After supervision group at the Gender Health Center, I head out to teach at Sac State. Tonight I discuss and lecture on transgender issues and the harsh realities of daily living for transgender folks (job discrimination, threat of violence, hate crimes, and health discrepancies, for example).
- My students are moved and enlightened by the discussion and praise me for being so broad-minded. And I know that as soon as the class is over, I really don't have to think about these harsh realities because I am cisgender; they don't affect my life. And as I walk to the car, I know that I won't be hassled or assaulted due to my gender expression.
- Class is over; 9 pm. Long day, tired...I need a beer. I go to my watering hole; Nishiki. I blend in, not worried of being teased due to my gender expression (well, maybe just a little because I am carrying a man purse). I blend in by talking about sports being fully accepted in the man club; a club that is very exclusionary through homophobic, sexist, and transphobic othering.
- Half a beer later, I notice an attractive person at the end of the bar. Somebody I haven't seen before. I go over to the person with the intention of flirting.
- I am anxious a bit; will I get rejected? Will I get the phone number? But I am not afraid or worried that my biological status will be the cause for rejection. I also know that the person will not ask me what my genitals look like or how I have sex. (all too common, the experience that transgender persons have)
- Such is a typical day for me; benefitting from unearned privilege. In this case, CISGENDER PRIVILEGE; unmerited benefits afforded to me solely due to the fact that I am not transgender.

- Why is important for us allies and non-trans folks to look brutally honest and examine this privilege?

Without interrogating cis-normativity and using our privilege to fight injustice, the Privilege uses us. And when Privilege is used to its own advantage, it cuts us off from kindness, tolerance, love, and our commitment to social justice as we take our cisgender identity for granted. By separated off from our preferred values, cisgender privilege teams up with hate, intolerance and yes, creates the context for the violence and murder of transgender and gender non-conforming persons.

We must look at our privilege and other privileges (white privilege, male privilege, class privilege) if we are going to strive towards a just world. In fact it would be just and queer to envision this utopian world, or what my colleague and friend, Julie Tilsen and I call:

QUEERTOPIA

Here's my version of a queertopian world:

- We would as Michel Foucault said, "Make the Familiar Strange".
- All sex would be good sex as long as it's consensual...yes, even vanilla sex! Free of restraints of morals, religion, psychiatry, or the law. People would not feel guilty or judged to get their "freak on" because there would be no concept of the "freak".
- People's directionality of their sexual desire would be more fluid. Relational choices would not be based on the gender of the person or the plumbing downstairs.
- There would be true marriage equality; for all configurations and diversities of relationships including poly and non-monogamous relationships. If this version of marriage equality does not happen, marriage would be banned for all. All citizens would gain the benefits afforded to married people.
- There would be a loosening up of fixed sexual identity and gender identity categories. More room for flexibility.
- The identity acronym would be QITBLGA
- Genders would be proliferated
- If expecting (pregnant), one would not be asked if it's a boy or girl. If somebody relentlessly asks about the gender, one would say, "I'm expecting a "genderqueer" kid
- The comment "You throw like a girl" would be a compliment.
- There would be gender-free/or gender-neutral bathrooms
- Required reading in school starting with grade school through high school would include the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Kate Boorstein (even Catholic schools)
- Classes in Feminist and Queer theory would be General Education requirements
- US history books would have a whole chapter on the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the modern gay rights movement and transgender movements along with stories of activist organizations and movements such as Queer Nation and ACT UP.
- The socialist party would have the majority of seats in the US Senate

- Althea Garrison, a Transgender African American Female would be president of the United States (she was the first transgender person in the country to be elected to a state legislature).
- Lady Gaga would be the vice president
 - Dr. Milazzo would be the Surgeon General
- The iron curtain of capitalism would be torn down
- The violence of racism, sexism, ableism would be squashed
- Gender Identity disorder would no longer exist; In fact, the whole DSM would be banned (the Psychiatric diagnosis manual that pathologizes differences and medicalizes social and political problems).
- Evidence based mental health practice would be no longer. Narrative therapy would be privileged!
- Free access to health care for much needed services, hormones, surgery, etc. would be a right.
- People would not have to justify who they love and how they prefer to perform their gender.
- People would not be harassed, discriminated, assaulted, or murdered...YES NOT MURDERED due to their gender expression and identity. ..Just being who they are and having the courage to do so would not end in death.
- **Ultimately, there would be no need for a Transgender Day of Remembrance**

This queertopia may seem like a fantasy. But imagining this future is not just what could be, but what should be. Cisgender folks, all of us, join us in this striving for and creating this queertopian world.

THANKS.