

On Violence against Trans People

“Misgendering” is the act of using the incorrect pronouns, making arguments that rely on the idea that a trans person is not what they state they are gender wise, and generally describing a trans person as something other than what they are.

It is often simply expressed by noting that Trans women are women, trans men are men, and that there are those who are neither men nor women, and those who are both men and women, and that when you describe them as something else – for any reason – you are engaging in misgendering.

Misgendering does happen as an accident on occasion – such as when a busy person says sir by default to a trans woman because they haven’t looked at her and are more focused on the task.

But these situations are exceedingly rare and uncommon. And, as a result, misgendering is an act of violence against trans people.

It is an act of violence to call a trans woman male or man, and here’s why:

The First Source

In 2002, the World Health Organization compiled a landmark study of worldwide violence. This was the ***The World Report on Violence and Health.***

Representing a consensus of experts and scientists, peer reviewed multiple times over, and acting as the new foundation of broader support for and understanding of the forces involved in tracking harmful, violent behavior, the report made it clear that there is a far more universal form of violence which is just as deadly as the oft seen and readily recognized brutality.

At this point, the WHO, a part of the medical and legal aspect of the United Nations, representing the vast majority of the nations, and the principle informing body to the other well known aspect of the UN relating to Human and Civil Rights, is not broadly or widely disagreed with by professionals, although often lay people, uninformed or misinformed by such trite and false aphorism such as the “sticks and stones” childhood rhyme, remain unaware of the violence they are engaged in.

That childhood rhyme, as well, is a statement of defiance, an utterance of the bullied to the bully, the oppressed to the oppressor, the victim to the abuser; a statement that they will no longer be hurt by those words because they can no longer be hurt by them — the scars are grown thick and calloused.

The Second Source

Kipling D. Williams is one of the foremost researchers in this area of Ostracism, Stigma, and social isolation, which has been ongoing for many years. Using thoroughly vetted methods, he has noted some startling factors that arise directly out of ostracism itself — with or without verbal derogation or physical assault (that means insults and related microaggressions).

That is, without any sort of physical violence or even the use of slurs, there is violence done by the act of ostracism.

When one is ostracized, physically, the body receives such stimuli – that is, your body does what it does -- in the same way it receives a physical blow. In controlled or uncontrolled situations, the act of ostracism, by itself, is felt by the body in the same way that a physical attack is felt.

The body reacts to them the same, with the physical blow simply involving more effort on the part of the body to heal, while with the nonphysical attack, the healing process takes much, much longer.

“Being excluded is painful because it threatens fundamental human needs, such as belonging and self-esteem,” Williams said. “Again and again research has found that strong, harmful reactions are possible even when ostracized by a stranger or for a short amount of time.”

The messages that trans people are told are often about there being something wrong with them are part of Stigma. They also receive messages about how what they are doing is wrong, or about how they are behaving is wrong, and when those messages are combined with the ones they have received all their lives and internalized – taken into themselves – these message serve to reinforce and often mirror the idea that something is wrong with them.

When trans people reach out initially, those first tentative steps they take only with people they trust in ways that they find almost impossible to do with other people, they ask some variant of the question “what is wrong with me” or they state, bluntly, “there is something wrong and I need to fix it” and they are referring to themselves.

This is the power of ***stigma*** – an unseen mark that connotes the lack of value and unworthiness of a person.

Understanding

The Report describes multiple forms of Violence, and breaks the down into the nature of the violence and the source of that violence.

Two kinds of violence in particular are discussed at length, especially as they affect the lives of people in minority populations. These are *psychological* and ***deprivation/neglect***.

Psychological violence includes and consists of the exclusion – or ostracism – of persons, and the application of stigma and societal efforts to deny them human dignity. So violence is also a core aspect and a major part of denying people their human and civil rights. This includes the violence of ***microaggressions*** (Sue, Derald Wing; Capodilupo, Christina M.; Torino, Gina C.; Bucceri, Jennifer M.; Holder, Aisha M. B.; Nadal, Kevin L.; Esquilin, Marta. Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice. American Psychologist, v62 n4 p271-286 May-Jun 2007), developed out of the work of Dr. Chester Pierce, and further added to later by Mary Rowe.

Microaggressions are a core concept in Critical Race Theory, and were brought into the mainstream of Feminist efforts and are often noted by Radical Feminist scholars such as Dr. Watkins, better known as bell hooks, in their critical race theory lensed approaches to feminism, which is directly oppositional to the sort of Radical Feminism, seen as colonialist, imperialist, white supremacist, and classist.

Deprivation/neglect consists of various forms of interpersonal, institutional, and consistent patterned violence that *does not fundamentally include and consider the existence of trans people*. This is called Ciscentrism, which is the normative pattern and the primary Axis of Oppression that trans people face, just like White Supremacy (racism), Patriarchy, Ableism, and so forth dominate other axes of oppression and are related form that work in tandem to oppress groups of people at a societal level.

The effects of Deprivation and neglect all stem from **the denial of basic human dignity – which is the foundation of Human, civil, and Political rights.**

In this case, the most fundamental of which is recognizing that trans women are women, trans men are men, and as women and men, they are also female and male, since in English (and most other languages) those concepts are linked inextricably and creating separation is actively engaging in hostile action towards trans people. Trans people, as a rule, suffer multiple times higher than statistically normative rates of issues, and *the only group that matches them, within the margin of error*, are the adult survivors of child abuse and neglect.

What are some of the effects of this lifelong deprivation and neglect?

Poor physical health. Several studies have shown a relationship between various forms of household dysfunction (including childhood abuse) and poor health (Flaherty et al., 2006; Felitti, 2002). Adults who experienced abuse or neglect during childhood are more likely to suffer from physical ailments such as allergies, arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, high blood pressure, and ulcers (Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, & Carnes, 2007).

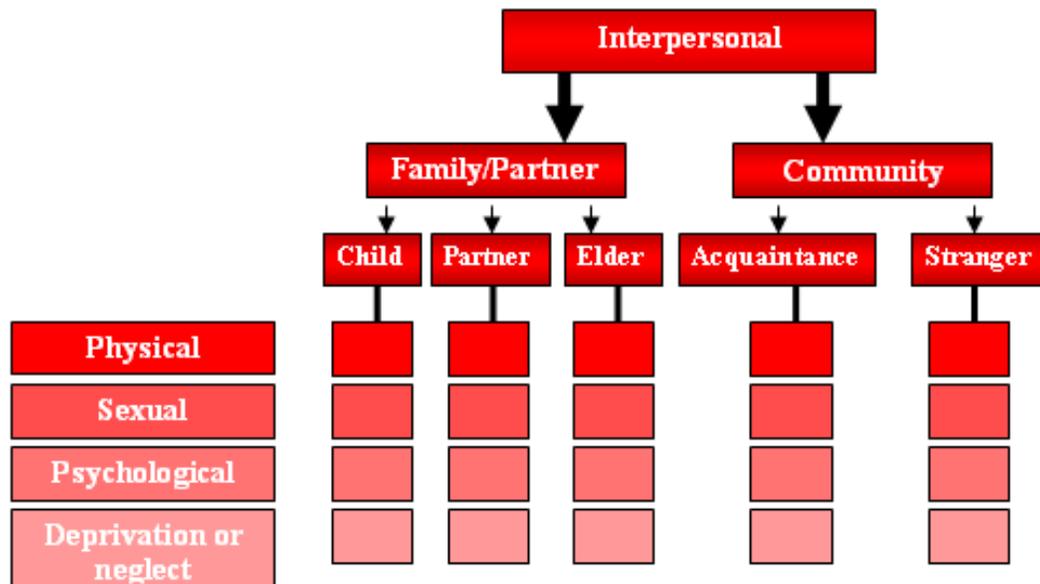
Poor mental and emotional health. In one long-term study, as many as 80 percent of young adults who had been abused met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21. These young adults exhibited many problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts (Silverman, Reinherz, & Giaconia, 1996). Other psychological and emotional conditions associated with abuse and neglect include panic disorder, dissociative disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, anger, posttraumatic stress disorder, and reactive attachment disorder (Teicher, 2000; De Bellis & Thomas, 2003; Springer, Sheridan, Kuo, & Carnes, 2007).

Social difficulties. Children who experience rejection or neglect are more likely to develop antisocial traits as they grow up. Parental neglect is also associated with borderline personality disorders and violent behavior (Schore, 2003).

Juvenile delinquency and adult criminality. According to a National Institute of Justice study, abused and neglected children were 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile, 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for violent and criminal behavior as an adult, and 3.1 times more likely to be arrested for one of many forms of violent crime (juvenile or adult) (English, Widom, & Brandford, 2004).

Alcohol and other drug abuse. Research consistently reflects an increased likelihood that abused and neglected children will smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol, or take illicit drugs during their lifetime (Dube et al., 2001). According to a report from the National Institute on Drug

Abuse, as many as two-thirds of people in drug treatment programs reported being abused as children (Swan, 1998).



Breaking it down

These two forms of violence are then further divided into Interpersonal and Community forms of violence, which then means that violence can be noted in 20 distinct forms by which it can happen.

Interpersonal violence is what happens when a small group of people are together – pretty much your most common experience on a day to day basis. Work, school, play, even just watching entertainment.

Community violence is that on the larger scale – those television programs, news reports, the things that people are taught and the way they are raised and socialized to think, the systems of institutions of the world around us.

From the analysis of these 20 different forms of violence, as seen in the image here, a definition of violence was developed. Violence is:

“the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”

The way it broke down established four different ways in which violence may be inflicted:

- physical;
- sexual
- psychological attack
- deprivation.

It further divides the general definition of violence into sub-types according to the victim-perpetrator relationship.

Self-directed violence refers to violence in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual and is subdivided into self-abuse and suicide. This demonstrates that suicide and self-abuse are directly caused by external forces which drive an individual to this sort of violence. This category includes child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse.

Interpersonal violence refers to violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. This category is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions.

Assault is predominantly physical in terms of the way most people think of it, but it is also, as the image above demonstrates, non-physical, as is common especially among bullies and those who engage in domestic violence, which sets the stage and creates the opportunity for more physical violence by excusing that physical violence and establishing a pattern of blamelessness for the perpetrator and blame and fault for the victim.

Collective violence refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence.

Structure & System

See where it says power in that definition?

The systems that operate in this world are created without consideration, thought, inclusion, attention, or concern to the needs and lives of trans people.

When you see Someone attacking trans people, they are usually using that institutional power.

When someone says trans women are men or male, that trans men are female or women, that non binary people don't exist or that the pronoun choices of someone are stupid, all of that...

All of that is the use of institutional power.

Those things are done with intent when folks are attacking trans people.

So we have the intentional use of power.

This is actual, as well, and it is against both an individual and a group.

The effect of that ***is perpetuating the ongoing psychological and social harm.***

It is violence to call a trans woman male or a man, to use the wrong pronouns, make arguments based on the idea that they are not women, and so forth.

It is, then, violence.

There is no but, no well, maybe, no if. This isn't an abstract talking point or some hypothetical mental exercise.

It is violence.

This isn't a thing one can disagree about **honestly**, for that matter. One can disagree with anything dishonestly, but dishonest people aren't ones you likely trust.

Do not ask a trans woman to be nice to someone being violent towards them. Doing that tells everyone you value people less than your beliefs.

Social Stigma

One of the more pervasive forms of this harm is exclusion — more formally described as Ostracism. Ostracism is social exclusion, and it is typically based on and involves Social Stigma.

Social stigma is the extreme disapproval of or discontent with a person or group because of being different in some way, that are perceived, and separate them, from other members of a society. Stigma is then applied to a person, by the greater society, who differs from their cultural norms.

Stigmatized people see others in three distinct ways:

the stigmatized are those who bear the stigma;

the normals are those who do not bear the stigma; and

the *wise* are those among the normals who are accepted by the stigmatized as “wise” to their condition

The *wise* come in two forms:

Active *wise*, who speak out to effect change in the stigma; and

Passive *wise*, who remain socially silent.

Stigmatization involves dehumanization, demonization, threat, policing, aversion, shaming, and sometimes the depersonalization of others into stereotypes. Stigmatizing others can work as self-esteem enhancement, control enhancement, and anxiety buffering, through comparing oneself to less fortunate others, and so increase one's own subjective sense of well-being and one's self-esteem.

Consider that for a moment. **People actually benefit from the act of stigmatizing others, emotionally.** It isn't rational – but people, by and large, are not rational beings.

This is part of why it is noted that Trans women, specifically, are eroticized, being exotic in their perceived natures, and so objectified, as women, but are also treated as the objects of ire more broadly. They are objects of desire as Women, and objects of ire as Trans people, a particular combination that exists only for trans people, and does apply to a lesser extent to Trans men and non-binary/GNC trans people as well.

Stigma can enter into a person when they live with it for a great deal of time. It becomes a part of the way they think about themselves, about things related to themselves, and become s a part of their goals. This is called internalization.

Passing is an example of internalized stigma – it serves within the community to act as a manner by which the stigma experienced by trans people can be avoided through “fitting in” – that is, meeting the expectations and following the rules of the broader culture and oppressive structures.

Being an Ally is often expected to involve being an Active Wise, and when an Active Wise fails to fully understand the nature of the stigmas, or errs in including stigma in their own actions, they are often the targets of ire, which serves to unintentionally convert them into passive wise, when such anger should be seen as a loss of trust and a call and appeal to do better and improve.

Stages of Ostracism

In his work, Dr. Williams has identified three stages of dealing with ostracism.

The first stage is simply being ostracised. For trans people, the signals of ostracism come in many forms. Most of them have to do with aversion or anxiety about trans people or transness in general — that is to say, transphobia.

The second stage of dealing with ostracism is Coping.

Coping usually means the person being ostracized tries harder be included. The way they do that may vary. For example, some of those who are ostracized may be more likely to engage in behaviors that increase their future inclusion by mimicking, complying, obeying orders, cooperating or expressing attraction. Others may seek to connect with persons who are similarly ostracized, creating an Affinity Group (or in-group), and possibly even advocate for changes to the social norms. In yet other cases — and in particular if there is something that gives them a sense that they are being ostracized by a larger group, or they gain the sense that it isn't possible to gain inclusion, or they come to feel or be told that they have little control over their lives (such as by being told that their knowledge of themselves is invalid or untrue, as frequently happens with Trans people when they are told they are not women), they may turn to provocative behavior and even aggression, such as when this happens between two groups that are oppressed under two different axes of oppression — especially when there are aspects of situational membership shared.

“They will go to great lengths to enhance their sense of belonging and self-esteem,” is how Williams describes it. However, “At some point, they stop worrying about being liked, and they just want to be noticed.”

This can lead — especially among competing out-groups — to internal warfare and the creation of ideologies and statements of outright hostility. This is the collective and interpersonal violence noted previously.

When ostracization continues for a long time — decades, in this case — the third stage, called Resignation, is reached.

At this point, many simply give up.

“This is when people who have been ostracized are less helpful and more aggressive to others in general,” says KD Williams. “It also increases anger and sadness, and long-term ostracism can result in alienation, depression, helplessness and feelings of unworthiness.”

Trans people, as a general rule, are in the third stage for the most part. This is particularly true for those who transition as adults, but still applies in many situations to those who transition as children. The long term effects of ostracism are incredibly damaging to people, as a whole, and all major pediatric organizations look at it as a form of child abuse and neglect — for good reason.

The issues that face the adult survivors of child abuse and neglect are massive and potent ongoing social issues that are merely exacerbated by the constant interpersonal and community attacks that trans people experience.

As I’ve noted previously in discussing how to identify transphobia and the argument of ostracism that is the male socialization argument, these attacks are harsh, critical, dehumanizing, overt acts of violence that are based in the presence within a Dominant Class and are founded on the principles of Ciscentrism, which is opposed by Transcentrism. There are additional posts which reflect on this that are also in the series of which this is one.

Williams says “Endure ostracism too long and they’re depleted. You don’t have it in you to cope, so you give up. You become depressed, helpless, and despairing.” Even memories of long-ago rejection can bring up those feelings.

His work, widely cited and broadly available, lays out the foundation for the manner in which trans people are actively and intentionally harmed through acts of violence that include microaggressions, psychologically damaging verbal attacks, and active efforts at exclusion and using existing stigma and shame against trans people in both externalized and internalized varieties, preying on low self esteem and insecurities of trans people (in particular, those going through the crisis point of transition, which is an incredibly fragile time and is, itself, an act of overt and fundamental hostility to another person during a time of incredibly personal and psychological vulnerability), and acting as if in concert with larger forces (such as those on the religious right and those within patriarchy) to create a powerful and potent mix of violence that has the appearance of being socially sanctioned in an environment where such behavior is not only tolerated, but often encouraged (social media).

This is the violence against trans people that is often talked about — it need not be a clue by four to the skull to have the same effect, and indeed, when combined with the life history of such experiences, it makes it an outright act of cruelty, inhumane in its force, and absolutely an act of violence.

On Biological Arguments

In the end, it does not matter if biology claims trans women are males.

Biology is not concerned with the violence done to people.

Biology is not a shield to do violence to people, and indeed, the admittedly flawed models of colloquial biology often cited against trans women have also been used to justify and make excuses for violence against minority populations in oppressive systems. “black people are subhuman, says biology”.

Violence is still violence. It is still immoral, still unethical, and defending it is immoral and unethical.

Psychology, sociology, anthropology, physiology, medicine — these sciences have all proven that calling a trans woman a man is violence.

Violence is not limited to broken bones and bruised flesh and physical damage visible to the seeing.

It is also words. Ask those fleeing persecution, read history, talk to survivors of child abuse and domestic violence and prison violence.

Words are just as physically damaging - and according to many measures more so, since the brain treats those words no differently than it treats the body blows. The science is there to demonstrate this, and it is well known.

Calling trans women men is violence. It has physical, measurable consequences, and it endures and we know that this applies even when it is strangers.

The science establishes it.

This is fact. Not opinion.

Calling a trans woman a man is an act of violence, an assault, and those who do so are being violent, are being immoral, are being unethical, are cruel and callous and pathetic.

Silence in the face of violence is complicity, especially when that violence is social. Defense of calling a trans woman a man is defending violence.

Name it what it is. Don't dress it up, don't reduce it, it is violence. It is unethical. It is immoral.

Shame those who do it, teach them it is wrong.

Because not doing so means you are complicit, means you are supporting, means you are not trying to stop violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and even straight people.

It means you are not trying to stop violence against people of color, against immigrants, against the disabled, against the poor.

It means you are standing by watching as someone does violence to another person.

And **that** is immoral, unethical, and shameful.

The Close

Now, in closing:

No person should have to undergo surgery or accept sterilization as a condition of identity recognition. If a sex marker is required on an identity document, that marker could recognize the person's lived gender, regardless of reproductive capacity. The WPATH Board of Directors urges governments and other authoritative bodies to move to eliminate requirements for identity recognition that require surgical procedures.

The expression of gender characteristics, including identities, that are not stereotypically associated with one's assigned sex at birth **is a common and culturally-diverse human phenomenon which should not be judged as inherently pathological or negative.** The psychopathologisation of gender characteristics and identities reinforces or can prompt stigma, making prejudice and discrimination more likely, rendering transgender and transsexual people more vulnerable to social and legal marginalisation and exclusion, and increasing risks to mental and physical well-being. WPATH urges governmental and medical professional organizations to review their policies and practices to eliminate stigma toward gender-variant people

Pathological

1. involving, caused by, or of the nature of a physical or mental disease.
 2. caused by or involving disease; morbid.
 3. caused by or evidencing a mentally disturbed condition
 4. dealing with diseases

1680s, "pertaining to disease," formed in English from pathology.

Synonyms: morbid, diseased, sick, ill, unhealthy, aberrant, medical, medical condition