



Actress Laverne Cox plays Sophia Burset in "Orange is the New Black." (Photo by btchfcks.com.)



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Ellen Kaczmarek is featured on page 5. (Photo by Markie Mickelson.)

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In this issue...

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Miley Cyrus is Not the Feminist Icon You're Looking For

By Kate Koenig

"We can't stop, and we won't stop," sings Miley Cyrus in one of her latest music videos, and she's right. She can't stop, and it appears like she won't stop making racist and ignorant remarks about the black community anytime soon. Anyone with a television or Internet access knows of the young Tennessee-born singer's exploits and her "scandalous" performances, like at the 2013 VMAs.

The name Miley Cyrus has become synonymous with a certain attitude that says, "Fuck you, I'm going to do what I want, and I don't care what you think!" While this attitude and Miley's body expression—in regards to clothing choices (or lack thereof), self-sexualization, and body positivity messages are fine—fans, commentators, and feminists alike support Miley's transformation into who she envisions herself as—many others are not pleased that she is achieving this identity at the cost of a marginalized group. This is something that needs to stop.

Cyrus is guilty of **cultural appropriation**, using these images for personal gain at the expense of the black community. In her "We Can't Stop" music video, she is seen putting a grill in her mouth and sneering at the camera. As the dancing commences, she's surrounded by black women shaking their asses. In her VMA performance, she grabbed and slapped the butt of a black woman. As for the diversity of her dancers, they were all black women. Cyrus seems to think that twerking ("ratchet culture" as it is sometimes called), grills, and putting up peace signs are all part of the black feel she is trying to accomplish. Where does the problem lie in doing so?

Miley is capitalizing on a wildly damaging stereotype to black women. It solidifies the notion that black culture is filled with raunchy dancing and recreational drug use and that twerking is associated with black women. She makes it all the punch line of her musical joke. Black women suddenly find that the sexuality of their bodies is the sole power and worth they possess.

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Miley Cyrus and the Cult of Modesty

By Maddie Denison

From the left enters Miley Cyrus.

She has been raising eyebrows since her album "Can't Be Tamed" was released along with a tour that featured pole and cage dancing, but her recent image transformation from Disney Channel's sweetheart Hannah Montana to Bangerz bombshell has everyone talking about her newly "sexualized appearance."

Her recent tour has been called "shocking," "raunchy," and even "exhibitionism," but reading article after article leaves one question burning: why?

Is it really so shocking? Miley herself aptly pointed out that, especially on the stage of the VMAs, "shocking" performances are commonplace.

Prince performed bare-buttocks in 1991. Britney Spears, Madonna, and Christina Aguilera made headlines in 2003 by sharing a three-way kiss on stage. Lady Gaga went as far as to pretend to hang herself, closing her 2009 performance.

"You are wanting to make history," Miley explained in an MTV interview following her VMAs appearance. In reality, there is nothing "shocking" about a VMA display that leaves its audience open-mouthed.

In response, commentators explain that it wasn't the fact that the performance happened that was shocking, but its content—"raunchy" and "exhibitionist." Thus, the problem is reached.

Some say that Miley Cyrus is setting feminism back. The arguments for this statement are persuasive, and at face value, one is inclined to believe them. But, face value is not enough.

Author of "Ladylike Lessons: A Guide to Feminine Empowerment and Etiquette" Chelsea-Lyn Rudder pointed out that the media would suggest that women have no choice but to objectify themselves, that only the "virtually naked and constantly ready to star in homemade pornography [...can] be worthy of attention," and there is truth to that.

(Continued on page 3)

slutciety

We are a monthly feminist publication produced by college students. Our goal is to break gender stereotypes, to write thoughtful and informative articles, and to empower the oppressed. We reclaim derogatory terms such as “slut” and use them in our favor, hence our name. We are answering to a need for a premiere feminist publication on college campuses.

What does reclaiming “slut” really mean?

Women can't escape it. We are sluts if we wear make-up, if we show too much skin, if we're out drinking by ourselves, if we ride the bus without paying attention to the viscious cat-calls, if we have casual sex for fun, if we have more than one boyfriend per every few months. Or sometimes, we're sluts if we don't. It would seem the basic requirement to qualifying as a “slut” is simply being woman.

I dream of a day where the word “slut” is no longer spat at me with a degrading, savage tone. Rather, I want to wake up and think, “I do what I want, when I want. I'm a fantastic slut.”

The word “awful” derived from the word “aweful,” and it was used to describe something inspirational or amazing--the meaning of “awful” has now changed so much, we can't even conceive using it in its former definition.

If we apply the same concept to “slut,” it's possible that in 50, 100, 300 years, the word used to so hatefully tear down women on a daily basis for practicing autonomy, for exhibiting sexual freedom, for simply existing, will evolve to something much better--instead, it will be a casual term of endearment for a greatly underappreciated majority of the population.

I love sluts, don't you?

Feminist Vocab of the Month

Internalized misogyny (noun): the noble-intentioned belief that the stereotypes and gender roles about women are true, also commonly referred to as “girl hate”

Example: “I'm not like other girls. I'm not a whore. She is a fatass. She was asking for it. She's making all women look bad. I don't party with crack whores like her.”

Stop tearing each other apart. Other women are not the enemy.

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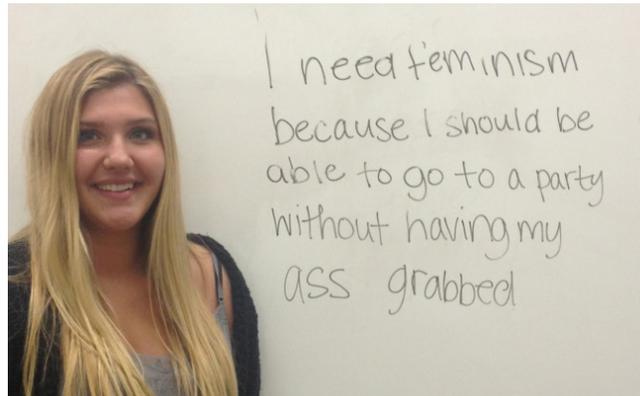
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Special thanks to Ms. Hirsch and Dr. Bishop for agreeing to support our endeavors.

I am a feminist because...

“I am a feminist because society does NOT define me.”

- Elyssa Johannesen



Jessica Zakis, freshman, reminding us that her body is not public property.

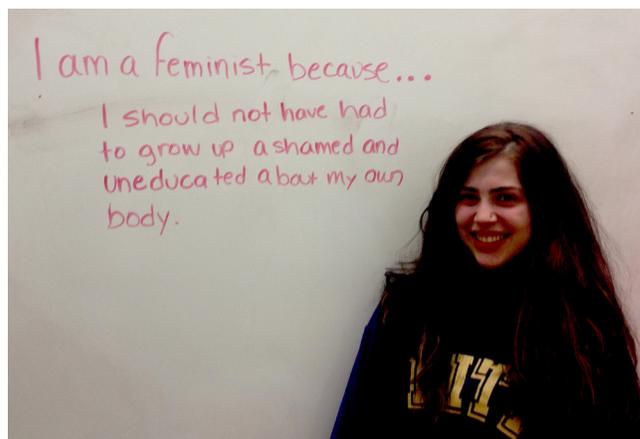
(Photo by Liz Lepro.)

“I'm a feminist because I'm tired of acting like my existence is a burden to your society.”

- Amanda Chan

“I am a feminist because I shouldn't have to choose between my femininity and my brain.”

- Maddie Denison



Kate Koenig, freshman, asks society to stop lying to young women about their bodies.

(Photo by Jessica Zakis.)

“I'm a feminist because individuals should not be denied their right to something as basely human as their own sexuality.”

- Courtney Linder

“I'm a feminist because I refuse to be complacent with the white patriarchy.”

- Maddie O'Connell

(Continued) Miley Cyrus is Not the Feminist Icon You're Looking For

They lose their identity as individuals in this manner, becoming just a large butt for Cyrus to grab. Their blackness is diminished to the significance of an accessory or a raunchy dance move--a prop for her gain. In her attempt to create her own identity, a far cry from the start of her career, she is leaving a wreck behind her.

The interesting part of this act Miley keeps perpetrating is that she denounces the stigma associated with these actions. She fights back saying that she isn't "ratchet" and that it's just her performing. In other words, it's just a persona.

She perpetrates stereotypes forced on black women, but then removes the associated stigma from her life--a luxury black women do not have. Cyrus has not been forced to face the barriers of race and discrimination that black women have to face on a daily basis. She has created an identity around harmful stereotypes about the black community, but she is able to shrug off the stigmas associated with such an identity whenever they become inconvenient.

Feminist Jacqui Germain writes, "As a woman of color, I'm still defending my right to actually be considered a body at all and not decoration. Expressing your sexuality at my expense isn't okay. You don't get to claim sexual freedom while simultaneously perpetuating the oppression of another body. When you feel the need to express your sexuality by turning my body into an accessory, the black feminist in me—two identities which I refuse to separate—can't have your back anymore."

It is perfectly fine and acceptable for Miley Cyrus to step away from her "good girl" past and embrace an edgier, sexier, raunchier, and more mature musical career, but her new identity is infused with racism that backfires onto the black community and furthers harmful stereotypes.

Many of her critics would claim her self-sexualization is a problem, but Cyrus has matured and owns her body in a way that makes her happy and comfortable. For that, I applaud her.

The real destruction wrought from Miley's performances lies in black communities across the country. When the dust clears and the rubble is removed, it's the same old racism.

(Continued) Miley Cyrus and the Cult of Modesty

Women are objectified daily and constituted to believe that their success is intrinsically tied to their physical appearance, and it is vital to remain aware of the way women are expected to behave, lest we forget the virgin-whore dichotomy.

Keeping this in mind, it is also critical to recognize the role of agency in these questions and to resist falling into a damning double standard.

Problems of slut-shaming are so pervasive, and so difficult to combat, that, I believe, the most effective strategy is to maintain a zero-tolerance policy, and that means acknowledging a woman's right to be provocative while fighting the broader issue

Why fight the celebrity when the producer and the industry are ripe for the picking? To say that Miley should perform more modestly because she is doing nothing but giving the industry what it wants is no different than telling women to dress more modestly at night.

Despite her faults, Miley has undoubtedly become a catalyst for a new wave of slut-shaming. Is she the best example, or, as she has called herself, "a feminist icon"? I will admit, the answer is probably no, but when it comes to standing opposed to the cult of modesty in her name, to put it simply, we can't stop.



Miley Cyrus's Bangerz tour began Feb. 14, 2014 in Vancouver, Canada.
(Photo by VIBE.)

Pro-Woman Pitt Clubs

By Maddie O'Connell

Where can we find feminism on campus? Slutciety is not the only organization who engages the student body with female-friendly missions.

The **Campus Women's Organization (CWO)** holds weekly meetings at 8:45p.m. on Tuesdays in 635 WPU. CWO is the go-to on-campus resource for both education and empowerment in the realm of feminism, sex, and gender. CWO builds an incredibly powerful influence on campus through events like Take Back the Night and "The Vagina Monologues". If anything, stop by for some free condoms. Find CWO on their Facebook open group or @PittCWO on Twitter.

She's the First*{Pitt} is our school's chapter of a not-for-profit organization that sponsors the education of first-generation female students in developing areas. STF*{Pitt} currently sponsors four students from around the world: Renuka from India, Justine from Uganda, Samita from Nepal, and Tsion from Ethiopia. Each month, this organization holds fundraisers on campus to continue sending these four incredibly deserving

students to school. Stay updated with STF*{Pitt} through their Facebook fan page or on Twitter (@stf_pitt).

Do you stand with Planned Parenthood? **Vox: Voices for Planned Parenthood** at the University of Pittsburgh promotes a pro-choice ideology on campus. Just recently, Vox sponsored a talk with Laci Green, a sex-positive feminist and popular YouTuber who opens a healthy online conversation about sex and reproductive rights. Find this organization on Facebook, or contact them through email at pitt.vox@gmail.com. (Author's note: a Planned Parenthood Health Center is located at 933 Liberty Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh.)

Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG) is a national organization whose women-only Pitt chapter mentors elementary school-aged girls; through "gender-specific programming," Pitt's SWSG leaders meet the demand for female leadership positions while providing younger girls in the Pittsburgh area with the education and resources to someday do the same. Visit their website for more information about the Pitt chapter as well as the organization as a whole: <http://swsg.org/locations/cities/pittsburgh/>

Stolen Name

By Nyri Bakkalian

In 1592, Japanese military forces crossed the Tsushima Strait and landed on the Korean coast at Pusan, to execute the Japanese suzerain Toyotomi Hideyoshi's campaign of conquest on the Asian continent. The Korean people did not stand idly by, as was the case with one courageous woman who fearlessly faced Japanese soldiers.

They came in ships. Teeming masses of thousands, armed and ready to fight, across the straits to land at Pusan. Fresh out of a century of civil war, the might of a newly, mostly, unified Japan under the suzerain Toyotomi Hideyoshi crossed over in 1592 into Korea, to march north and face the Ming Dynasty's might. Hideyoshi may have considered himself a reasonable man; after all, he'd written the Korean king and asked to receive assurances of safe passage for his forces. Perhaps not surprisingly to us today, the king flatly refused.

It was these men whom the woman on horseback outside Pusan faced, one day in the middle of the 1590s. She didn't know their names, I'd like to think she couldn't have cared less. They were invaders, pure and simple. She breached their perimeter and fought, long and hard, one woman in a camp of what might have been as many as three thousand.

Had history been merciful, perhaps she would've been let go, or even faced in combat like her male counterparts. But instead, history was cruel.

Yamaoka Shigenaga, the man who unhorsed her, was surprised to find she was a woman. He's remembered as a teetotaler and a vassal to Date Masamune, the overlord of the men encamped there.

Eager to take home a spoil of war less dead than the severed limbs sent by some of his comrades, Yamaoka didn't want to kill her. So, she was taken to Sendai, in northern Japan, where Yamaoka made her his wife; she would, in time, bear him at least one child.

It is safe to assume that she was given a new name, and that she died, somewhere and somewhen, in her captor-turned-husband's land.

Whatever the story, here the trail of evidence slams to a halt.

Four centuries later, I sit in a coffee shop half a world away and stare at the lines on the page, the last remnant of the woman who broke Lord Date's perimeter in Pusan.

Her name--both her original name and the one she might have been given in Japan--has altogether been forgotten. Had I not happened upon mention of Yamaoka, I would've missed the woman entirely. To me, Sendai was a sacred place, one where I reclaimed my spirituality and started the long journey to living in truth and wholeness. But to her, it was distant exile, a verdant prison in an alien land.

What was your name? I want to ask her, this courageous woman from so long ago. Who did you lose? Where is your grave? I want to come to see it, when next I return to Sendai.

History was cruel to her: stealing her name, burying her story, and distilling this woman to ink on a page otherwise devoted to the man who stole her away.

But even so, I want to say to her, to the woman who faced those thousands in Pusan, and to all the countless others like her, whom time has erased, one simple message.

I will remember you.

Fun Internet Tidbits

Man: Hello, I'd like to report a mugging.

Officer: A mugging, eh? Where did it take place?

Man: I was walking by 21st and Dundritch Street and a man pulled out a gun and said, "Give me all your money."

Officer: And did you?

Man: Yes, I co-operated.

Officer: So you willingly gave the man your money without fighting back, calling for help or trying to escape?

Man: Well, yes, but I was terrified. I thought he was going to kill me!

Officer: Mmm. But you did co-operate with him. And I've been informed that you're quite a philanthropist, too.

Man: I give to charity, yes.

Officer: So you like to give money away. You make a habit of giving money away.

Man: What does that have to do with this situation?

Officer: You knowingly walked down Dundritch Street in your suit when everyone knows you like to give away money, and then you didn't fight back. It sounds like you gave money to someone, but now you're having after-donation regret. Tell me, do you really want to ruin his life because of your mistake?

Man: This is ridiculous!

Officer: This is a rape analogy. This is what women face every single day when they try to bring their rapists to justice.

Man: Fuck the patriarchy.

Officer: Word.

Rape culture, the societal attitude that rape is normal and provoked by the victims, is very real.

(Photo by Tumblr or somewhere else deep within the shadows of the interwebs.)

The Virginity Myth

By Amanda Chan

Quirky and selfless Shoshanna Shapiro, with glamorous side buns and a baguette-shaped purse, on Lena Dunham's HBO show "Girls," revealed her "biggest baggage" was her virginity. Her sexual escapades were a twisted turn of events; a make-out partner rejects her after she embarrassedly revealed her sexual inexperience, and later, she has sex with a man over ten years her senior, who becomes her boyfriend. But afterwards, she confesses she "misses her hymen."

When she does have sex for the first time, Shosh feels like she lost a part of herself—as expressed by her hymen-themed nostalgia.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, about 25 percent of 18- and 19-year-olds have not had sexual contact with others, meaning a significant portion of the population of any college campus is "virginal."

"Only 37 percent of women report bleeding during first-time sexual intercourse, many of the women reporting they don't even remember."

The media is infamous for its representation of virgins experiencing sex complete with horrifyingly unrealistic expectations for America's youth, but why then, do so many myths about virginity still pervade the public?

The hymen doesn't pop—it's simply slightly stretched out with penile penetration, if it already hasn't been stretched out by exercise or another strenuous activity.

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Continued The Virginity Myth

Only 37 percent of women report bleeding during first-time sexual intercourse, many of the women reporting they don't even remember.

But the biggest myth about losing one's virginity is implied in the phrase itself—what exactly are women “losing”? Some say women lose their innocence and purity, as if their character is directly tied to the choices they have made about their vagina.

Indeed, many feminist communities have rejected the phrase, substituting instead the phrase “sexual debut,” a much more positive connotation that conveys an exciting time of exploring sexuality, not a sacrificial rite of passage.

There is no medical definition of “virginity.” None. The definition of “virginity” vastly differs from person to person. What if it was only two thrusts? What if she had anal sex 13 times but no vaginal sex? What if she fellated 26 men and accepted three orgasms' worth of finger-banging? Even more controversial, what if she only has lesbian sex, never getting penetrated by a man? A bunch of vibrating dildos could break a girl's hymen, but then again, so could an intense bicycle ride.

By defining women as “virgins,” the public has placed an unhealthy emphasis upon women's “purity.” America is obsessed with women's sex lives, splaying toxic trash such as slut-shaming and defining a women's worth solely on her sexual activity. Thus, “virginity,” with no medical definition—or any definition agreed upon by the public, for that matter—is naturally a myth.

Instead of obsessing over find the perfect candles for that “magical night,” women should focus on exploring their own sexuality--find out what they like, what they don't like, and where they want to proceed next--if they even want to start having sex at all.

Women do not squander their virtue with penile penetration; they gain a better sense of themselves and a healthy relationship with their sex lives.

“What's the difference between venerating women for being fuckable and putting them on a purity pedestal? In both cases, women's worth is contingent upon their ability to please men and to shape their sexual identities around what men want.”

— Jessica Valenti

The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women



The concept of virginity is used to commodify women. Jessica Valenti is the author of “The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women.” The documentary “The Purity Myth” was released in 2011. (Photo by Brandie Rector on Pinterest.)

Choice to Cover up

By Elyssa Johannesen

It's no secret that a large proportion of women around the world are oppressed. Otherwise, we wouldn't need feminist ideology to fight against the wage gap, sexual objectification, or strict gender roles. However, many of the customs that are often interpreted as anti-feminist may not be as sexist as popularly considered. One controversial topic is the supposed subjugation of Muslim women by the hijab, a headscarf worn by 43 percent of American Muslim women. Why, in fact, do Muslim women wear the hijab?

Self-proclaimed Muslim feminist Dina Mujanovic offered her feedback. “I choose how much of myself others can see,” she explained, emphasizing her belief in **choice feminism**, the idea that women should be able to make the choices that are right for them individually, without concern for society, family members, or partners. It emphasizes that women are in control of their own lives and can live outside of the roles that society often tries to box them into.

Every woman should be treated with the same respect, regardless of the size of her waist, the amount of makeup she wears on her face, or in this case, what sort of fabrics she chooses to wrap her body with.

In Islam, this choice is important and empowering to female individuals. Mujanovic expressed that she wore her headscarf out of self-respect. She doesn't hide her body because someone forced her to, but because she wants to highlight features about her besides her physical appearance, such as her strength and intellect.

Ellen Kaczmarek, who converted to Islam during her years as an upperclassman in high school, began wearing the hijab during the summer before she started college. As many people are aware, in some countries, women were and still are forced to wear the hijab, which Kaczmarek agrees is “oppressive.” In Afghanistan, the Taliban prohibited women from being out in public without covering up. On the other side of the spectrum, however, in France, students attending public school are prohibited from wearing the hijab.

Kaczmarek points out that western countries constantly “criticize Islamic governments that require women to wear more clothes” but then “ban women in their country from wearing more clothes.” Rather than allowing women to wear what they decide for themselves, the different governments “allow their own ideology to dictate what women are allowed to wear, which is equally oppressive.”

Hijab-wearing women face discrimination all the time for what they wear even in the United States. Mujanovic has experienced uncomfortable staring accompanied by invasive questions from strangers on the bus on multiple occasions, and she's not the only one.

According to a 2012 survey from the Council on American-Islamic Relations based in California, of 471 Muslim students between the ages of 11- and 18-years-old, half reported to have been subject to bullying, with 10 percent having experienced physical violence due to their religion or choice of dress. Even worse, Melanie Trottman of the Wall Street Journal discloses that although Muslims make up less than one percent of the US population, fifteen percent of the reports of religious harassment at work come from Muslim women. Wearing the hijab is a choice of the individual, yet so many people outside of the religion attempt to impose on that birthright.

Muslim women such as Mujanovic and Kaczmarek want the world to know that the choice of the hijab is respectable. Such a choice has little to do with the objectification of women.

Incarcerated by Gender

By Courtney Linder

For some of us, living in this world means a daily battle for establishing freedom of identity, or autonomy, within yourself. You not only cannot control the world you live in, but you are also unable to find a place in this world.

This is the life of a transgender individual in a heteronormative, patriarchal society, that is, a world where heterosexuality and male-female binaries are exclusively acceptable, with little deviation from them.

A recently developed Netflix original series, “Orange is the New Black,” beautifully depicts the struggle a transgender person faces, such as discrimination they face in patriarchal America. Laverne Cox, a transgender woman, plays the role of Sophia, also a transgender woman, who lives in a prison in upstate New York. Sophia has breasts and a vagina that she is not afraid to show off because she “paid a lot of money for it,” as she puts it.

Sex is the biological, physiological assignment of male or female given at birth. It is characterized by having a penis and high levels of testosterone or a vagina and high levels of estrogen.

In contrast to sex, gender is the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes of men and women deemed appropriate by a society.

“In order to free ourselves from oppression of personal autonomy, we need to accept that gender is oppressive in and of itself.”

This more or less is an allocation by society of what is “masculine,” and what is “feminine.”

For example, in the United States, women typically make less money than men and less women work than men. In this way, we can say the workplace is a masculine force. In Vietnam, less women smoke than men, so smoking is a masculine characteristic.

In the United States, women are expected to shave their legs and underarms, but in Europe, it is more common for women to sport hair on their body.

Sex does not vary across regions but clearly gender does. Gender, then, is not set in stone. There is no one correct answer to what is masculine and what is feminine, complicating the assignment of sex and its paralleled gender expectations.

If a person’s sex matches their gender, they are considered “cis-gendered.” It is important that we use the term “cis” rather than “normal” gender because assigning cissexuals as normal alienates transgender people who have a different experience.

Transgender people live through a gender that is different from what they were assigned at birth.

In “Orange is the New Black,” Sophia was born Marcus, a man who married a woman and had a son, forced to live the life of a man. Sophia was a victim of oppression due to the patriarchal standards of gender, expected to be masculine because she was born male.

Oppression in gender is a complicated subject for many to understand because we classically associate oppression with the civil rights activism of the 60’s or the abolishment of American slavery.

What we are neglecting to realize, however, is that oppression need not only be physical and inflicted upon us by a certain group; oppression is any prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control that puts distress or mental pressure on an individual.

It is not just making someone physically uncomfortable; it is having your rights taken away from you.

The right to your own comfort in who you are and establishing your own sense of self is the freedom to personal autonomy.

Transgender people are often denied this right because they do not neatly fall into cis-gendered standards of masculinity and femininity. They complicate the tenets of the patriarchal society we live in, so they often go ignored. It is important to realize, then, that gender is not a binary but a spectrum. Examples of more genders include, but are not limited to:

1. **Androgyne/Androgynous:** a person possessing both female and male gender characteristics. They refer to themselves as a third gender.

2. **Agender/Neutrois:** People who do not identify with any gender may choose this title. Some use surgery or hormones to make their bodies conform to a gender state.

3. **Cis-gender:** essentially, the opposite of transgender. These are people whose gender aligns with their sex.

4. **Trans/Transgender:** a broad category that encompasses people who feel their gender is different from their sex. They may or may not choose to physically transition from their birth sex to their real sex.

5. **Pangender:** similar to androgyny in that they identify with both genders, but unique because the distinction is more fluid. This word literally means “all genders.”

6. **Intersex:** a person with sexual anatomy, organs, or chromosomes that are not entirely male or female.

7. **Gender fluid:** express both masculine and feminine characteristics at different times.

In order to free ourselves from oppression of personal autonomy, we need to accept that gender is oppressive in and of itself. We cannot treat transgender people as an anomaly; we need to accept people for who they truly are, not who they are assigned to be.

In a country built upon a melting-pot culture of different nationalities, we need to extend our diversity to gender, as well. Thankfully, however, series such as “Orange is the New Black” are helping to educate the public on the disservices we do to one another simply by assuming someone is a “he” or a “she.”



Laverne Cox, aside from being an actress, is a prominent trans activist and the first African-American trans woman to star and produce her own television show.
(Photo by HuffingtonPostLive.)

Invisible Women

By Kate Koenig

The 86th annual Academy Awards was a spectacle to behold. Hollywood's sweetheart, Ellen DeGeneres hosted the memorable night.

It is remembered for such victories as enchanting and humble Lupita Nyong'o and her win for Best Supporting Actress in her role as the real-life slave, Patsey in the film "12 Years a Slave" and the cheeky speech delivered by award-winning Actress Cate Blanchett.

In her acceptance speech, Blanchett called out the sexiest tendencies that linger in the filmmaking industry saying, "And thank you to... those of us in the industry who are still foolishly clinging to the idea that female films, with women at the center, are niche experiences. They are not —audiences want to see them and, in fact, they earn money. The world is round, people."

Her comments were met with uproarious applause, fitting into an apparent underlying theme for the night: equality and visibility.



Attendees of the 2013 London LGBT Film Festival hold up signs in support of trans violence victim Islan Nettles.

(Photo by Vimeo.)

Women—in their nominated roles, in their speeches, in their notoriety— appeared to be making waves this year in film and in recognition for their talents. Unfortunately, our society's most vulnerable and underrepresented women were once again rendered invisible by Hollywood.

Jared Leto received his award for Best Supporting Actor for the role of Rayon, a transgender woman who contracted HIV in the 1980's. Many have hailed the movie as a gritty and heartbreaking look into the struggle and stigmas of AIDS patients.

The controversy of this film comes from the director, Jean-Marc Vallée, and his casting of Leto.

Jared Leto is a cisgender male playing the role of a trans woman. He adorns make up and feminine attire as his body wastes away from the deadly and stigmatized virus. His acting was well done, but his casting in and of itself is transphobic and inappropriate.

Trans women today, as well as in Rayon's time, face egregious violence, harassment, and discrimination, something a cisgender male does not face. In 2012, fifty-three percent of all anti-LGBT hate crimes were targeted against trans women. Furthermore, trans women of color bear the brunt of this violence.

The very act of a cis man playing the role of a trans woman—trans face— invalidates trans identity. At its core, it propagates the idea that trans women are not actual women and that they remain their birth gender, reducing identity to genitalia.

The trope of men in drag playing viable and "true" transgender women is offensive and needs to be retired. Jos Truitt writes, "Rewarding a man for his brave portrayal of an 'impossible' trans

woman perpetuates stereotypes about us being men in drag, which also supports a culture of dehumanization and violence."

Wearing make-up and "passing," but still being seen as men often becomes the joke on screen.

"It is a long overdue call for equal trans representation and justice."

For trans women—who face heightened rape, assault, and hate crimes—this stereotype displayed so ignorantly in media could very well be deadly for them on the streets. Their stories barely make headlines when cat-calling or harassment turns into violence, as it did for Islan Nettles.

Islan Nettles, a trans woman of color, was attacked when a group of men realized she was trans. They beat her so severely that she became comatose and died less than a week later. This violent attack happened outside of a Harlem police precinct in 2013.

Originally, the suspects in her case were only charged with misdemeanor assault, but after pressure from trans activists and her family, the charges were upped to homicide. Many trans men and women have criticized the police in New York for a lackluster attitude towards Nettles' murder and similar cases in the state. Justice has yet to be served.

A 2011 survey of 6,000 transgender individuals found that they faced double the unemployment rate, 26% lost their job, and 19% face homelessness.

With cases like Islan Nettles, who was homeless for a time and whose life was tragically cut short, Rayon had the potential to bring these issues to an audience much larger than just the theaters presenting the film. Sadly, the opportunity was besmirched by Leto's casting.

Why Leto was cast over a trans actress in the first place is a result of the transphobic director, Jean-Marc Vallée. When asked in an interview by CBC regarding casting a trans woman for Rayon, Jean-Marc Vallée responded with, "Is there any transgender actor? To my knowledge I don't know one." When prompted by the interviewer that in fact, there are trans actors, Vallée responded with, "Which ones? There's like five, or three, or two. No, I never thought of that. I was looking for an actor to do this." The very casting of the film disregarded the very representation they claimed to perpetuate.

Claims that there aren't any trans actors in Hollywood are ridiculous and incorrect.

A simple Google search would have reaped countless results and possibilities for the role of Rayon from the transgender community. A possibility for the role could have gone to *Orange is the New Black* actress, Laverne Cox, who has received acclaim for her acting. Carmen Carrera, Harmony Santana, and Jamie Clayton are a few other possibilities.

Hollywood must become responsible for accuracy and decency toward the transgender community, likewise lawmakers and law enforcement, must open their arms to equality and justice.

It is a long overdue call for equal trans representation and justice. These areas are where the transgender community is consistently being let down and contribute to the ongoing fear many trans people have for their safety.

The Offer Islam Campaign

By Laila Al-Soulaiman

Beginning in the fall semester of 2014, the University of Pittsburgh will not offer any courses dedicated solely to the study of Islamic thought or history. It is unacceptable that Islam, one of the world's oldest and fastest growing monotheistic religions, comprising 23% of the global population, is nonexistent in a world-class academic institution fostering research and scholarship. The Offer Islam Campaign requests that the University of Pittsburgh offer Islam to that it is fairly represented in the curriculum.

As it stands, four courses have been indefinitely canceled at the University of Pittsburgh. The courses are the Anthropology of Islam, the Sociology of Islam, Introduction to Islamic Civilization, and the Ottoman Empire.

Islam, dating back to 622 AD, is one of the world's three monotheistic religions and the second largest religion in the world with 1.6 billion followers. Based on these statistics alone, it is unacceptable that the University of Pittsburgh has such a large discrepancy in representing a substantial portion of the global population and portrait.

As a leader in international education, the University of Pittsburgh is expected to offer curriculum to prepare informed global citizens that demonstrate and are receptive to multiculturalism. By cancelling these courses the university is not upholding this promise to its students and professors.

The Offer Islam Campaign requests that Islamic courses be offered in the history, anthropology, sociology, and religious studies departments by spring 2015 and two tenured track professors with Islamic history expertise be hired by fall 2015. The University of Pittsburgh community and its supporters request that the curriculum represent its belief in global citizenship, diversity, and equity.

For more information or to get involved with the campaign, please contact offerislam@gmail.com

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