

Response to Thu, Mar 22, 2018 Hamilton Spectator Editorial Cartoon

By Lyla Miklos

This open letter was shared and posted on the Facebook Page of Anti-racists and Allies of Hamilton, Ontario (@HamiltonForDiversity) in response to Graeme MacKay's editorial cartoon in the Thu, Mar 22, 2018 issue of The Hamilton Spectator:

I finally had a chance to read my Hamilton Spectator on my bus ride home after a very long day at work. A day that had me listening on my headphones while working on my computer to fellow LGBTQI2S+ activists via Facebook Live. They held a Press Conference at The 519 Community Centre in the heart of Toronto's Queer Village and demanded a public inquiry into the Toronto Police's investigation of a serial killer who had targeted gay men. They protested outside of Toronto Police Headquarters and demanded the resignation of Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders for his mishandling of the investigation and victim blaming of the LGBTQI2S+ Community. The message was clear, the lives of these murdered and missing gay men were not valued and hence the investigation into their deaths was not taken seriously until far far too late.

On this same day I experienced a tone deaf, dismissive and damaging editorial cartoon by Graeme Mackay making a mockery of those in the LGBTQI2S+ Community who self-identify as transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or non-binary. In the cartoon an individual who presents as female is asked by a clerk at a Service Canada desk how they would like to be addressed. The individual gives a glib and flippant answer ending with "In Ms. Chatsworth's Gifted Class I went by Phil". There is a sign at the clerk's desk which reads: Gender Neutrality Policy Now In Effect.

When individuals transition from the gender they were assigned at birth the journey they go on is filled with systemic barriers, discrimination, ignorance, ridicule, hate, and even violence.

Being referred to by your chosen name and gender is not only respectful, but for many it is a matter of life and death. Being outed as your former gender or name can be very dangerous. "Dead Naming" someone who has transitioned invalidates their current identity and can put them at risk. Transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, are disproportionately affected by hate violence. Transgender people face high levels of discrimination and poverty. Access to healthcare is extremely limited for transgender people.

Last year at Hamilton City Hall I listened to transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary members of our LGBTQI2S+ Community share their traumas to help City Councillors understand the realities of their lived experience. New Trans Protocols were voted on by City Council after a transgender woman was denied access to a public bathroom on City of Hamilton property. In the end these protocols were passed unanimously by Council, but it is shameful that we had to watch our queer comrades publicly weep and figuratively bleed to reach that point.

Transgender people in Ontario are able to obtain a legal name change from the government. As a registered religious official for the Province of Ontario I have had the privilege and pleasure of being a guarantor more than once on the very extensive form that is required to be filled out for this process. I have witnessed the pure joy of someone having a document that legally validates their identity. However, some transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to legally change their name on their own. Whether or not they have an official piece of paper that recognizes their identity, take hormones, or have had gender reassignment surgery they should be afforded the same respect and dignity for their chosen name as anyone else who uses a name other than their birth name.

My union, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OOSTF), at their Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly (AMPA) earlier this year had name badges that included what pronoun you want used to identify you (Ex: He/Him/His, She/Her/Hers, They/Them/Theirs) [Picture below.]. I was thrilled! What a wonderful and inclusive acknowledgement of the many gender identities and gender expressions of our fellow union members.

More and more people are accepting, acknowledging, and understanding the experiences, identities, and realities of transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary members of our community.

Which makes MacKay's cartoon all the more disappointing.

The 10th Edition of the GLAAD Media Guide can be found at <https://www.glaad.org/reference> . Although the stats and language in it are US based I have always found it an invaluable resource for those working in the media who want to report and commentate on issues related to the LGBTQI2S+ community with dignity, depth, and respect.

Because in the end if we truly believe that LGBTQI2S+ lives matter then at the very least we must legitimize and validate their existence.

Anti-racists and Allies of Hamilton, Ontario Facebook Post:
<https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonForDiversity/posts/1278318618969674>

This is the version of my editorial that appeared in The Hamilton Spectator:

Tone-deaf cartoon made a mockery of LGBTQI2S+ community struggles

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Photo Credit: Lisa MacMaster

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Lyla Miklos is a resident of Hamilton. Website: www.lylamiklos.com

The Hamilton Spectator published my letter online on Mon, Mar 26, 2018 and in their print edition on Tue, Mar 27, 2018: <https://www.thespec.com/opinion-story/8351615-tone-deaf-cartoon-made-a-mockery-of-lgbtqi2s-community-struggles/>