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Ad Hoc Coalition Against the Cotton Ceiling Condemns Planned Parenthood Toronto For Anti-Female Sex Workshop

March 28, 2012

Blame Canada

Toronto, Ontario (March 28, 2012): Today, the Ad Hoc Coalition Against the Cotton Ceiling (the "Coalition") submitted a petition with more than 250 signatures to Planned Parenthood Toronto (PPT) to ask the organization to reconsider hosting an event that promotes the sexualization of females.

PPT is sponsoring a March 31 conference in Toronto called "*Pleasure and Possibilities*." According to Sarah Hobbs, Executive Director of Planned Parenthood Toronto, the purpose of the conference is to continue conversations that began at an earlier conference entitled "*No More Apologies: Queer Trans and Cis Women, Coming/Cumming Together!*"

The subject matter of both conferences is specifically sexual in nature. One of the featured workshops is entitled "*Overcoming the Cotton Ceiling: Breaking Down Sexual Barriers for Queer Trans Women*." The workshop facilitator has defined the "Cotton Ceiling" as follows:

The cotton ceiling is a theory proposed ... to explain the experiences queer trans women have with simultaneous social inclusion and sexual exclusion within the broader queer women's communities. Basically, it means that cis queer women will be friends with us and talk day and night about trans rights and ending transmisogyny, but will still not consider us viable sexual partners.

The term cotton ceiling is a reference to the "glass ceiling" that second wave feminist identified in the workforce, wherein women could only advance so high in the workforce but could not break through into positions of power and authority. The cotton represents underwear, signifying sex.

The Ad Hoc Coalition Against the Cotton Ceiling objects to any analogy between sex and the "glass ceiling" as both politically and sexually inappropriate. Unlike women's right to equal employment and professional credibility in the workplace, trans women

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are not *entitled*—individually or as a class—to have sex with “cis” lesbians, as they call us.

“Trans women’s access to lesbians as viable sexual partners should never be framed as a barrier to trans women’s sexual pleasure or to trans women’s equal participation in ‘queer women’s communities,’” said Elizabeth Hungerford, a spokeswoman for the Coalition.

Workshop supporters have suggested that “*Overcoming the Cotton Ceiling*” is intended to facilitate a discussion about the social construction of sexual desire. Even *if* this were the case, being a lesbian is not a prejudicial social construct to be *overcome* by expanding lesbians’ limited political consciousness around trans women’s “gender identity.” Indeed, many— if not most— lesbians are gender non-conforming themselves; and *all* lesbians openly defy the oppressive constructs of normative sexuality. Lesbians — like all women — have **no social, ethical, or political obligation to make themselves sexually available to anyone**, including trans women and individuals who have or had male bodies.

“‘Lesbian’ is a valid sexual identity. The offensive notion of a ‘Cotton Ceiling’ prioritizes some women’s sexual desires over other women’s sexual boundaries. Lesbian sexuality is not a tool to service others’ needs or a mirror that shows others what they want to see about themselves. This workshop has no place in a conference about sexual health entitled ‘Pleasure and Possibilities,’” said Hungerford.

The Ad Hoc Coalition Against the Cotton Ceiling represents the 282 signers of the Petition asking PPT to reconsider the Cotton Ceiling workshop. The Coalition rejects the notion put forth by PPT that the sexual orientation of lesbians towards other lesbians with female-born bodies harms queer trans women’s sexual health or well-being. We also reject the suggestion that some lesbians’ sexual boundaries exclude queer trans women from engaging as full members of LGBTQ communities. Sexual access is not an in-group entitlement; it is not required for community membership.

All branches of Planned Parenthood can serve their equality mandate *without* reinforcing the unreasonable expectation of some trans women that their community inclusion requires full sexual access to other community members—specifically singling out “cis” lesbians to provide sexual validation. The idea that trans women are politically entitled to overcome a “Cotton Ceiling” barrier maintained by “cis” lesbians becomes particularly threatening when supported by the authority of an internationally renowned organization whose mission is to protect *all* women’s sexual and reproductive health. Reference to any women’s cotton underwear as representative of a sexual *or* political barrier to be broken is sexually inappropriate and politically indefensible in this context.

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About bugbrennan

Gender Atheist.

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Cathy Brennan’s Blogs

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Gender Fatigue Hung Over On Gender Kool Aid 0

Pretendbians: Exactly Like Lesbians, Except Not Pretendbians was a blog that arose in response to the concept of the Cotton Ceiling, which posits that lesbians owe sex to men who think they are female. 0

Cathy Brennan’s Vimeo 0

fauxmossexuals – it’s not just for gays anymore fauxmossexuals is a blog that addresses heterosexual appropriation of gay and lesbian culture under the guise of “queer culture.” 0

Name The Problem: Male Violence Humans – males and females – need to stop debating whether males are more violent. 0

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In which Tobi Hill-Meyer Demonstrates a Lack of Reading Ability →

18 Comments on “Ad Hoc Coalition Against the Cotton Ceiling Condemns Planned Parenthood Toronto For Anti-Female Sex Workshop”



GallusMag Says:

March 28, 2012 at 11:12 pm e

Reblogged this on [The Cotton Ceiling](#).



Rusty Says:

March 29, 2012 at 12:53 am e

Excellent. Concise and powerful.



W2Me Says:

March 29, 2012 at 1:56 am e

Right on, Coalition.



Mary Sunshine Says:

March 29, 2012 at 5:53 pm e

Reblogged this on [Female Biology Matters](#).



FeistyAmazon Says:

March 30, 2012 at 9:15 am e

Very well said...and the same with the whole 'stealth' phenomena when MTF's try to trick Lesbians in bed by 'passing' extremely well, and not until an intimate moment does the Lesbian find out, if she hadn't a clue before....I only had this happen once, and fortunately it didn't lead to intimate sex. But I felt psychically violated for two weeks and was very, very angry about it afterwards. My sexuality is for Lesbians and WBW ONLY! NEVER do trans individuals talk about overcoming the glass/concrete ceiling to better jobs and opportunities for ALL women, only their entitlement to Lesbian bodies and spirits!



Sharon Says:

March 31, 2012 at 5:44 am e

I'm one of the women who signed the petition opposing the "Overcoming Cotton Ceiling" workshop. I emailed a four page .pdf file to Planned Parenthood of Toronto. As a middle-aged feminist, I've always dearly loved Planned Parenthood. Indeed, I've tenaciously defended Planned Parenthood against attacks from pro-life, Bible thumping, conservatives time and time again. However, this "cotton ceiling" workshop deeply disturbs and offends me. It's obvious to me that Planned Parenthood of Toronto doesn't care the least about our petition. They certainly know this is demeaning and offensive to lesbians and, indeed, to all women. Do they care? Of course, they don't. Let's not fool ourselves. Below are my strategies. I very much appreciate the time that all the women put into the online petition. Kudos! I don't know about you, but I'm not stopping at a petition. These are my strategies.

STRATEGY ONE:

Canada prides itself on upholding civil and human rights. Indeed, it has an excellent

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track record as it relates to civil and human rights. This is what the trans and gender queer activists rely upon. First, I want to make it clear that I've never discriminated against trans women in my life. I mean never in my life. However, after the "cotton ceiling" workshop, I feel compelled to speak out. This has actually deeply offended me. Because lesbians are women, they must deal with sexism, threats of sexual abuse, as well as oppressive marginalization because of their sexual preference. Similar to all women, lesbians have been sexually assaulted, molested as children, or viciously raped. In the title and description of this workshop, words such as "breaking barriers", "overcoming", and "cotton ceiling" in reference to sexual access to lesbians is used. The "cotton ceiling" refers to the plain cotton underwear that some lesbians wear. Older women and lesbians are stereotyped as having cotton underwear as opposed to lacy nylon underwear. As I stated earlier, ceiling refers to the process of breaking through. In addition to the real threat of sexual assault, lesbians have been told whom they should and should not desire all their lives in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways. This in itself is very corrosive to the self-esteem. Every lesbian experiences this some time in her life. As a lesbian, my relatives were constantly trying to get me to date certain men. I have had to deal with this for years. Indeed, I've seen the look of disappointment on my mother's face many times. Now, it's implied that lesbians are "trans phobic" if they don't feel the desire to sleep with male to female transsexuals. This is the first time in my life that I've been made to feel shame for not feeling sexual attraction to male transgender individuals. I'm not making this up. When I go online and read all the chatter about this subject, I read about "lesbian by proxy", or some other nonsense term that clearly implies that lesbians are just using the identity of lesbian to exclude male transgender or gender queer individuals as potential sexual partners. Lesbians are being harassed because of their "lesbian by proxy" whatever that means. Or, someone mentions "cotton ceiling" as if lesbians are flawed if they don't desire male transgender individuals. This is damaging to the emotional well-being and integrity of lesbians no matter how it's dressed up. Planned Parenthood of Toronto simply refuses to accept the fact that this, indeed, causes great suffering to women who identify as lesbian. It's as if this anguish and suffering of lesbians is of little or no significance whatsoever. By its actions Planned Parenthood of Toronto further traumatizes an already fragile and vulnerable sexual minority of women. To me, this is simply inexcusable.

LESBIANS HAVE CIVIL RIGHTS TOO. IT GOES BOTH WAYS. I CONTEND THAT THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY AS A MARGINALIED SEXUAL MINORITY OF WOMEN HAS BEEN DAMAGED.

According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, "La Charte canadienne des droits et libertés all citizens are to be treated with respect and no one individual group or community is entitled to usurp the rights of others, or to demean and lessen the human dignity of other populations. Is this correct? There is overwhelming evidence that the lesbian community has been humiliated, dehumanized, and damaged by the intentional actions of Planned Parenthood. In a rather bazaar, inhumane, and contentious manner, Planned Parenthood of Toronto has in fact pitted one population of marginalized people against another equally marginalized population. While I can understand the need to support transgender individuals and the queer community, how is this workshop and the use of the offensive term "cotton ceiling" essential to the well-being of the transgender community? The gender queer community could easily have had another workshop, and it certainly didn't have to use the offensive term "cotton ceiling" in reference to women's cotton panties. Despite repeatedly being told that this demeans lesbians, Planned Parenthood of Toronto intentionally ignored the emotional trauma caused by its actions.

ACTION:

I see nothing wrong with filing complaints with various human rights organizations in Canada. What do we have to lose?

THIS REQUIRES GATHERING A GREAT DEAL OF DATA AND INFORMATION AS TO HOW THIS HAS DAMAGED THE SELF-ESTEEM, DIGNITY, AND SELF WORTH OF AN OPPRESSED SEXUAL MINORITY. THAT IS, LESBIANS. LET'S TELL OUR OWN STORIES. LET'S TELL THE WORLD ABOUT OUR PAIN, AND HOW PLANNED PARENTHOOD HAS DEHUMANIZED US. YES, THE "COTTON CEILING " WORKSHOP IS DAMAGING TO THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY.

STRATEGY TWO

Planned Parenthood Toronto receives funding from the Toronto Central LHIN and from

the Government of Ontario. As I stated earlier, I've always supported Planned Parenthood. However, it's clear to me that Planned Parenthood of Toronto does not respect the lesbian community. We are fooling ourselves if we believe this. Unfortunately, they don't seem the least bit concerned about our petition, or the fact that they have intentionally demeaned and humiliated the lesbian community.

THIS IS MORGAN PAGE. SHE HAS ONLY WORKED WITH THE TRANS COMMUNITY. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH DOING SO. HOWEVER, SHE DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT LESBIANS. SHE HAS TOTALLY BOUGHT INTO QUEER SPEAK, GENDER QUEER, AND EVERYTHING TRANS RELATED. DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE SHE RECOGNIZES LESBIANS? WELL, HELL NO SHE DOESN'T. MORGAN IS A TRANSFEMINIST. YES, I MEAN TRANSFEMINIST. THAT IS WHAT SHE SAYS. WELL, PLANNED PARENTHOOD COULD DO BETTER.

"Morgan M Page (facilitator of "Overcoming the Cotton Ceiling: Breaking Down Sexual Barriers for Queer Trans Women") is a transfeminist activist, performance + video artist, writer, and Santera currently living in Toronto. She works as Trans Community Services Coordinator at The 519 Church Street Community Centre, coordinating programs for trans youth, trans adults, and trans sex workers. In June 2011, she was the recipient of the Youthline's Outstanding Contribution to Community Empowerment award. She writes for PrettyQueer.com, and speaks and performs locally and internationally."

After getting all my ducks in a row, I plan on writing to the governmental agencies that fund Planned Parenthood of Toronto. WE NEED SOMEONE FROM THE PROVINCE OF CANADA. THIS WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE. In the petition, I noticed some people from other provinces in Canada. This is good. Yes, kick them where it hurts. THAT IS, THE POCKETBOOK. It goes like this. It's only lesbians complaining. They wouldn't try to pull this crap on rich white men, or some other privilege group. If rich white men complained, they would crap their pants and jump. No, we are just a bunch of man hating, transphobic dykes.

ACTION:

IT WOULD BE ABSOLUTELY FREAKING AWESOME IF EVERYONE WHO SIGNED THE PETITION WOULD ALSO WRITE TO EVERY FUNDING SOURCE THAT PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF TORONTO DEPENDS ON. BE POLITE AND NICE ABOUT IT, BUT SPEAK FROM THE HEART.



fmnst Says:

March 31, 2012 at 3:09 pm e

I'm in. You write and think fantastically, Sharon. You are so right that we should take this, and ourselves and our rights, seriously, and take concerted, lengthy campaign until we get something from this. We need to specify a goal: an apology, a retraction, something, from PP of Toronto.

If anyone has addresses of funding sources, or other organizations we can write to, please share them here.

Thanks, Sharon. Great work.



Mary Sunshine Says:

March 31, 2012 at 3:32 pm e

Hi Sharon,

I am a (very) old Canadian radical feminist lesbian. Are you Canadian? If so, can we work together on this?

You can email me at: femalebiology matters@gmail.com

(harrassing emails from tranz will be reported to the internet authorities).



Sharon Says:

April 1, 2012 at 5:25 am e

Thank you very much fmnst and Mary. I very much appreciate your assistance. Together we can make a difference. I would much rather have each other's email addresses if

this is okay with everyone. All the nasty posts on these blogs are really starting to depress me.

I found all the funding sources for Planned Parenthood of Toronto. I emailed it to Mary. Is this okay with you? After I know FMNST's email address, I will email to her.

So, let's do it! Yes, we need to clearly define a goal. We can do that later.

Again, thank you very much.



Mary Sunshine Says:

April 1, 2012 at 5:54 am e

Hi Sharon, thanks for your email. 😊 Great information. OK, we have a garden to dig.

Fmnst, if you email me, then we can have a three-woman email list for working on this. Yay!

Fmnst, if you prefer to keep your primary email private, you can set up a free yahoo or gmail account for contacting me.



bugbrennan Says:

April 6, 2012 at 11:15 am e

http://an-uncommon-scold.newsvine.com/_news/2012/04/03/11006655-transgenders-claim-cotton-ceiling-because-lesbians-wont-have-sex-with-them



Sharon Says:

April 13, 2012 at 9:26 pm e

Bugbrennan:

I have thirty page written complaint that I would like to submit to Planned Parenthood's funding sources. I've been revising it. Is there some way that I could send it to your email address, or post it here. It is a .pdf file.

Sharon



bugbrennan Says:

April 13, 2012 at 10:52 pm e

bugbrennan@gmail.com



Mary Sunshine Says:

April 13, 2012 at 11:31 pm e

And if you think it would be helpful to have a Canadian citizen / resident lodge the complaint, I will be happy to do so.



Mary Sunshine Says:

April 13, 2012 at 11:34 pm e

Sharon, that is **so** excellent.

I saw that list of funding sources you sent, and fell back in exhaustion!

What do you eat for breakfast? 😊



KittyBarber Says:

April 16, 2012 at 8:39 pm e

This is great. I would only add one thing, and that is an explanation—brief—of why the term "cis" is offensive and still another request that it not be used.

Thanks, Mary, and everyone.

Kitty

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