

Reclaiming "Tranny"

Two Sides to a Complex Conversation

A trending topic this year in the queer community at large and at home has been the reclamation of the word "tranny."

The reclaiming of words traditionally used to oppress a marginalized group, in this case primarily trans women, is always a touchy subject. Despite its increasing use, the word "queer" still elicits shudders from some members of the LGBT community, while black communities remain divided on the reappropriation of the "n-word."

But the debate about "tranny" is different. By and large, those currently self-identifying with the word are drag performers and trans men, not the most frequent targets of the word when used as a slur.

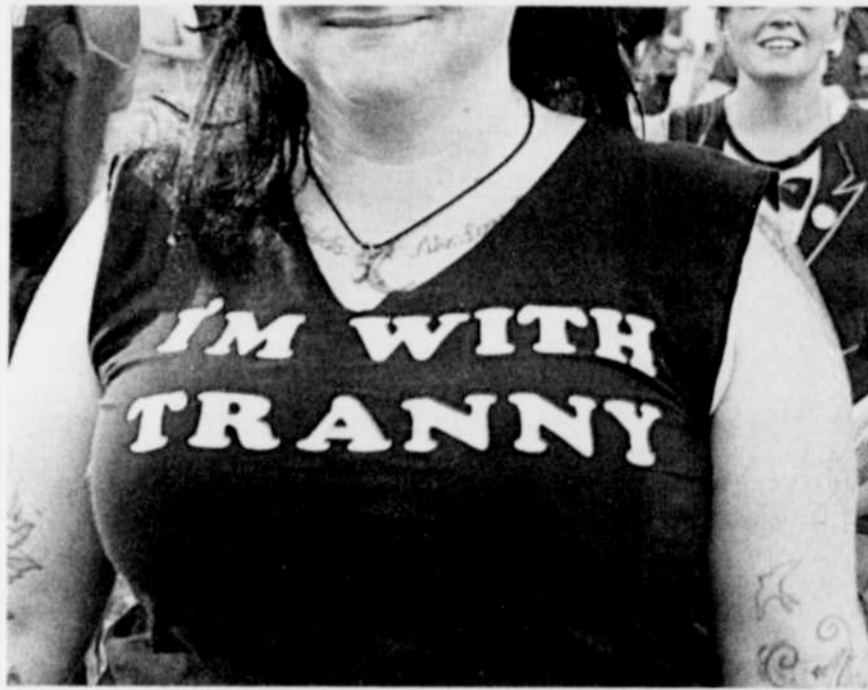
The term is still considered off-limits for those who do not fall under the umbrella represented by the T in LGBT, but within

that diverse community—which includes transgender, transsexual and genderqueer folks as well as drag performers (aka transvestites)—there is no real consensus on who can reclaim it.

This issue came to a head recently when Blow Pony advertised its October party as "Night of the Living Trannys" for the third year. Following a heated online debate, party organizer Airick Heater apologized and changed the name to "Night of the Living Homos."

As part of that ongoing conversation, two community members offer their perspectives on the reclamation of "tranny."

—ERIN ROOK



Take the Power Out of Slurs and Stop Policing Identities

By Fannie Mae Darling, a drag performer and self-identified tranny

Words have as much power as you choose to give to them. Any word can be taken and turned into a derogatory one simply by giving it that power. For example, the word "queer" is used to describe the LGBT community and it seems to be accepted and used often.

"Queer," according to dictionary.com, means strange or odd, shady, questionable, not feeling physically right or stable, and finally, it says that it is slang for a homosexual being unmanly. Somehow we as a community picked this word up and everyone seems okay with it. We even have performers named Freddie Fagula, or bars called Bent, or groups called Dykes on Bikes and everyone seems all right with it because we took the power away from the words.

What I don't understand is when did the word tranny solely become any one group's to fight for? Tranny is an umbrella term meaning transformer, transmission, transgendered, transistor radio, Ford transit, Transylvania, and the list goes on and also includes transvestite. Ah, transvestite! You mean cross-dresser? Drag queen? Why yes! That brings me to my biggest issue.

I am a known cross-dressing, lady clothes-wearing, makeup-slathering, high heel shoe-sprinting, gender-blending, drag performer! I AM A TRANNY! If I choose to classify myself with that term, or be part of a project in which "tranny" is used, then I have every right and no one has the right to stop me or make me feel wrong for using it. If the word "tranny" is used to hurt or ridicule someone, then yes, that word becomes hurtful. Don't give power to the word and the word means nothing.

If we want to move ahead and be respected by other communities then we need to stop creating walls among our own community. I understand that many of us have come from parts of the world where we, alone, had to fight to be heard and fight to be accepted, but now we are in a community where the last thing we need to do is fight amongst ourselves.

Trans Women Should Lead Reclamation of "Tranny"

By R.J., a 28-year-old student at Portland University, genderqueer trans woman and Portland native

To an extent, it is hard to really take a position against reclaiming any word—after all, language is a shifting and living thing, formed by millions of people, that is hard to have much control over. As far as the widespread reclamation of the word "tranny" goes in LGBT circles, I assume that it will happen eventually. I still probably won't like it when it happens, and that may mark me as part of an older generation of trans people, even though I'm still not quite 30. But I will accept that change without a lot of complaining if it happens in the right way—the word "tranny" should be reclaimed by those who have been historically the most negatively affected by it, primarily trans women.

I know that drag performers have used this within that community for a long time, and I am not saying that its use should stop within that community. But the drag community, particularly gay men, is not entitled to reclaim this word in a wider sense and tell trans women that they aren't big enough gender radicals for not having reclaimed it yet, which is something I feel that I have seen. Lesbians didn't reclaim the word "fag" and then tell gay men to get with the program—gay men reclaimed "fag" for themselves, and so it should be with "tranny."

There are already trans women out in the community who identify with this term, and I think that will grow with time. For now, if people want to identify themselves with "tranny," that's fine—but don't say hi by yelling "Hey tranny!" across the room at me and then act surprised when I'm not happy about it.

What's in a word?

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