# Mundane transphobia in Celebrity Big Brother UK

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**Abstract**:
Trans people have long experienced visibility within the media. Historically, such visibility has been largely negative, reliant upon pathologising understandings of trans people's lives. More recent representations, however, have been somewhat more positive, with a range of media outlets seeking to understand and include trans people's experiences. Yet despite this shift, media representations of trans people are arguably still sensationalist and often perpetuate mundane, though no less marginalising, forms of transphobia. This paper presents an analysis of interactions that occurred in the 2013 season of Celebrity Big Brother UK between a trans housemate - Lauren Harries - and three cisgender housemates. The analysis highlights four forms of mundane transphobia: 1) jocular mockery, 2) discounting discrimination, 3) focusing on anatomy, and 4) liberal inclusivity. The paper concludes by exploring implications both for media representations of trans people and for how cisgender people engage with trans people's experiences more broadly.

## Introduction

1 Over the past decade, trans people (i.e., people whose gender differs from that normatively expected of their assigned sex) have become increasingly visible in the mainstream media, particularly on television. Examples include trans people engaging in conversations about their own lives (such as interviews with Thomas Beatie about his pregnancies), acting in fictional television programs (such as Laverne Cox in *Orange is the New Black*), and appearing as contestants in reality television programs (such as on *Big Brother* UK, *America's Next Top Model*, and *The X Factor Australia*). Whilst such recent representations are not uniformly positive, they are arguably an improvement on representations of trans people that have previously appeared in the media (such as on tabloid talk shows like *The Jerry Springer Show*), where trans people's lives have often been depicted through narratives of deception, predation, and abnormality (Gamson esp. 98).

2 However despite the fact that contemporary media representations of trans people are arguably more positive than those that have appeared previously, there is a degree to which they continue to be both normative (i.e., they ignore the diversity of trans people's lives) and marginalising. In this paper we present an analysis of interactions from the 2013 season of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK, focusing on the ways in which a trans contestant in this season – Lauren Harries – was marginalised in comments made by cisgender contestants. The analysis we present is framed by an understanding of "mundane transphobia", which refers to "the

everyday ways in which non-trans people enact marginalisation towards transgender people despite claims to inclusivity" (Riggs 160). Such an understanding is important, we argue, because it allows for a focus on the commonplace ways in which marginalisation occurs, in addition to exploring ways in which marginalisation can be challenged. In the following sections, we first present an overview of research that has examined media representations of trans people, after which we outline our methodological approach and provide a brief overview of *Celebrity Big Brother*. We then present an analysis of four interactions that were aired as part of the 2013 season, before turning to a discussion of the implications of our findings, particularly with regard to media guidelines for how trans people are represented.

**Previous Literature**

3 Whilst, as we noted above, representations of trans people in the mainstream media have been increasingly positive, such representations remain both normative and marginalising (Eldredge and Imre; Hollar). For example, in the UK television program *There's Something about Miriam* (a dating show featuring a trans woman) which aired in 2004, Miriam's trans status was known to viewers but hidden from the six cisgender men competing for her affections, until the season final where she "revealed" the "truth" of her gender history. In this type of programming, trans people's lives are used as plot devices to titillate a nominally cisgender audience.

4 The lives of trans men and women are also sensationalised through a repeated focus in media representations upon trans people's genitalia. In such representations trans people are routinely asked invasive questions about their past, present, and future embodiment, as Namaste argues:

> Access to the media is a whole other form of institutional discrimination. Transsexuals are required to give their autobiography on demand: how long have you known? Are you operated? How did your family take the news? .... It is astounding to me that within 15 seconds of knowing an individual is transsexual, some people feel comfortable enough to ask transsexuals to describe the physical appearance and sexual function of their genitals. How is it that cultural taboos regarding speaking openly about sexuality and genitalia with people you do not know well go out the window when it comes to transsexuals? (4)

5 An explicit focus on embodiment was clearly apparent in media discussions about Thomas Beatie and his pregnant body. Riggs, for example, explores how Oprah Winfrey marginalised Beatie's own account of his embodiment by first framing his masculinity through a narrative of his past as a "beauty queen," before then marginalising his account of his embodiment through the derision of his penis as "small" ('The Pregnant Man', The Oprah

Winfrey Show, April 2008). Trans women too are repeatedly subject to a focus upon their genitalia. For example, on one episode of the Australian talk show *Beauty and the Beast*, host Stan Zemanek referred to Carlotta – a prominent Australian trans woman – as "a bloke who cut off his penis to become a sheila" (quoted in McIntyre 29).

6 A pathologising focus on trans people's embodiment also appears in the common media narrative of trans people being born in the "wrong body". Barker-Plummer, writing about newspaper coverage of the murder of US trans teenager Gwen Arajuo, argues that the utilisation of the "wrong body discourse" limits understanding of the broader issues that trans people face (such as violence), in addition to reducing gender to binary categories. The "wrong body" narrative was also evident in relation to Nadia Almada, the winner of *Big Brother* UK in 2004, whose trans status was known by the audience but not the other participants. For example, Almada was later described by the host Davina MacCall as a "woman trapped in a man's body" who successfully "passed" because the other housemates did not know she was trans (Hines 132). While this "wrong body" discourse is sometimes used by trans people themselves (Hines), the ways in which the media uses this narrative typically serves to sensationalise trans people's lives.

7 A final way in which trans people continue to be marginalised within media representations takes the form of desexualisation. Such representations are notable as they differ to past representations of trans people which often emphasised an account of trans people as sexual predators (Brinker and Maza). By contrast, the desexualisation of trans people denies trans people's sexuality, an account that is arguably less sensationalistic, but no less marginalising. An example of this occurred in the thirteenth season of the US version of *Dancing with the Stars*, on which Chaz Bono appeared as a contestant. In their analysis of the season, Mocarski and colleagues highlight a number of ways in which Bono was positioned differently to other male contestants. For example, Bono was typically fully covered by clothing while other male contestants were often shirtless or wore half-opened shirts. The content of Bono's performances was also noticeably different to those of other male contestants, the latter of whom typically remained in close bodily contact with female partners throughout their performances, whilst Bono often had little close physical contact with his dance partner. Similarly, the only female judge on the program that season framed Bono in a desexualised way, calling him "cute" and "cuddly", in stark contrast to the ways in which she flirted with other male contestants (quoted in Mocarski et al 254).

8 The examples of mundane transphobia we have outlined in this section demonstrate our claim that contemporary media representations of trans people continue to be

marginalising, and to a certain degree sensationalising. What is lacking from previous analyses of media representations of trans people, however, has been a close focus on how transphobia occurs interactionally in conversations between trans and cisgender people. As demonstrated in the analysis we present below, such a focus is important as it serves to highlight both the presence of normative and sensationalising narratives of trans people within the media, and more broadly how transphobia occurs in everyday interactions, a dual focus that we return to in our discussion.

## Methodology

### *Data and Context of Celebrity Big Brother*

9 The data for this study consist of interactions that occurred between contestants on the 2013 season of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK. Specifically, our focus is on interactions between Lauren Harries – a housemate who identified as transsexual – and three cisgender housemates. These interactions were chosen for analysis as they included reference to Harries' gender identity as a trans person, references that were made salient by cisgender housemates rather than by Harries herself. Whilst we identified at least five other instances in which Harries' status as trans was made salient by other housemates, the four interactions we examine below were the most extensive and detailed.

10 As is typical of the *Big Brother* franchise, the 2013 season of *Celebrity Big Brother* followed contestants over an extended period of time (in this case 23 days). Hour long episodes were aired daily throughout the season, with audiences presented with selected 'highlights' from the previous day. As part of their time in the *Big Brother* house, contestants are presented with challenges that they must undertake in order to gain rewards (primarily related to food and alcohol), though a significant proportion of their time is spent unoccupied, thus engendering periods of ad hoc interactions between contestants. Whilst the 'naturalness' of these interactions is debatable (see Riggs and Due for a discussion of this issue), for the purposes of the analysis below we would suggest that these interactions are not scripted, and hence provide us with an instance of everyday interactions between contestants within the household (albeit within extraordinary circumstances, and within the framework of editing and production that shapes what is aired).

11 Throughout the season contestants nominate one another for eviction, with the results of evictions determined by public vote. In this sense, *Big Brother* is both a social experiment in terms of how a group of people who typically have not previously experienced a relationship with one another interact in the context of a highly regulated environment, and it

is also a popularity contest. Harries herself remained in the house for the entire season, and exited the house in third place during the season finale.

*Analytic Approach*

12 Membership categorisation analysis (MCA) was used to examine the four interactions. MCA focuses on the ways in which people – as culturally competent members of the society in which they live – draw on taken for granted categories through which to account for their own experiences and to question the experiences of others. Stokoe suggests that MCA may be particularly useful for understanding the experiences of people who are routinely treated as "exceptions" to a particular category. Of particular interest in the current paper are the ways in which cisgender people may question or challenge trans people's category membership, which then places an onus upon trans people to account for their location within a particular category to which they are claiming membership.

13 MCA typically proceeds through the identification and analysis of membership categorization devices (MCDs), which provide category-bound rules for how a particular category is normatively understood. Importantly, and as Stokoe emphasises, categories are "inference rich" (474), meaning that our understanding of categories is often based on assumptions derived from what we treat as implicit to a category. For example, the category "male" is normatively treated as referencing predicates (such as "has a penis"), as including category-bound activities that are also normatively produced (such as assumptions about what men do), and as part of a collection (in which male and female are normatively treated as paired opposites).

14 For the purposes of the analysis below we draw upon previous research that has identified a broad range of MCDs in everyday interactions. Specifically, identity construction practices such as category entitlement are particularly pertinent since, as Sacks argues, these categories lead to a range of culturally-produced and readily accessible tropes concerning the qualities of people seen as belonging to particular groups (see also Wooffitt). Once such identities are made available interactionally, normative expectations of how a member of a given category should behave are elicited. In the case of members of marginalised groups, these expectations frequently result in characterisations which could be considered as marginalising (Wooffitt).

15 With specific regard to trans people, then, our suggestion in the analysis is that mundane transphobia occurs through the normative expectations that adhere to gender categories, in which trans people are treated as improper members of the gender category to which they claim belonging. For Harries, three particular cisgender housemates repeatedly

raised questions about her category membership, yet did so in a range of ways that appear aimed at mitigating any accusation of transphobia by Harries.

16 For the purposes of the analysis each of the identified interactions was transcribed using Jeffersonian-Lite transcription (Jefferson). This mode of transcription goes beyond a simple verbatim transcription to include a focus on intonation, modulation, and other features of speech that are salient to understanding how categories are evoked through the minutiae of interactional turn-taking. In the analysis the first two letters of each speaker's name are used alongside their turn.

**Analysis**

17 The analysis below highlights four forms of mundane transphobia: 1) jocular mockery, 2) discounting discrimination, 3) focusing on anatomy, and 4) liberal inclusivity. Whilst we are aware that framing each of the extracts by a particular account of mundane transphobia may be seen as pre-empting the contents of the categories evoked by the individuals, our intention is to highlight the broader patterns that we believe arise from each of the four sets of interactions. In other words, whilst utilising MCA requires us to focus on the specific ways in which each of the individuals constructed member categories, we nonetheless believe it important to consider how these constructions function more broadly to marginalise Harries in ways that each evidence forms of mundane transphobia.

***Mundane transphobia as jocular mockery***

18 The first extract is taken from an exchange between three housemates: Harries, Louie Spence (a dancer), and Sophie Anderton (a model). At the beginning of the season these three contestants were removed from the Big Brother household and placed in a separate area referred to as the "temple of celebrity". These three contestants spent two days in the "temple of celebrity", where they were required to view and comment on the activities of the rest of the housemates, and to select the first three housemates to face elimination. The other housemates were unaware that they were being watched by these three housemates, nor did they know that the three housemates were chosen by *Big Brother* to nominate those facing eviction.

19 The interaction that appears in the first extract followed on from Harries, Spence and Anderton watching an interaction in the house involving Ron Atkinson, who is well known in the UK for his professional football career:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | So: | I know nothing about football. I went to uh. I uh >it's |
| 2 | | just not my thing< |
| 3 | | (0.2) |
| 4 | Lo: | I know footballers |
| 5 | | (0.1) |
| 6 | La: | All I know is it's a ball |
| 7 | | (2.2) |
| 8 | Lo: | yeah (.)And we got rid of them didn't we? Hahahaha |
| 9 | | darling ↑it's all in jest you know that |
| 10 | | (2.0) |
| 11 | La: | Ye::s (.) I do |

Extract 1 - Day One, 23/8/13

20 In this interaction, even though all three speakers made a comment about football, only Harries' statement was attended to. Specifically, Spence makes reference to Harries' gender affirming surgery in line 8. In so doing, he takes Harries' statement about football to initiate a new direction of talk, thus making Harries' gender embodiment interactionally relevant. This new conversational direction was introduced after a pause of atypical length. In conversation, speakers typically manage conversational transitions with no or very short gaps between speakers (Atkinson and Heritage). Longer gaps depart from this normative practice and can be indicative of interactional difficulties. The gap of 2.2 seconds may thus have been a product of the fact that any attempt at humour in regards to Harries' gender affirming surgery could be taken as offensive, prompting consideration before saying it.

21 The comment then made by Spence in lines 8-9 is an example of an attempt at jocular mockery, which has a range of functions according to the context of the joke (Haugh). Such functions include fostering affiliation or solidarity, diffusion of conflict, assertion of power, or a means of socialising others (Haugh). One of the key elements to jocular mockery is that it combines two elements: provocation and being playful. Spence's comment combines these two elements: first, a provocation about getting rid of balls (though a provocation that is softened by the use of the word "we" rather than "you"), and then an attempt at being playful, as evident in the clarifying statement "darling it's all in jest you know that". Spence's speech in this clarifying statement is noticeably quicker, potentially in an attempt at further softening his initial statement by making clear it was "all in jest".

22 Jocular mockery, however, is not always successful, and its accomplishment is dependent on the way the speaker builds up utterances and how the recipient responds to such

utterances (Haugh). When a speaker makes an attempt at a humorous remark intended to prompt laugher, this produces a sequential warrant for laughter from the recipient and, by adherence, this can produce interactional intimacy (Glenn). If laughter is not achieved in conversation following a joke, interactional intimacy is not achieved and instead the speakers are distanced. Distance produced by Spence's jocular statement is arguably evident in Harries' seemingly blunt response in line 11, and the hesitation with which she says "yes". This is understandable, given the implication of Spence's attempt at jocular mockery is that Harries membership of the category "female" is questionable (i.e., given that women are not normatively understood as having "balls"), a form of implicit question that appears again in the following extract.

***Mundane transphobia as a focus on anatomy***

23 The following interaction also occurred in the "temple of celebrity", again between Harries, Spence, and Anderton, though this time on day two. It is important to note that the initiating sequence of an interaction was not always apparent. As such, it is unclear why the housemates were talking about Harries' vagina:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | La: | You can have a very deep vagina |
| 2 | | (0.1) |
| 3 | Lo: | yeah (.) so did you have a big willy then since |
| 4 | | you've got a deep vagina? |
| 5 | | (0.7) |
| 6 | La: | I ca:n't remember (.) but I know I've got a deep vagina |
| 7 | | (0.1) |
| 8 | Lo: | Oh so you had a big willy |
| 9 | | (0.6) |
| 10 | So: | It's fascinating (.)Was it incredibly painful? |
| 11 | | (0.9) |
| 12 | La: | Very (.)You couldn't eat for two weeks (.) And you |
| 13 | | were strapped to a bed |
| 14 | | (0.4) |
| 15 | So: | ↑Oh gosh |
| 16 | | (0.4) |
| 17 | La: | And you couldn't eat. So when I left I was five and a |
| 18 | | half stone |
| 19 | | (0.1) |
| 20 | Lo: | I've seen some friends of mine who have had sex change(.) they have showed |
| | | me their fannys(.) and they have re:::ally nice vaginas |
| 21 | | (0.1) |
| 22 | So: | Well I'd imagine, it's a ↑designer (.) vagina really |
| 23 | | (0.1) |
| 24 | So: | So I have to ask something quite personal (.) so is it (.) sensitive? |
| 31 | | (0.4) |
| 32 | La: | Yes. |
| 33 | | (0.1) |
| 34 | So: | >okay, sorry. That was my on[ly::<] |
| 35 | La: | [It's ex]a::ctly the same as any |
| 36 | | other woman, [yeah]. |
| 38 | So: | [I w]asn't gonna ask you but I've never asked my |
| 42 | | friend (0.1) it's just never come up in conversation. |

Extract 2 - Day Two, 24/8/13

24 In line one Harries makes a statement in regards to anatomy. Her use of the word "you", however, distances this from being a directly personal reference. Spence's response to this statement, however, positions the statement as being about Harries when he first asks her if she "ha[d] a big willy", and then in the next turn states "oh so you had a big willy". It should be noted that this was not a question, but rather a statement made by Spence, as evident in his pitch. This statement is subsequently authorised through a claim to category entitlement in lines 21-23 by reference to Spence having trans friends, thus building up his statement as factual and authoritative (Wooffitt). In making a claim to category entitlement Spence potentially mitigates any possible accusation of being prurient or even transphobic by authorising his statement about Harries' vagina through reference to friends who "showed me their fannys". This attribution of agency to his friends is important, as it makes it appear that the "showing" was initiated by them, thus preventing any suggestion that Spence asked them to show him.

25 In line 10 Anderton takes up the topic of surgery, referring to it as “fascinating”. The use of this term potentially serves to position Harries as different to other women. In other words, by only asking *Harries* about the “sensitivity” of her vagina (i.e., Anderton did not ask other women in the house about the sensitivity of their vaginas), Anderton treats Harries as an exception, thus evoking a normative understanding of the category “vagina” from which Harries is implicitly excluded. Anderton’s query is met with a hesitant response from Harries (seen in the long pause), triggering an attempted repair by Anderton. Anderton’s multiple and continued attempts at trying to repair the question (“sorry”, “I wasn’t gonna ask you”, and “because I’ve never asked my friend”) frame the initial question as troubled. Harries responds by explicitly refuting the suggestion that her vagina is anything different to “any other woman”, thus making a clear claim to category membership as a woman.

26Extract three depicts another conversation that occurred between Harries, Anderton, and Spence, again in the temple of celebrity on the second day of being in the house. Similar to the previous extract, the footage aired did not include anything that would explain how the conversation on celibacy arose:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | La: | Well I've bee::n celibate for six year:s |
| 2 | | (0.6) |
| 3 | Lo: | for[ how long?] |
| 4 | So: | [°you've bee]n celibate for six ye[ars?°] |
| 5 | La: | [six ye]ars |
| 6 | | (0.1) |
| 7 | Lo: | Six years? (.5) .H[hhh ↑really?] |
| 8 | So: | [OH I don't think I could do ↑tha:t] |
| 9 | | (0.3) |
| 10 | Lo: | No:::: I couldn't (.) ↑but how long have you had your |
| 11 | | vagina? |
| 12 | | (0.6) |
| 13 | La: | Fifteen year[s] |
| 14 | Lo: | ↑[Fif]teen years? ↓so it has been use:d |
| 15 | | (0.6) |
| 16 | La: | Ye::s (.) yes (.) ↑but the thing is tho:ugh (.)↓I've |
| 17 | | had such bad reactions from men because they were |
| 18 | | (.) transphobic |
| 19 | | (0.1) |
| 20 | Lo: | Where did you have it done? |
| 21 | | (0.8) |
| 22 | La: | uh you know it was u:::h I >was on so much medication |
| 23 | | [I can't even remember]< the hospital |
| 24 | So: | [a little bit of a blur?] |
| 25 | | (0.7) |
| 26 | So: | um I think that times have changed though now, |
| 27 | | ↓I do believe that (.) You know (.)I think people are |
| 28 | | becoming (.) you know (.) much more:: acceptable, accepting, |
| 29 | | to be hone[st] |
| 30 | La: | But sometimes, because I live in Cardiff (.) you know, it's a bit more (.) |
| 31 | | small mi[nded] |
| 32 | Lo: | [yeah ]but everyone must know you there now, do |
| 33 | | you know what I me[an?] |
| 34 | So: | [>s]ee In London, |
| 35 | | they wouldn't blink an eyelash< |

Extract 3 - Day Two, 24/8/13

27 In line 8, the response to Harries' initial statement is an example of what is termed "oh prefacing" (Heritage). Oh prefacing is a reaction to a source of surprise used to acknowledge new information, and is demonstrated through the gasp seen in line 7 and the use of the word "oh" itself in line 8. This type of surprise token is generally indicative of reluctance by speakers to further a conversational topic (Heritage). Spence did not further the conversational topic of celibacy, and instead asked a more personal anatomically-related question (seen in line 10 and 11). In so doing, Spence again makes Harries' gender affirming surgery interactionally relevant, and thus again raises questions about her membership of the category female in two specific ways. First, he questions Harries about how long she has had her vagina. Similar to Anderton's questioning in the previous extract about the "sensitivity"

of Harries' vagina, Spence's questioning of Harries positions her as different to the other women in the house (i.e., he doesn't ask any of the other women how long they have had their vaginas). Second, Spence makes the presumption that Harries must have "used" her vagina. Implicit in this presumption is the idea that trans women have gender affirming surgery in order to allow them to "use" their vaginas, thus creating a category in which the purpose of vaginas is to be "used".

28 In response to this question about "use", Harries states that she has had "bad reactions" due to men being transphobic (line 17). The two other speakers, however, do not immediately attend to this comment, and instead Spence quickly continues the topic of surgery. This appears not to have been a topic that Harries wanted to discuss, claiming instead that she could not remember and responding with "uh" and "u:::h" (seen on line 22). Although Harries' account of not knowing is a non-answer response, it is still preferred over not providing a second pair part to a question, given the interactional preference for the progressivity of a conversation (Stivers). Harries' account of not knowing thus fulfilled the two-part sequence of question-answer formation in conversation, however it did not offer any further explicit information within the conversation. Instead, Harries' apparent discomfort in regards to Spence's question appears to have been noted by Anderton who interrupts and attempts to finish off the question for Harries. This interruption potentially demonstrates that Anderton was aware of the sensitive nature of the line of questioning that Spence was pursuing.

29 Taking up the topic of transphobia in lines 28-32, Anderton uses the words "think" and "believe," positioning her statement as personal opinion rather than fact (Wooffitt). Generally, "I think" formulations are used to address sensitive matters delicately, and can also moderate the force of a response through framing the utterance as personal. Positioning her statements as personal and moderated may have been important given that what Anderton said effectively discounted Harries' account of transphobia (e.g., "times have changed," line 28). Furthermore, Anderton's statement about people in London "not blinking an eyelash" functions to evoke a membership category in which people who don't blink an eyelash are not transphobic. Given this membership category specifically references people in London, and given Anderton herself lives in London, the membership category positions Anderton herself as not transphobic. In this extract, then, not only does Spence again draw attention to Harries' gender affirming surgery (and thus implicitly questions her membership in the category "female"), but Anderton then effectively discounts Harries' experiences of transphobia by evoking a category in which Londoners are not transphobic. This type of

liberal inclusive logic elaborated by cisgender people in regards to trans people is further exemplified in the final extract.

**Mundane transphobia as liberal inclusivity**

30 Extract four features an interaction between Harries and another housemate, Courtney Stodden (an American reality TV show star), this time in the context of the Big Brother house (i.e., after Harries, Anderton and Spence had left the temple of celebrity). Prior to the interaction Big Brother had showed the housemates footage of Harries making negative comments in regards to a dress worn by Stodden. The interaction below then followed this screening:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | La: | I s:aid I thought the dress was slutty, hhhh |
| 2 | | (0.2) |
| 3 | Co: | No:: I don't blame you. I blame Big Brother |
| 4 | | (0.1) |
| 5 | La: | YES (.) THAT'S who to blame. Because they can ask you |
| 6 | | to do the same thing and you can't refuse. |
| 7 | | (0.3) |
| 8 | Co: | Right, but I would never say something I didn't think |
| 9 | | (1.5) that's why I'm so confused, ↑do you know what |
| 10 | | I mean? |
| 11 | | (0.6) |
| 12 | La: | Wha- wha:(.)? what did you say? |
| 13 | | (0.2) |
| 14 | Co: | I'm saying >like I would never say something I didn't |
| 15 | | think< (.) So >like if you walked into the house<(.) I |
| 16 | | wouldn't sa:::y, (0.6) about your appearan- |
| 17 | | >you know because I'm not that kind of person< (.) >do |
| 18 | | you know what I mean?< Like I wouldn't say she's weird |
| 19 | | because of the wa::y she:: (.) >you know what I mean?<, |
| 20 | | I just wouldn't do that, because I love transgenders |

Extract 4 - Day 3, 25/8/13

31 The notable point about this interaction appears in the final line, where it is revealed that Stodden's argument hinges upon a liberal account of inclusivity ("I just wouldn't do that, because I love transgenders"). In this line Stodden's extreme case formulation "I love transgenders" serves to encapsulate all trans people. In so doing, it reduces the experience of being transgender to something based on appearance, even though she has previously suggested (line 16) that she wouldn't make statements about a person's appearance. In this sense, Stodden's final statement is both an extreme case formulation and a disclaimer.

Disclaimers allow for inequalities to be reproduced within a conversation, but with the speaker shielded from an accusation of bias through depicting their statements as not reflective of their personal beliefs (Speer). Disclaimers thus serve a dual function, namely to express an opinion the speaker has while at the same time positioning their talk in an egalitarian way. The disclaimer on line 20 thus demonstrates Stodden's orientation to the possibility that her talk could be heard as transphobic. As such the claim that she "love[s] transgenders" is an attempt at both pre-empting and deflecting any possible accusations of transphobia by staking a claim to membership of a category (i.e., "loving transgenders") that is treated as inherently trans inclusive.

32 Furthermore, implied in Stodden's statement is a paired contrast between Harries' statement (made on Big Brother's command) that Stodden's dress looked slutty and her own non-statement about Harries. Stodden expresses concern over Harries making a statement about the dress, saying that "I would never say something that I didn't think". Stodden compares this with her non-statement about Harries' appearance, suggesting that she wouldn't make a negative statement about Harries' appearance because she "love[s] transgenders". Yet despite Stodden treating these as paired contrasts, they are in fact of entirely different registers. Harries made a statement, by Stodden's accusation, about something she thinks. Stodden did not make a statement about something she potentially thinks, because to do so would counter her "love [of] transgenders". Indeed, Stodden's entire statement in lines 14-20 rests upon the possibility that she could have expressed what she thought, if only she did not "love transgenders". In this sense, to be "that kind of person" (who would make negative evaluations about a trans person's appearance) is treated by Stodden as socially impermissible, but not necessarily wrong or transphobic.

**Discussion**

33 As we noted earlier, the analysis presented above has implications in two areas: media representations of trans people specifically, and more broadly the ways in which cisgender people interact with trans people. We now examine these implications in turn, both by referring back to our analysis and by extrapolating from our findings to broader issues relating to transphobia.

34 In a later season of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK (2014), a trans housemate (former boxing promoter, Kellie Maloney) accused a cisgender housemate (former boxer, Audley Harrison) of transphobia. Notably, in the season that we have analysed in this paper no such accusation was made. The difference between the two seasons, we would suggest, is that in

the season where an accusation was made, Harrison had stated that he was "uncomfortable" being around Maloney. In the season we have analysed in this paper, however, none of the cisgender participants expressed being uncomfortable around Lauren Harries. This difference is important, as it makes a distinction between what are treated as different "types" of interactions between trans and cisgender people. This requires ongoing attention given the fact that the examples of mundane transphobia we have examined in this paper are no less problematic than a statement about feeling "uncomfortable", yet the examples we have examined in this paper were not treated as problematic within the season.

35 Despite the incidences of mundane transphobia identified in our analysis not being treated as problematic within the season, the GLAAD media reference guide suggests that many of its recommendations were not adhered to in terms of the representation of Lauren Harries on *Celebrity Big Brother*. Specifically, GLAAD states that the words "trans" or "transgender" are adjectives, not nouns, yet Courtney Stodden's use of the word "transgenders" (a noun) was not addressed within the season. Similarly, GLAAD recommends that media representations should avoid a focus on gender affirming surgeries and that the phrase "sex change" should be avoided. Despite this, the term "sex change" was used by Spence, yet this was not challenged within the season. This lack of comment is notable given that it is common within *Celebrity Big Brother* for housemates to be given warnings about discriminatory language (indeed, Audley Harrison was cautioned in regards to the comments he made to Kellie Maloney).

36 Further, it is notable that aspects of the GLAAD reference guide itself fail to address issues that were apparent in the interactions analysed above. Specifically, the reference guide utilises the language of gender "matching" with assigned sex, and suggests that male and female are "opposites" (which is reinforced by the GLAAD terminology of "sex reassignment surgery"). In extract three, Harries makes the point that her vagina is "exactly the same" as any other woman's vagina (lines 35-36). This statement by Harries suggests that the GLAAD guidelines, with their emphasis on "matching" and "reassignment", may be inadequate in terms of addressing some of the subtle, mundane ways in which transphobia occurs in terms of discussions about trans people's genitalia that are initiated by cisgender people.

37 Moving beyond media representation specifically, our analysis has broader implications for how cisgender people engage in conversations with trans people. An increasing number of organisations and individuals have produced what are referred to as "trans 101" documents: overviews of key issues pertaining to trans people that are

intended to be primers for cisgender people seeking to be allies to trans people. An example of a trans 101 is provided by the *Sylvia Rivera Law Project*, which takes as its central premise the diversity amongst trans people. This premise has direct implications for the interactions analysed above, in which the cisgender housemates often appeared to reduce Harries' experiences as a trans woman down to a specific set of coordinates that could then be mapped across to other people's experiences. Consider, for example, Spence's comparison in extract two between his friends' vaginas and Harries'. These types of responses to trans people fail to acknowledge the diversity of trans people's experiences, and indeed fail to acknowledge the contexts in which trans people live.

38 The issue of context is particularly pertinent in regards to how the cisgender housemates engaged with the experiences shared by Lauren Harries. The *Trans Respect Versus Transphobia Project* (Transgender Europe) documents the extensive violence (including murder) that is perpetuated against trans people worldwide every year. The reduction of trans people's lives to matters pertaining to genitalia, for example, ignores the extent of violence. This can be seen in extract three, where Anderton discounts Harries's experiences of transphobia. Our point is not that trans people might not want to talk about their genitalia (and indeed talking about genitalia in the context of intimacy can be an important affirmation of trans people's right to sexual expression), but rather that cisgender people must attend to the topics that trans people set as interactionally relevant, not vice versa.

39 The use of membership categorisation analysis in our analysis presented above served to highlight some of the specific interactional tools that trans people employ in order to manage what we have identified as forms of mundane transphobia. These include feigning forgetfulness, not taking up particular topics, and re-framing topics. Previous research has suggested that trans people learn to use evasion as a way to sidestep topics that are likely to contribute to their marginalisation (Bell, Özbilgin, Beuregard and Sürgevil). This would suggest that acknowledging such evasion in conversation should not be a cause of interactional concern by cisgender people in regards to trans people's honesty, but rather should be taken as an opportunity by cisgender interlocutors to reflect upon how their statements may have been received as marginalising.

40 To conclude, the analysis we have presented here suggests that whilst it may be positive that trans people – such as Lauren Harries – are accorded representation in the media, and whilst they may be received relatively well, such representations are not free from mundane transphobia. This finding suggests the importance of more detailed and nuanced understandings in regards to how media regulatory bodies monitor representations of trans

people, and that attention must be paid to the more mundane ways in which marginalisation can occur. Beyond the media sphere, and taking the interactions we analysed above as to a certain degree indicative of broader patterns of interactions between cisgender and trans people, it is clear that even cisgender people who believe they are inclusive likely still engage in the types of normative statements that have elsewhere been referred to as "microaggressions" perpetuated against trans people in everyday conversation (Nadal, Skolnik and Wong). Addressing these types of normativity, including those identified in the analysis above (specifically the focus on genitalia and surgery and the construction of a generic "trans experience") has the potential to play an important role in contributing to the reduction of forms of everyday marginalisation that many trans people experience.

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