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SAVAGE LOVE



GAYED, BLACKED, TRANSGENDERED BY DAN SAVAGE

Is there a term that is preferred to "transgendered"? I recently wrote an article that described a MTF person I know as transgendered. The article was positive about transgendered persons I have known (she is one of many). Upon seeing a draft prior to publication, this person flipped out so hard that I felt compelled to cut off all contact with her. I also killed the article. One of her complaints was that I used the word "transgendered" to describe her, and she identifies as something other than that. I feel like an old fart even asking, but have you heard of this? What is the new term if it's not okay to say "transgendered" anymore?

Confused In Straightland

"Let's assume CIS got the subject's identity right (versus genderqueer or agender) and is being respectful," said Shadi Petosky, a writer, a trans woman, and the cofounder of PUNY Entertainment. "Even if CIS showed her respect, CIS isn't showing respect for the English language." Transgender is an adjective like blue or tall, Petosky pointed out. It's not a noun or verb. So the correct term is "transgender man," "transgender woman," or "transgender person," not "transgendered man."

"It might help if CIS thinks about the adjectives gay or black," said Petosky. "You're a gay man or you're gay. You're not 'gayed.' The president is a black man. He's not a blacked man. Only an ignorant person or a bigot would get gayed/blacked wrong. And to say that Dan Savage is 'a gay' or Barack Obama is 'a black' sounds homophobic or racist because it dehumanizes. Trans people want dignity, CIS, so if you are saying transgender or trans outside of 'they're transgender,' you have to put man, woman, or person (or human) after it. Because that is what we are."

If all you got wrong was that one thing, CIS, and your transgender friend blew up at you, well, that's unfortunate. (We're both giving you the benefit of the doubt, CIS, and assuming that "transgendered" was the only issue.) You were trying to do right by your friend, her anger was misplaced, an opportunity to educate a well-meaning ally was lost, a friendship was nuked, and a transgender angel didn't get her wings that day. But let's zoom out for a second: Trans folks have an awful lot to be angry about, CIS, from absolutely staggering levels of anti-trans violence to discrimination against trans people in employment to a lack of access to basic health care. But at times, righteous trans anger seems to get directed at whoever is nearest at hand, however well-intentioned or otherwise supportive that person might be. (Cough, cough.) But blowing up at you was easier than blowing up at, say, high-profile anti-trans bigot Bill O'Reilly because you were in the room and O'Reilly wasn't.

But Petosky would like you — and glittery me — to keep that misdirected anger in perspective. "People mostly seem to be fascinated by trans people right after we come out," said Petosky. "If CIS's friend recently came out, then he was dealing with a person who is probably going through a lot of trauma and anxiety. When I transitioned, I thought I was going to lose my business, kill my dating chances, and end up homeless. Many trans people do. People called me 'he' most of the time in those early months. My self-image was in shambles. I lashed out at some gay friends for saying things that were less than supportive. Gay men were actually some of the worst because they could be — they can be — sarcastic about stuff I was really sensitive about. It's not like we trans people have no sense of who the real bad guys are. We're just getting tons of shit thrown at us all at once and want some minor wins. We're just trying to feel safe close to home first."

So something about your article rubbed your trans friend the wrong way — maybe it was the way you brandished her as proof of your own high-mindedness? — and she suddenly felt less safe around you and she blew up. Hopefully you two will be able to patch things up once the glitter has settled.

On a related note: Media Matters for America has extensively covered the outrageous and damaging anti-trans bigotry that Fox News routinely spews into American homes, hotels, airports, and waiting rooms. (These two posts at MediaMatters.com will bring you up to speed: "Experts: Fox News' Coverage Contributes to Violence, Discrimination Against Transgender Community" and "Fox News' Transphobia Problem.") Far be it from me to give the trans-rights movement marching orders... but... if a coalition of queer and trans-rights groups came together and called for a big demonstration outside the Fox News studios in midtown Manhattan, I would be there along with tons of other gay, lesbian, straight, and bi cissies. How about it?

I'm a 37-year-old straight male and I've never had a girlfriend. I lost my virginity when I was 25 and proceeded to have sex with dozens of women over the next five years, but none lasted more than a night or two. Over the next few years, I dated with the goal of finding a relationship, not sex, and found neither, then a few years of depression. The question is: Am I screwed? Will women my age be willing to date someone with no relationship experience? Is it something I should be up front about?

Hope Over Personal Experience

There are tons of women your age who have similar dating histories — there are tons of women your age with no dating histories at all — and you won't be at a disadvantage, experience-wise, if you're willing to date one (or more) of them. Create a few online personal profiles, HOPE, and be up front, honest, and unapologetic about your dating history and your desire for a relationship. State that you are looking for a woman understanding enough to look past your inexperience and offer that you are willing and able to do the same. Good luck.

Any tips on getting over unrequited love? I'm a 30-year-old straight male who fell in love with a girl who didn't want to proceed with a relationship. I have tried the gym, movies, socializing, and dating other women, but I still can't get her off my mind. To make matters worse, I will be running into her a lot in a professional setting in a few months. It has been 1.5 years, and I still haven't gotten over her. I fear that my future interaction with her will make it impossible to move on.

She Moved On

For two years, I pined for a guy I couldn't have, certain I would never get over him. So I called him one day and asked him to have lunch. The plan: throw myself at him and convince him to leave his boyfriend for me. Failing that, convince him to resume cheating on his boyfriend with me. But five minutes into lunch, I realized I wasn't attracted to him anymore. It wasn't that I couldn't get over him during those two years, SMO, but that my ego wouldn't let me get over being dumped. With that realization, the spell broke. We ate our sandwiches and said our good-byes. Maybe you'll have the same spell-breaking experience when you run into this woman in a professional setting? If not, keep trying the gym, movies, dating, etc. until the spell breaks or your life ends, whichever comes first.

Follow Shadi Petosky on Twitter @shadipetosky.

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