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## [FemmEssay](#)

### The words of Woman.

### [Is Cis A Dis? And other air castles to storm...](#)

My bosom friend, [Nuclear Unicorn](#), and I were having one of our epic discussions about privilege, trans/cis-woman issues, and she brought to my attention a bit of a detonation that had occurred while I wasn't paying attention via [Questioning Transphobia](#), and [TransAdvocate](#).

The reason I didn't hear the explosion is because I am a bisexual ciswoman. I am privileged enough to elect whether I will be in the ditch fighting with transwomen, or whether I'll be over there playing a video game, which is what I was doing when the bomb went off. I point that out not to trivialize the discussion, but to make it clear that as a bi-ciswoman, fighting with transwomen is always optional and I rely upon her to tell me that she's in a ditch so I can hop in with her and fight off the goblin horde. Her personal fight as a transwoman is not an ever-present reality that I live with, and so it is easy for these fights, however nuclear they are, to happen well off of my radar. The bomb I speak of is [this](#):

And one last wading into the deep:

For the record, I find cis- to be offensive. In general, I thought our community (I mean the whole LGBT rainbow here) uses terms that are acceptable to those being described. That is, we use the preferred gender of trans people, we call someone bi if they identify as bi, we don't say tranny, etc.

So why is it okay for (some of) the trans community to call us cis-? If members of the trans community said "stop calling us trans, we find it offensive" would we here at PHB continue to say "trans"? I doubt it very much.

Why the lack of respect in the other direction?

by: [Lane](#) @ [Sun Jun 28, 2009 at 11:55:10 AM CDT](#)

I dare not speak for transgendered people, but I will speak to cisgendered people: Are you fucking kidding me?

What theoretical world have you constructed in your mind where, in some vacuum of a parallel universe, transgendered people are in control of the human rights of cisgendered people? What kind of toying with reality must happen here where transpeople can, by virtue of the words they choose to use, determine [whether you can pee, or fuck, or walk, or talk, or have an I.D., or a job, or a child](#)? Even the most vitriolic hateful screed of a transperson toward a cisperson — even if they said: I fucking hate you fucking *cissy cispeople* — even *that* can only hurt your feelings. That's all the teeth it has, whereas if a cisgendered person says: I fucking hate you fucking tranny transpeople... now *that*... that has teeth. That can mean that they don't get a job, or a house, or the ability to even pee in a public restroom, or live, and

that's not even touching their feelings about it. That's how much power cispeople have over transpeople.

And that's even assuming that a transperson intended the prefix "cis" to mean something bad, which of course it doesn't, but it's your option as a cis-person to choose to even recognize any intention there at all. As a cis-person, you will *never, ever* have to worry about that intention beyond the mere personal hurt feelings you have about that. Transpeople are always, *always* having to be keenly aware of the intentions of cispeople, scrying into our words like fucking tea-leaves to see whether we are going to fuck with their human rights. So to construct this artificial world where all things are theoretically equal, to *erase* that very real oppression that transpeople must live with — whether you are paying attention or not — simply so you can somehow draw a parallel between the momentary twinge of discomfort you might have felt at having a word used to describe you, and the vast yawning abyss of crushing oppression that transpeople deal with, is infantile entitlement at best, and intentionally silencing at worst.

And here's another thing: Most cispeople don't even know what the fuck that word means. By and large, they've never heard of it. It only exists in the vernacular of a very small segment of the progressive movement, and that in itself is informative: That's how de-voiced the transgendered populations are. Their words have not even approached the public consciousness. They are still in the very early stages of building their movement and ciswomen like me can live their whole lives without ever having to worry about what the "cis" part of that means. That's fucking privilege.

To respond to Autumn, who felt the need to placate cis-people:

To begin with, I'm giving up on the words *cissexual* and *cisgender*. I saw these as neutral terms, and now I see these are not. Thank you for your reasoned explanation as to why. And yeah, civil tone matters, and thinking in terms of broad communities matter. I see these as being more and more as important as time goes on.

One more MLK Jr. quote:

Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars... Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

I, for one, want to see the stars through my very real *rose-colored glasses* — \$50, pink-shaded, prescription glasses I actually bought from [Zenni Optical](#) to make that personal point about looking for a brighter, more beautiful world.

--  
 ~~[Autumn](#)~~

by: [Autumn Sandeen](#) @ [Sun Jun 28, 2009 at 12:12:33 PM CDT](#)

Autumn? Really, don't do this. I'm sure you're a sweet person who just wants to avoid conflict, but it's way too early in the trans-movement for a scab whose willing to sell the rest of the movement upriver just to keep the peace with the oppressors. That shit never works. You might get a cookie for it (as you did right afterward), but you will not get your human rights, which are way more important than cookies. Don't let cispeople intimidate you like that. What Lane meant (and [this guy](#), and lots of others), is that they believe in the Law of the Conservation of Human Dignity and transpeople are inconvenient hangers-on holding the gay movement back, and they wish you'd learn your place, which is... who cares? Somewhere else. It is not coincidental that these are men saying this. Any movement for human rights that involves men will always get traction, because it has men in it. Transgendered folks — specifically transwomen — are going to have to tread a lot of fucking ground before you get to the mountaintop, sugarplum. Transwomen are a part of the feminist movement too, and if you do your homework, you'll see that feminism is a fight that has spanned the centuries, and we still ain't gone over

the mountain top. Don't give in when you are handed your hat like that. The trans-movement is too young to start making Faustian bargains with the oppressors in exchange for cookies — which is exactly what turning over your language to their arbitration is, because all they'll do with it is what oppressors have done forever, which is: silence you.

But let me break it down even further for you, in case that's too abstract:

Nuclear Unicorn and I have come to the table of friendship together because 1) we like each other, and 2) we recognize that we are stronger in our struggles together than apart. I am so grateful everyday that I can pick up the phone and call her and we get each other. I don't have to explain to her what time it is. But here's the thing: I have a loaded gun that the Patriarchy has given me. I am a cis-person; it was issued to me at birth. That gun sits on the table between us. It is a gun that, if I ever chose to use it, could totally destroy her life, or at least injure her grievously. It is a gun that I will always have forever, even if we leave the table of friendship. If, 20 years from now, Nuclear Unicorn and I have long since parted ways and, say, she goes on to become some famous author and chooses to not be out about her transition, I could cock and fire at her with a few strategic phone calls... or just casual careless babbling to people I don't know well. There is nothing that will change that until society chooses to take the bullets out of that gun by giving Nuclear Unicorn her full human rights and social dignity, so that if I decided to pick it up and fire it at her, it will have no bullets in it, and I will look just as stupid and offensively bigoted as KKK members seem to us today.

Society must take away my gun. It should not be on the table between us. That I would never use it is totally irrelevant. That Nuclear Unicorn has chosen to trust me not to reach for it, or threaten to reach for it in order to compel her to do something against her will, is a beautiful thing and it is humbling to me that she does trust me so implicitly. But, that's not the fucking point. No one should ever have to trust someone like that, because no one should have the fucking gun to begin with. I may not want it, but I can't get rid of it. I can't just say, "there is no gun", because there *is*. It's right fucking there between us on the table and we both know that. It is a constant reminder of how much privilege I have over her, and while I might find the gun disgusting and may work with her against it's issuance to me, I will never have as much motivation as she does.

I understand this because I have plenty of guns on the tables of friendship that I have with men. It happens all the time when a woman is financially disadvantaged and relies upon the largess of a privileged man to help support her and her children. That's a fucking big-ass gun, and I know how it feels to try to love someone who has it and struggle with trusting them — a trust you should never have to have, because that's fucked up. I trust you not to shoot me? What? Why is it your choice?

And the truth is, people use those guns to coerce the oppressed all the time. Sometimes just having the gun-Owner talk about it, just reminding the oppressed person that the gun is on the table, the act of speculating about the caliber of it or how many bullets are in it, or whether maybe it's not there at all, or whether maybe it should be there because without it the other person would steal it and use it against them, is enough to fill them with anxiety and make them react as any sane person with a gun pointed at them would act. They get angry. They get depressed. They feel threatened and start questioning whether you really do see them as a human being. They start wondering if they made a mistake in knowing you. They start calculating what they will do if you decide to whimsically fire it at them while you're waving it around obliviously.

Cispeople do not have a gun pointed at them from transpeople. While this doesn't mean that a given transperson's intentions might not be hateful — hey, there are all kinds of people — it does mean that pretending as though the gun is in their hands, acting as if they have the ability to shoot you when you *know* damned well that it's the other way around, is incredibly wrong. It is the beginnings of a rationalization that goes like this: If transpeople have more human rights and dignity, it must come at the cost of my own, therefore I will protect my own privilege in order to ensure that they never have this gun, because I'm sure that if they had it, they'd shoot me right in the face.

The point is not to give the gun over to the oppressed person — and it isn't as though that could ever happen in any universe that doesn't exist in your own head, and every transperson knows that, just like women know that we'll never have a matriarchy — the point is to **get rid of the guns**. The prefix “cis” is one tiny step in the epically difficult process of removing the bullets from the cisprivileged gun. It is not being loaded into their own gun — they don't have one! — it is being thrown away in the hopes that maybe one day we can all sit at the table together and enjoy our relationships without the unspoken threats sitting between us.

That's something that I hope I live to see happen, because I would love it if Nuclear Unicorn could rest easy in the knowledge that she is free to be at the table with me or not, and that the only consequence of any of her actions or mine would be the kind of offense that [Lane](#) is talking about. Would that hurt feelings were the worst thing that she ever had to think about. Until we are all humans together with no label having any context that can result in oppression, I will gladly accept ciswoman as my label, and always think of Nuclear Unicorn as a woman, a human, like me.

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on August 13, 2009 at 12:16 pm [Leave a Comment](#)

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42 Comments

1.

On August 13, 2009 at 12:50 pm Sophia Marsden Said:

Man... sometimes I stumble across the strangest things on the internet. Sometimes I forget there are whole other worlds out there than the one I generally (purposefully) limit myself to.

\*

On August 13, 2009 at 1:11 pm Woman Said:

It's good for you.

2.

On August 13, 2009 at 3:25 pm recursiveparadox Said:

All I can really say is:

Thank you. If only other cis folk had that realization. Hell if only anyone with privilege had that realization, we wouldn't have the problems we do now in society.

It sucks that it's so rare that I feel like thanking you emphatically, but thank you nevertheless.

I hope you don't mind me linking you on twitter and linking your blog in my own post on the word cis.

\*

On August 13, 2009 at 4:28 pm Woman Said:

Of course I don't mind if you link. And no, please don't thank me for this teensy act of owning up to privilege. But I am glad if it helped. :)

3.

On August 13, 2009 at 6:09 pm Quinnae Moongazer Said:

Very well said, dear, and I'll be writing my own take in the coming day. I know I said I'd shy away from it 'just in case' but to the Ninth Hell with that. That's what those who would silence us want.

Society only ever works because we want what society does, and oppression works because sometimes we elect to be silenced out of fear. Justifiable fear, mayhaps, but I won't elect silence this time and I'll say my piece.

I will say, as ever, that in your long journey you've gotten to a point where you quintessentially Get It in regards to us, and I've little doubt it's also because you discovered the gem of wisdom that tells you all these issues between various oppressed classes are eerily related. The same machinations used to keep down women as a whole press down on trans women.

If more people realised that- if people like Lane understood that his own fight for equality was often held hostage by the same sorts of thinking he indulges in- we'd all move forward a lot faster.

4.

On August 13, 2009 at 7:57 pm The City of Cis « The Nuclear Unicorn Said:

[...] is, of course, a privileged way of thinking. So, what do I want? Well, I'll let Femmessay explicate: "The point is not to give the gun over to the oppressed person — and it isn't as [...]"

5.

On August 14, 2009 at 1:26 am Julian Morrison Said:

Cis isn't offensive. It's a chemistry term for "on the same side" and opposed to the chemistry term trans, "on opposite sides". Its use for people is a non-insulting metaphor and a pun extending from the pre-existing use of "trans". So basically, anyone getting het up about it is demanding to own the unlabeled default. They don't want to be treated equally to trans people, they want to be the "normal" ones. Well at that point, there's nothing more to say except "no".

6.

On August 14, 2009 at 2:12 am hardcorps80204 Said:

This was EPIC. I wish—and I know I'm not alone—that more folks got this. I was so pissed at that guy on PHB; it was a total crock of shit but obviously he didn't care. He just wanted to force his will on the transfolk. I'm FTM & \*I\* call a cis a cis. Untill there's no danger in being trans, there will be cis.

7.

On August 14, 2009 at 4:34 am unusualmusic Said:

Thanks you for this post. Your analogy was especially sharp and crystallized the problem very well for me.

8.

On August 14, 2009 at 5:28 am Ruth Moss Said:

\*applause\*

Well fucking said, and it sure needed to be said!

9.

On August 14, 2009 at 7:53 am maevele Said:

people need to read this

10.

On August 14, 2009 at 11:26 am Vicki Said:

Roz sent me over here, and I just want to add, as another bisexual ciswoman: "cis" is not offensive. It's *useful*. It's much easier for me to say, in contexts where this comes up, that I'm a ciswoman or just cis than to say "I'm not transgendered, and—"

The unmarked state is a place of privilege, yes. But as long as a distinction matters, having labels for all the pieces is helpful for people who want to think, and talk, about what's going on.

11.

On August 14, 2009 at 11:29 am Oliver Said:

“It is not coincidental that these are men saying this. Any movement for human rights that involves men will always get traction, because it has men in it.

Wow. I’m trans, I’m male and I found that statement pretty appalling.

Most of the more damaging instances of transphobia I’ve ever encountered have been from women.

‘what a surprise, its coming from a man’ sentiments are ludicrous. Open your eyes for pity’s sakes. The way that queer women fetishise transmen and exclude transwomen alone should have set off your bullshit detector.

Transphobia is an equal opportunities game, with cisgendered people of both genders equally to blame.

Keep your random male sentiments to at least semi relevance if you’re going to talk about transissues, please. There are males whose place in the movement have far more legitimacy than yours, and someone along the lines will pull you on it.

\*

On August 14, 2009 at 1:46 pm Woman Said:

I stand by what I said, though that does not invalidate your own observations.

Perhaps to put a finer point on what I was thinking as I wrote it — which, of course, as it is coming from a cisperson is only worth as much salt as you want to weight here — is that transmen belong in the feminist movement, too. And I’ll tell you why I think that: Even as a transman, your birth genitals gendered you female in this society, and you experienced that particular oppression up until you transitioned and could, as they say, “pass”. I can only imagine that you are keenly aware of how illegitimate your masculine gender would be considered by the cis-populations as a whole in the Patriarchy, especially by cismen. After all, it isn’t ciswomen who murder transmen.

It is NOT coincidental that cismales were the ones whose opinions carried the most currency in this upset, precisely because they ARE \*cis\*men. The feminist movement is germane to transmen, at least as much as the LGBT movement, precisely because we challenge the kind of cismale dominion that allows those cismen to have that kind of currency.

This isn’t to say that ciswomen do not also mete out damaging statements — I went into detail about my own ability to harm, so I obviously acknowledge that — but it doesn’t have near the clout of a cisman’s, which is why those men were the ones cited. Their opinions were considered more authoritative and definitive.

And if you really think that what I said about human rights movements involving cismen getting more traction is ludicrous, I’d ask you to look at the feminist movement and tell me why, even though we’ve been at it for the entire history of this country since its founding (and European feminists were at it even longer), the articles written in *The Revolution*, which was published by Susan B. Anthony (and I have available here on this site) are still germane to the same struggles women go through today.

The gay movement gains traction because gay cismen have a lot of positions of serious political and socio-economic power, because they are cismen. Perhaps transmen may enjoy a slight edge over transwomen in the race up the human rights ladder, but I think that the equipment you were born with has a lot to do with why these gay cismen treat transpeople like red-headed step-children, and it's even worse, in my observation, for transwomen who become the target of all that misogyny I experience x 1000.

I wish there was more involvement in the feminist movement from transpeople because I think you all have so much to teach cisfeminists about gender issues, and I blame ciswomen 100% for the fact that you don't identify as readily with feminism as you do with the LGBT movement. So don't think I'm blaming men here for all the ills of transpeople. But I do blame the Patriarchy for the fact that movements that involve anyone who has ever or will ever be identified as female (whether that identification is correct or not) do not gain the ground that they ought to.

But by all means, feel free to measure my legitimacy in your movement however you think is best.

EDIT: I apologize for my hamhandedness and needing to edit this comment twice to make sure that I'd put in all the appropriate cis-'s and trans's, to keep what I was saying clear. I am unpracticed in writing about trans/cis issues and I am still getting used to remembering to use those prefixes consistently where they are relevant to keep my meaning clear as I foray in my attempt at solidarity. All I can say is: Privilege has I, but I'm trying.

0

On August 14, 2009 at 9:47 pm Caoimhe Ora Snow Said:

Speaking of solidarity and "all the appropriate cis-'s and trans's" and "getting used to remembering to use those prefixes consistently" –

Can I request that you consider not using them as prefixes but as adjectives instead?

"Trans man" instead of "transman," "trans people" instead of "transpeople" and so on.

Look carefully at the comments on this thread. The trans people are generally using trans (and cis) as adjectives, while you're making them part of a compound noun.

This is subtle, but it is still important — it is a minor dehumanizing effect, even if you use "cisman" or "ciswoman" in parallel, in that it implies an essential connectedness through the compound word that isn't implied in the use as an adjective.

Thanks.

12.

On August 14, 2009 at 2:09 pm Oliver Said:

That gun that you said you wouldn't wave around?

When you start telling a transguy what he must or mustn't have experienced and that men are worse culprits than women of transphobia? When you start bringing up the contents of other people's pants and other people's bodies uninvited?

Well honey, you just failed on that score.

The reason that I identify with the LGBT movement rather than feminism... I hate to break it to you but it isn't because ciswomen are so mean and have alienated me from my rightful place... its because people are drawn to causes that effect them, and the issues that affect me are primarily because I'm a man who likes dick, and secondarily because I'm trans.

When I was a kid the fact that girls weren't allowed to try out for the football team didn't bother me. The fact that boys like me weren't allowed to did.

There's a hell of a lot of transguys who don't give a shit how women are treated as long as they aren't being included in that. I'm not actually one of them, but the fact that that is taken for granted as a factor of my being trans really makes me wonder if I should be.

I hate how I get given an honorary cookie from feminists because I should 'get' it.

I hate that lesbians think that transguys are some sort of safe version of manhood.

I hate that its got to the stage where I wonder if the only way to be treated as a real man by feminists is to slip somebody rohypnol, or for their to be a really high profile transguy off murdering prostitutes somewhere.

\*

On August 14, 2009 at 2:25 pm Woman Said:

Well, if you don't think feminism has anything to teach you because you're a guy, then by all means, fuck off.

o

On August 14, 2009 at 3:11 pm Rachel K Said:

I enjoyed this blog post, and I'm really very disappointed to scroll down here to the comments thread and see this. The point you're missing here is that telling a trans man what his experience is and how he should interpret it based on nothing more than what you assume his "birth genitals" must have been IS ITSELF AN EXPRESSION OF CIS PRIVILEGE.

Not to mention that it's also the perpetuation of a meme that is frequently used in the opposite direction to bar trans women from women's/lesbian/feminist events ("Womyn-born-womyn only").

o

On August 14, 2009 at 3:22 pm Oliver Said:

That wasn't at all the point that I was trying to make, the point is, if anything the opposite; that feminism has a lot to teach me BECAUSE I am a guy... there are things that I don't get it neccesarly intuitively.

I thank the friends, the exgirlfriend, the mother who called me out when I was full of shit, who had the patience to explain things to me...

My point is that these things were opportunities, or choices... I didn't get an automatic hall pass into feminism by virtue of having been born trans, which is a sentiment that is in itself transphobic.

I recognise that I'm an ally, it isn't really my struggle, and I'm cool with that. Expressing that isn't the same as saying that I don't really care.

o

On August 14, 2009 at 3:30 pm M.E. Said:

Ok ... that's *\*not\** what he said.

(Side note: Oliver, I don't want to speak *for you*; what follows is an explanation of what I was thinking as I read your post, which hopefully is somewhat related to your intent in posting it. If it's not, a clue-by-four please?)

So, yeah. Back to our illustrious hostess. :c)

I'm sure you've read essays/comments linking the behavior of any given badass trans woman to her transness, usually via the detested "residual male privilege" argument. It's the one that goes, roughly, "because the world perceived you as male for so long, you understand viscerally what it is to be male, and thus in some fundamental way you're not like other [real, cis] women." I think (I hope!) that we all realize here that those arguments are pernicious and insulting.

The problem is "trans men are inherently better than cis men," though it sounds like a compliment, is cut out of similar cloth. The argument runs, more or less, on the assumption that, having been perceived as a girl or woman for some formative period, a trans man is *fundamentally a different type of man* from "real" men, simply by virtue of his transness. From a feminist perspective, being called "better than other men" seems like a good thing, but what it boils down to is "not really a man."

There are, of course, other ways to talk about commonalities between and among trans men, trans women, feminists, etc. You point out yourself, in the comment that this is a reply to, that feminism has things to teach *every* guy. Furthermore, there is (I believe) a place within feminism for any man who is willing to be there, and I neither need nor want to know what was between his legs when the doctor first slapped his bottom.

Trans men and women also have in common a social experience of transness; like a lot of other categories, this may be a bigger or smaller part of any individual person's identity, and their desire to be considered The Trans Person Who Is Just Like Other Trans People will obviously vary. (A given person's *ability* to avoid being thought of immediately, always, and only as trans *\*also\** varies, of course; but part of getting the gun off the table, I think, is making it an option for those who want it.) So every trans person has in common, regardless of their gender, that they are at least potentially interested in trans people not looking down the barrel of the privilege-gun. (I'm sorry. I'm killing your awesome metaphor and I don't know how to stop...)

And yes, I do think that, if we're playing the "who's got the most at stake in the patriarchy?" game, cis men are going to come out on top – *not* because trans men's childhoods make them inherently more capable of seeing the feminist side of things, but because as long as there's anyone invested in the idea that a trans person's childhood makes them an inherently separate class of gendered person, that class of person will be ranked below cis men. Which is a

pretty sweet place for cis men to be (if you're not into too much self-reflection), and one that many cis men will unsurprisingly fight pretty hard to remain in.

Does any of this make sense?

13.

On August 14, 2009 at 2:46 pm M.E. Said:

*Society must take away my gun. It should not be on the table between us. That I would never use it is totally irrelevant.*

Oh, \*hell\* yes. Best analogy for privilege I've read in a while.

14.

On August 14, 2009 at 4:06 pm recursiveparadox Said:

@Olivier: To be entirely honest, there are things cismales can learn from feminism too. So to say, "hey, I'm a guy and I have nothing I can learn from feminism" or "hey, I'm a guy and feminism is of no benefit to me" is just pretty ignorant whether you're cis or trans. There are elements of the patriarchy that are largely pretty harmful to men too, so unless you are 100% happy in the most stereotypical position in male society (which is basically the womanizing asshole position) it does have something (however minor) to offer. At the very least it can educate you on how to avoid being a part of patriarchal oppression due to your male privilege. Which I would say is worth it, if only to avoid the irony of going from oppressed (trans) to oppressor (patriarchy enabling/operating guy).

@Woman: That being said, he is right about a /lot/ of things. Namely that a transperson's experiences really aren't easily compared to a cisperson's experiences, even if the behavior and things they were exposed to is (externally) exactly the same. That trans lens (caused by dysphoria, identity and self concept) adjusts things, brings up entirely different reasons for being upset with certain actions or a lack of upset with other actions a cis person who is oppressed for other reasons would find upsetting. A trans guy is not any more likely than a cis guy to have women's rights and interests at heart because of that lens of experience. And considering how many misogynistic asshole trans guys I know, I'm inclined to express a high level of doubt to any person who tells me that a trans guy is more likely to respect us.

While I certainly view my experiences before transition as male privilege, I'm certainly not typical, with my more neutralized self conception and just a very basic bodily dysphoria. I know quite a few other trans women who would disagree heavily on whether they experienced male privilege before transition, primarily because the sheer oppositional tension between their identity and the way they were treated were so strong as to turn those privileges into just another dysphoria inducing element of suffering.

Dysphoria really does adjust a lot of things you would take for granted as positive or negative in the social environment. It's really important to remember that.

((@Olivier: Please correct if I rephrased your points incorrectly in my statements above, thanks))

\*

On August 14, 2009 at 4:38 pm recursiveparadox Said:

Okay, I misunderstood you, Olivier. Just ignore that part where I said that you do have things to learn from feminism as though you said you didn't. \*nodnod\*

15.

On August 14, 2009 at 4:34 pm Oliver Said:

Re: M.E

No smacking with clue by fours required, you've pretty much captured it. :)

recursiveparadox: likewise, no real disagreement with what you've said, and yes, I think that devaluing of any attributes based on their assumed femininity and how that equates to inferiority has a huge impact on everybody, not just women... but I hate the assumption that this is something that I'd have an investment in as a man who happens to be trans, rather than as a man who enjoys wearing eyeliner.

Its like assuming that somebody who is black and likes basketball does so because they're black. Occasionally I have the urge to deny any interest in feminism because having it attributed by the fact I'm trans rather than the fact that my mama raised me to think that women were something other than second class citizens.

The thing about privilege is that you can never look at it as a simple hierarchy.

You can't say everybody in x group gets more privilege than y group because nobody only belongs to one group.

Passing and non passing trans people are in two radically different categories of privilege, and I say someone who has been on both sides of that fence. Conventionally gendered people (cis or trans) receive different privilege from non binary gendered people.

Race, class, gender, sexuality and ability all play their parts too.

Does a poor black queer cis man have more privilege than a straight, middle class, stealth, trans women?

I can't answer that, aside from to say 'In what specific circumstance?'

\*

On August 14, 2009 at 6:33 pm recursiveparadox Said:

Yeah, privilege is annoyingly complex. Having experienced the divide between passing and non passing as I transitioned, I can definitely say that I possess a distinct privilege from that. I think the point I was trying to make is not so much that one set of privilege or another is worse than another and more that engaging in oppression is universally bad and engaging in oppression as someone who has experienced oppression is even worse, because we know that marginalization sucks. Sure it's different marginalization, but it still sucks, like all other forms of marginalization.

On the second part: Like you said, it's not good to assume that a trans person is automatically going to have those experiences the same way, as I described using the lens analogy, but it's also a good idea to point out that some trans people have experienced it the same way.

There are some trans guys out there that didn't apply the same lens and actually do get what female oppression is like. And there are some trans girls (like myself) that didn't apply the same lens and actually do comprehend what we experienced before transition as male privilege.

So it isn't inherently offensive, the concept that a trans person could comprehend that stuff in that way. What was offensive was the blanket assumption that any trans person could. What she should have done was to ask you about your experiences first.

That being said... I do have to agree with Woman on your rape joke, it was pretty fucked up and (as a rape victim) it took all my self control not to steamroll your head into the ground for it. And she was well within her rights to tell you to fuck off for that, because really, responding to oppressive privileged comments with oppressive privileged violent comments is a quick way to send your moral highground swimming with the fishies with concrete flippers.

16.

On August 14, 2009 at 5:35 pm Oliver Said:

I'm sorry for making you feel threatened, and I feel genuinely ashamed of myself.

I should explain that part of my frustration goes beyond the fact that there are a lot of women have used my transness to argue that I am some sort of defanged version of a real man, into seeing misogyny and really vile chauvanistic attitudes not only praised but condoned by queer women.

I've experienced a lot of shit for being femme, pre and post transition, and one of the most despicable atmospheres for that nastiness? It wasn't from cismen it was from the butch-femme scene, and it was being perpetrated by butch women and transguys who didn't see any problem with their being there.

Femme identity was based entirely on a person's partner, chauvanism was encouraged, and if a femme didn't like it? Then they were obviously just not a proper femme. And the thing that spared these asshats a good kicking in the crotch? The continuing myth that 'bioguys' were the only one capable of rape and violence and misbehaviour, and the only possible culprits are being with penises.

I go off so badly about these sorts of myths because I know its not just ego bruising...it can be out and out dangerous and enabling.

I get frustrated about the myth that 'this is what real men do' because of the role it has in encouraging that sort of behaviour, glorifying it, and giving it validation, to anybody with aspirations of masculinity, cis or trans, male, female or anywhere else in between.

I don't defend it as something I ever actually do want to be a part of.

\*

On August 14, 2009 at 6:27 pm M.E. Said:

Oh, there are a fair number of our fellow femmes that pull that shit, too. (The "I only date butches-and-trans-guys" femmes, who somehow see that as a coherent category? And the ones who refuse to even think about why calling themselves lesbians while dating

men *might* be awkward and maybe a little disrespectful to their FTM partners? \*bitter grin\*)

\*

On August 15, 2009 at 9:47 am Woman Said:

Thanks for explaining this, Oliver.

Sorry it took me awhile to approve this stuff, I had to go rest. If it puts anything into any kind of context, I had a minor heart attack a few days ago (I have lupus, no healthcare, yay!), and Quinnae has been soldiering on in the fight for healthcare for people like me for a few posts now (go visit her blog and see what I'm saying), because I'm one of those 18,000 people who die every year due to lack of insurance and financial problems (no, I'm not speaking to you from the Other Side, but the powers that be are trying to push me there as fast as possible, and it won't be very much longer at this rate). Quinnae and I have a lot of love for each other, and we talk about these things a lot. I wanted to make a post in solidarity with her. In some ways, she has more privilege than I do, because she is healthy and has financial security for her healthcare, but at the same time, health care issues are important to her, 1) because she's a human who might one day not be as financially secure and healthy and she realizes that it's her fight too because the same forces that keep me from getting care are the same ones that wave around SRS as a scare tactic to frighten the masses away from reform, and 2) because she loves me. The way I saw my post was very similar. Because I am cis, I have more privilege than she does when it comes to gender and the Patriarchy, and I wrote it because 1) I am a human who deals with gender oppression and I fight against sexism and misogyny and I recognize that the same thing that causes that is responsible for anti-trans bigotry, and 2) because I love her.

I was thinking largely of trans women when I wrote what I did. And you know what? You were right, you did get away with saying certain things that I would have moderated right out of existence if we hadn't been talking about trans issues — which, in its own complex way meant that you did get special treatment from this radfem because you are a trans man — primarily because I felt obligated to let it through because I did not know much about trans men issues and I default to letting the oppressed person speak, remembering that lesson from Privilege-Check Bootcamp. But I really didn't know what the right thing was to do there, even though I was clawing at the screen because here at FemmEssay, the cuisine is radical feminism, and no one gets served heaping side-dishes of misogyny.

My instinct is to throw up my hands and say, "Fuck it! We'll never be able to find common ground!" when I read the pile-on of all the anger here that people so rarely get to express to their oppressors, because that door is almost never open, and there are so many things that want to be said in that rare moment of feeling voiced to an oppressor. I've done it myself when a guy tries to show some solidarity with feminism by talking to other guys, fumbles around and fucks up (I wrote a post some while ago that did just that), so I get it. I don't mind being the example here of how not to be helpful, if I haven't been, because I know that in itself can be helpful; maybe somewhere there is a post right now analyzing and deconstructing my fuck ups brilliantly to others.

But look, I'd like to see more intersectionalism, because I think that's the only way we're going to get anywhere with the Patriarchy, which does intentionally and by virtue of its particular cultural standards, set us against each other: for instance, between you and I just now, where I offend you with my privilege gun unwittingly while trying to talk about

how the Patriarchy effects us, and you grab onto your male privilege in turn and fire back because you want me to understand how frustrated you are with the same Patriarchal effect. In a way, we were saying the same thing, but because of the Patriarchy, instead of talking about it, we hurt each other and deepened the gulf between our two movements. Perhaps there is something we can learn about there.

\*

On August 15, 2009 at 10:33 am Woman Said:

And furthermore, so you don't think I completely missed your point: I understand that you were saying that cis men are not the only ones who can hurt women, because it is enabling the myth that trans men are not men, and is dangerous, as well.

I didn't assume that at all.

17.

On August 14, 2009 at 7:52 pm Cedar Said:

So, I didn't have the spoons to read through the male privilege thread, other than the first comment or two; male privilege makes transphobia more effective, it enhances cis/white privilege (and ameliorates trans/POC oppression), but it isn't exactly a requirement for effectiveness or transphobia, and it doesn't necessarily make that person more likely to be transphobic. Male privilege is only one kind of privilege, not necessarily any more or less potent than any other kind. So a trans guy telling a cis woman to not criticize men is totally busted, as is said cis woman telling a trans guy what his experience must have been.

But the main thing I wanted to comment is that while "cis" isn't offensive "cisperson" (and "transperson") is: see Put The Goddamn Space In: Trans(wo)man, Transfeminism, Transmasculine etc. [<http://takesupspace.wordpress.com/2008/10/15/put-the-goddamn-space-in-transwoman-transfeminism-transmasculine-etc-language-politics-1/> ]

\*

On August 15, 2009 at 10:09 am Woman Said:

Done.

18.

On August 14, 2009 at 9:02 pm Caoimhe Ora Snow Said:

FYI, I wrote about this post and included a description of why I found the parts of it critical of Autumn Sandeen to be highly problematic and, yes, cis privileged.

Please note: I am saying this as someone who is quite possibly one of the biggest Autumn Sandeen critics in the LGBT blogosphere. She ain't my friend and her actions have been very wrong, but I do think your cis privilege needs to be called out here in the way you are addressing her.

Autumn Sandeen, for all her faults, knows more about anti-trans bigotry and the types of "Faustian bargains with the oppressors" trans people need to make, than you will ever, ever know.

Reply

19.

On August 15, 2009 at 8:18 am patchworkchimera Said:

Just putting my two cents in, but as both a transman and as a person who was raised in a feminist household by his two feminist parents, I continue to feel that use of overarching negative reinforcements of “cismen=not progressive or feminist” only turns away people that might be open to the feminist cause. The amount of rage I have seen directed at cismen is something that has caused me and many others I know to discard the term feminism altogether and adopt equalitism. Not because we are against female rights or because we do not think that females are not the ones being oppressed, but because we feel that the original goal, the goal of both genders being able to interact equally, has been overshadowed by the pushing away of cismen and to a lesser extent transmen. I know plenty of cismen who not only have progressive views on equality of women but also on LGBT issues. And yes, cismen have a “loaded gun” but when you sit down at a table and slap someone because they have a gun that they aren’t using and can’t get rid of? That’s only going to hurt your cause. Being a transman shouldn’t make it easier or harder for me to be an ally in feminism because even if I was a cisman I would hope that I would be accepted as an ally. However, when you make comments like, “It is not coincidental that these are men saying this. Any movement for human rights that involves men will always get traction, because it has men in it.” I recoil. Your words are hurtful and are meant to be hurtful when you say that. And yes, when you say them you aren’t taking away my rights, or my father’s rights, or my cisman friends’ rights, but you are alienating us. You are pushing us away and telling us that you don’t want to deal with us as allies.

\*

On August 15, 2009 at 10:06 am Woman Said:

You know, it is just as ridiculous for you to say that feminism should be discarded because women hurt your feelings, as it would be for me to discard trans issues because some of the people here hurt mine. Just because you didn’t like my truth, or the truth of any other woman, does not mean that you can then justify continuing to retain your male privilege by dismissing feminism as a movement, which then reinforces the oppression of women. And yes, it is truth that maleness confers authority, and I was speaking in a feminist context with assumption that the readers of this blog understood that, because this is a feminist blog first and foremost.

I do not have to make my words nice when I am responding to men in my space because otherwise you’re going to threaten to not support my rights, to revoke your alliance. That is coercion. That’s basic 101 privilege stuff there, dude.

o

On August 15, 2009 at 4:07 pm patchworkchimera Said:

I never meant to threaten to take away my alliance, but what I am saying is that what you’re doing is making an us and them category and placing men in the them category even when men want to be allies. Don’t assume everything is an attack on your words. I wasn’t trying to lord over you with my privilege, I wasn’t trying to “revoke my support”, I was stating that I feel the feminist movement is at heart about equality and I feel that we should try to treat everyone in it with respect.

Truth is important, but so is respect. Just as it is sexist to generalize all women, it is sexist to generalize all men.

20.

On August 15, 2009 at 3:00 pm Jesse Dangerously Said:

Hi, I was directed to this post by a friend who thinks it is the best thing ever. She has great analysis, and I see what she liked about it (the gun analogy is at least nearly perfect), but I have some qualms.

They go like this!

You ask:

“What theoretical world have you constructed in your mind where, in some vacuum of a parallel universe, transgendered people are in control of the human rights of cis gendered people?”

And the answer is:

A theoretical world where any number of those cis gendered people are women and any number of the trans gendered people can (or could previously) pass as men. That is to say, this world.

It’s specious to prioritize GENDER above SEX as an overriding source of privilege. Privilege is something that society bestows upon groups and individuals, and that doesn’t happen when the determining basis for privilege (or its lack) may be invisible.

Then, over the course of the post, you say these things:

“I dare not speak for transgendered people, ...”

and

“Autumn? Really, don’t do this. I’m sure you’re a sweet person who just wants to avoid conflict, but it’s way too early in the trans-movement for a scab whose willing to sell the rest of the movement upriver just to keep the peace with the oppressors. That shit never works. You might get a cookie for it (as you did right afterward), but you will not get your human rights, which are way more important than cookies.

...

The trans-movement is too young to start making Faustian bargains with the oppressors in exchange for cookies — which is exactly what turning over your language to their arbitration is, because all they’ll do with it is what oppressors have done forever, which is: silence you.”

You called a trans woman a SCAB and patronizingly spoke of COOKIES in response to her stated choice, and you warn that someone ELSE is going to silence her? There were certainly ways to address your reservations with that choice without — I beg your pardon very much — waving that particular gun in her face. I think you should make a firmer decision as to whether you’re going to tell trans people what to do or not, and then abide by it.

also in there:

“Any movement for human rights that involves men will always get traction, because it has men in it. Trans gendered folks — specifically trans women — are going to have to tread a lot of fucking ground before you get to the mountaintop, sugarplum.”

Sugarplum = also a bullet. And going back to my first qualm, it is fantastic to treat a movement for the human rights of trans women (specifically) as though it doesn’t have men (that is to say, beneficiaries of male privilege, whether identified as men or not) in it.

The world that fails to recognize the validity of trans gender is the world that thinks that trans women are men. That means that, in any sense meaningful to whether traction is achieved or not, the movement has men (b's of m.p.) in it.

You came closest to demonstrating an awareness of this in the comments, when you said: "Even as a transman, your birth genitals gendered you female in this society, and you experienced that particular oppression up until you transitioned and could, as they say, "pass"."

But do you recognize that it goes both ways? Not the oppression, but the public identification and where societal privilege winds up for that reason?

For context: I write this as a cis man, and I know that what that means is that my perspective should be afforded as little weight as possible on this matter. But I'm speaking to you, cis to cis, as someone who wants to help tighten up the discourse among allies, and I hope it can be received as such.

Thanks for writing the post in the first place!

21.

On August 15, 2009 at 3:16 pm quinacridones Said:

(For full disclosure I am trans genderqueer who was female-assigned at birth)

*I assumed you were a more informed and enlightened man because you're part of the progressive human rights movement, and I assumed, familiar with the idea of gender-based oppression based on what I also assumed was your experience, which was a poor assumption I realize in retrospect because I don't know your experience.*

It's more than just a poor assumption, your statement about birth genitals and oppression is a fundamental part of trans misogyny. If you continue to fall back on that idea, then you won't get anywhere in fighting cissexism and trans misogyny, instead you'll continue perpetuating it. I'm not cognitively able enough right now to tease through the various layers of stuff going on here, but I want to at least point out:

At least three people, Rachel K, M.E., and RecursiveParadox have talked about how this idea affects trans women, Caoimhe has called your criticism of Autumn Sandeen, and Cedar has also made some points about male privilege, yet you're only talking to the trans men in this conversation and responding to their callouts. You're privileging and centering male voices here and in turn cutting off a necessary discussion about trans misogyny and cissexism that centers women.

\*

On August 15, 2009 at 4:16 pm Woman Said:

I have allowed every comment through my moderation, and within my responses to the male ones because I had the bones of misogyny to pick with them, I included responses to the women who contributed too.

The things that were said by the trans women in this thread I did not argue, let stand and I went and revised my post because of one of the things that Caoimhe said (vis: putting the space in). I have let all of you say your piece. I have spoken less in response, because I am trying to let you all speak. What do you want me to say?

“I get it”? Because I don’t. I don’t get what you mean (EDIT: And here I mean your specific analysis of how I reinforced cissexism and trans misogyny). But I also know that it isn’t your job to educate me. I will assume you are right and try to figure it out later on my own.

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On August 15, 2009 at 4:36 pm M.E. Said:  
*Your comment is awaiting moderation.*

Just to clarify, by the way, I’m a femme-ID’d, [but otherwise] cisgender, queer Arab-American woman, who, for personal reasons as well as a little bit of politics has ended up involved in the trans community as an ally. (It’s really a long story.)

So any in-group credibility should be assigned accordingly, and I do apologize if I allowed it to seem otherwise.

22.

On August 14, 2009 at 3:14 pm Woman Said:

I didn’t miss the point. I let it stand, because it was a good point and didn’t argue it because of that. I acknowledge that in my attempt to articulate the dovetailing between feminism and trans-issues, I fucked up, and I will not edit my comment above so that it shows a good example of how best intentions can get screwed up by privilege.

23.

On August 14, 2009 at 5:06 pm Woman Said:

Thanks to everyone for your patient responses.

And hey, for what it’s worth, after reading this and feeling like we’d gone at cross-purposes in a big ball of mixed experiences, general testiness and privilege, maybe it’s worth something if I say that I get that it was totally wrong of me to try to tell you that I knew what your experiences were (and I should have known better than to blather my Incredibly Salient Point when I’d already had to edit it twice due to my privilege and habit of talking about men in a general non-trans-specific sense vis the Patriarchy, re-reading it and realizing that I’d totally made it sound like cismen are real and transmen are not-real... that was dumb of me.). I was making generalizations and then perfectly rude remarks about genitals, and I really truly am sorry for that. That was totally wrong of me to do that, and Quinnae was really super sweet and patient about explaining to me what was wrong with it when I called and asked her to please be patient with this grasshoppah and help me understand what I did wrong, because frankly, I was too pissed off about your rape threat to rationally examine my privilege, though I knew that you were saying something there that I should get.

What I was not intending — and I regret that my own fumbling around with this topic through my privilege killed what was supposed to be one of my Incredibly Salient Points I am so famous for — is saying that you are somehow a better man because you are trans, which is a side-ways way of saying “Not real”. I assumed you were a more informed and enlightened man because you’re part of the progressive human rights movement, and I assumed, familiar with the idea of gender-based oppression based on what I also assumed was your experience, which was a poor assumption I realize in retrospect because I don’t know your experience. Nor did I mean to say

that I think you're not a real man, though I can totally see how you thought of it that way, and were offended by my presumptuousness and my privileged words use. Again, I am very sorry.

I want more unity of purpose and more cross-talk understanding. I want more PROGRESSIVE MEN (because there are precious few) in the feminist movement, though most of the time they got no use for it. I think that we all suffer under the Patriarchy for very related reasons that all seem to come back to its gender arbitration. But Oliver, if you don't think that it's your struggle too — if you don't see the cross-points where feminism and transgendered oppression meet, that the Patriarchy is very much your problem — then you got the same fucking problem that all privileged men do, and you need to examine that too.

And just for the record, saying that you think you have to date rape a woman to be taken seriously by feminists? That was fucked up, and I do call you on that shit right there because that was threatening. I have been date raped, and I did used to be a prostitute, so how's about you back that shit up a bit, because that was an asshole patriarchal bomb to drop. I get what your point is, and I'm not saying you should have made nicey-nice with me or not used strong words to tell me what's what, but no one comes on my blog and talks about considering raping or murdering women. If what you're looking for is to be treated like you're an asshole misogynist, rather than a sensible progressive man who groks male privilege, then I really meant the fuck off part. You're not an ally if you're saying shit like that, because however offensive my words admittedly were, there was no violence in them, and I don't like being threatened either. You need to own that.

24.

On August 14, 2009 at 9:10 pm Caoimhe Ora Snow Said:

Also, um: Accusing Oliver of making “rape threats” is pretty screwed up. He hasn't done anything of the sort.

25.

On August 15, 2009 at 4:30 pm Woman Said:

You, as a man, do not get to rename the feminist movement or define it. You, as a man, just did lord over me with your privilege. And yes, you as man, just sat here and called reverse sexism on me because I pointed out that male privilege exists, it confers extra authority, and it is why — I believe — that gay cis men were the ones not only feeling vested with enough authority to say that trans people were not invited to the GLBT party, but furthermore try to arbitrate the language, AND, that it was the gay cis men who were cited and responded to, precisely because that authority is recognized by society. That was my point. I said it twice now, and the men here have torched strawmen now twice in both responses by saying that I must just hate men for pointing that out, and then you suggested that man-hating meanie feminists are the reason that guys like you just don't think feminism is cool. I have heard these arguments from men so many times that it's tiring, and I'm done with you now about feminism. You are not even making a good faith effort; you're justifying why you don't have to take it seriously.