

## **1. Contextualizing the transphobia here at Conn within dominant US culture**

- This is pretty basic stuff, but it's times like these where it's really important to have a baseline understanding of what's going on. It's also really important to know what we mean when we call an incident transphobic, like what we have been seeing on campus after voyeurism incidents.
- The word "transphobic" can be applied on a couple different levels.
  - Individuals can do and say things that are transphobic, i.e. devaluing or damaging to trans identities, intentional or unintentional. This is really important, and it's crucial to call out interpersonal transphobia and address its causes within specific contexts when we see incidents happen.
  - For me, "transphobic" is more useful when we use it to describe the default, status quo of the society we live in. Because the truth is that we live immersed in a culture that hates trans people. Every aspect of our socialization in the US revolves around a gender binary that either condescends and pathologizes transness or erases it altogether.
  - So, it's important to understand that interpersonal instances of transphobia are just manifestations of a pervasive and all-encompassing system of oppression that marginalizes trans ppl at every level of society.
- Every time a transphobic incident occurs, it is not just violence towards the trans person in question. It strengthens and legitimizes a culture that hates trans people. That doesn't want trans people to exist, to love, to be successful, to be a part of our communities. It is structural violence enacted against an entire community of people. Interpersonal transphobic incidents are the agents of a much larger transphobic culture – they are how cis het hegemony carries out its projects of erasure and destruction of trans identities.
- This is not about hurt feelings. This is not about misunderstandings. The issue is not the life choices or mental health of trans people. This is life or death.

## **2. So now I have a couple things to say about allyship for cis (and trans) people**

- Allyship  $\neq$  not being transphobic. If you are focused on not being transphobic, you will get caught in a cycle of denial and self-defense.
- You will end up protecting your own self image as a "good person," a "person-who-is-not-transphobic," instead of learning new ways to support your trans peers.
- If you believe people who do transphobic things are "bad people," and you want at all costs to be a "good person," you will spend all your energy denying that your actions have harmed trans people. Examining and working thru your own transphobia is the only concrete way as an individual to dismantle cis heteronormativity and hegemony.
- **So again, to reiterate: we are all socialized in a culture that hates and denies and erases trans identities. We all hold transphobic beliefs. If you care about dismantling the roots of structural transphobia instead of just treating the symptoms, you must confront the transphobic beliefs that your socialization into this system has instilled**

**in you.** You can't run away, or point your finger at something else and shout "transphobic." Again, it is really important to do this – to call out explicit acts of transphobia – but the work you must do is deeply personal.

- "Not being transphobic" is not enough.
- It takes prolonged, conscious effort. And just so we are clear, being an ally is a promise that never, ever ends. There will always be more to do. You have never "made it." It is not even something you are, but rather something you are always becoming. Don't call yourself an ally if you're not willing to do the personal work.
- So I guess what I'm trying to say is that we cannot just address explicit hateful actions and words, although that is an important part of addressing the ongoing structural oppression that trans people face, on this campus and elsewhere. We have to be proactive, seek out our own prejudices so we can move past them. And not just our prejudices about gender identity, but about race, socioeconomic class, ability, sexuality, citizenship. Beliefs about gender are influenced by ideologies about all these other identity categories. We all have intersecting identities, and if you want to support trans people, you must be prepared to support trans people at all the intersections of our identities, at all the intersections of the oppressions we face.
- You have to seek out trans voices, trans stories, trans histories. If you want to be better, that's great, but it is work that you must do. It's not going to do itself, and we are not going to do it for you. We'll do a lot of work, but we won't do your share of the work. Only you can do that work.

### **3. A message to the members of administration here tonight.**

- Remember what I said about being proactive? Well, Conn's administration has not shown themselves to be proactive about the issue of transphobia on our campus.
- 7 sentences about transphobia at the bottom of an email is not going to prevent violence from happening again. Beyond that, the pattern of admin responding to instances of gender-based violence with one email detailing the incident and saying that "Conn does not tolerate" violence is pretty insulting.
- Conn has not shown that it does not tolerate violence. In fact, the inability of administration to prevent these incidences from occurring shows just the opposite: that Conn as an institution DOES accept gender based violence and transphobia. Conn has not shown that it is willing and prepared to undertake systemic reform to protect its students from voyeurism, transphobia, and harassment.
- I understand the burden that we as students have to create a safer culture. I don't want to minimize the personal responsibility that all of us have. but while some of us clearly do take this seriously, not all of us are. Conn as an institution cannot put the blame on the students alone. You have created the conditions in which sexual violence and transphobia are tolerated, condoned, and normalized. Conn has the institutional power to enforce or at least increase student engagement with issues of violence.

- So I just want to leave you with a question. How seriously do you take the health and safety of the students who you are accountable to? While you send your emails, your students are being oppressed. Erased. Victimized. You have positions of institutional power. When are you going to start using this power to protect your students instead of reacting to the violence perpetrated against them?